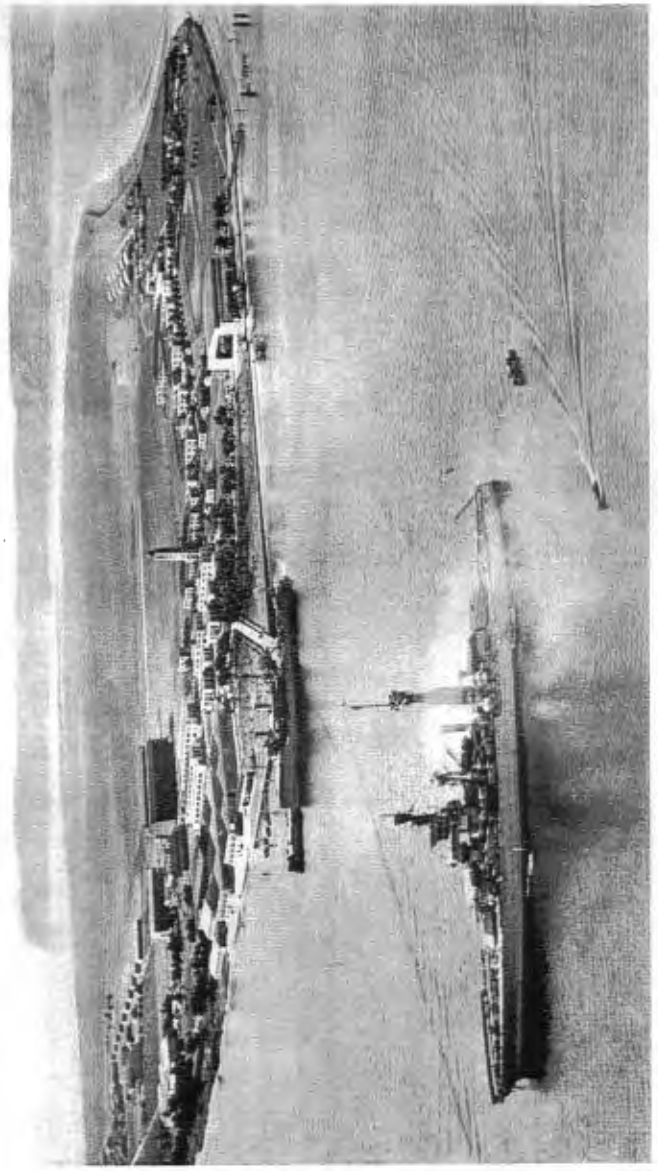

(Official Photograph, U. S. Navy.)

North Island—home to many a naval aviator.

(Frontispiece)

Air Base

by

BOONE T. GUYTON
Test Pilot,
Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft

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To

THE UNITED STATES NAVAL AIR FORCE
WHOSE FLIERS, OFFICERS AND MEN
ARE MOLDING AMERICA'S FIRST
LINE OF DEFENSE

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BOONE T. GUYTON.

Chapter I

THE crash siren started up out of nowhere, wailed out into the night. It hit high pitch just about the time I had kicked off my last shoe and pulled on my pajamas for an eight-hour hop into dreamland. As I crawled back out of bed, jerked on trousers and sneaks, I thought to myself, this San Diego howler sounds just like the old one back at Pensacola. It brought the same results. There was a scuffle of scraping feet and slamming doors, some hurried talk with a few wisecracks. "Some green-eared ensign probably ground-looped out on the field." "It's my crib, and don't stack the cards before we get back."

Basil Alexander Martin, Jr., stuck his head around the corner. "Who the hell you suppose did this one?" he said in about the same tone I had listened to for a year back in training. Bud never

did get very excited about anything. As we hit the bottom step a head thrust through the screen door. "Everybody with a car get down to South Beach. One of Scouting Two's planes went in off the breakwater and didn't have time to drop a flare. We need a lot of lights." The head disappeared.

Outside the officers' quarters we crawled into "Hotdamn," our rolling bucket of bolts. Cars were already streaming out toward the beach, and we fell into line. Landing planes came in one after another out of the black across Spanish Bight, then into the glare of the field floods, and sat down on the black tar, throwing long, fast shadows. The tires screeched and grump-grumped above the howling siren. A white flare was burning vividly out in the middle of the black landing mat, and we knew from training days that this was the recall signal for all planes still in the air. (It isn't healthy for two or three planes to try circling around in the dark looking for a proverbial needle in the haystack. The danger of collision at night is quadrupled in the air, and base radio had probably already called all ships back to the field supplementing the flare.)

We went down past the last squadron hangar,

around the corner back of the big balloon hangar, and by the rows of squatty stucco houses that bounded South Field. As we passed the officers' club, a security watch officer pointed down to the edge of the water, where cars were pulling up into line, throwing their light beams up high. "Follow the last car, and get your lights on the water." Bud pulled "Hotdamn" up alongside the station fire truck, whose big spotlight was playing out across the black Pacific Ocean. I kept wondering who had gone in and whether it could have been one of our class—Kelley, Jones, MacKrille. They had gone to Scouting Two, but surely they couldn't be night-flying yet. We had arrived on the base only this evening, and Bud and I had been among the first to get orders to a carrier squadron based at North Island.

Up and down the white sand beach a motley crowd of officers, enlisted men, and even some women in evening clothes were scanning the inky surf for signs of a rubber life raft that would spell O.K. in their language. I've found it the same everywhere. Aboard a naval base—a small world in itself—the call goes out for help, and the shipmate who is in trouble gets it. From the third-class

enlisted man in his barracks, to the admiral in his spacious quarters, the aid gathers as a family. White dinner jackets mingled with green uniforms, blue denims and half and half pajamas with service blues. Within twenty minutes a hundred cars had assembled along the shore line, and groups of people walked the beach, straining into the damp night for a Very signal or some sign from the occupants of the disabled plane. By now the last plane had landed on the field, and the silence was broken only by lapping waves and hushed talk.

Bud had come back from talking to one of Scouting Two's pilots who had been flying. "It was Blackburn and one of the radio men. His engine cut on his final approach to the field, and he landed out about a thousand yards from the beach. He was too low to use his radio or flares. The ready plane standing by at the ramp is having some trouble getting started."

Even as he spoke you could hear the unmistakable growl of the Grumman amphibian taking off from the bay on the other side of the island. A short few minutes later and he was circling over us, out to sea, his green and red running lights dipping down toward the water. Then on went the landing

light, and out of the blackness came one, two, three parachute flares, lighting the water for several miles. The Grumman kept circling overhead. Half an hour. People were slowly registering that hopeless look as the minutes passed. No one left.

"There he blows!" The big chief mechanic on the fire engine bellowed out lustily, pointing down the beach. We started running and had almost made the spot when two wet figures jumped out of the little rubber raft and dragged it up on the sand. A big cheer went up and down the beach, and I would have given a lot to have had a camera and got a movie of that dramatic setting. Neither Blackburn nor his mechanic was hurt any, but they were wet and shivering.

"Rowed in from about half a mile out," Blackburn said, wiping water from his face and eyes. "Plane sank almost immediately, and we just did get the boat out. Boy, these lights sure helped on the beach. The haze offshore is pretty thick."

The crowd backed away to let them through, and before we could offer congratulations the station "meat wagon" (our crude term for ambulance) was hauling them off for a good rubdown and medical check. I thought what a lucky couple

of boys they were to get away with an emergency landing at night without even the help of a landing light or flare. That water looked awfully black.

Then I thought back to the time Jimmy Abraham had landed at night in Pensacola with one wheel hung up in the belly of his plane. We were about as green about flying then as we were about service aviation now. I'll never forget how we lined the runway at Corry Field that night, wishing so hard for old Jim that the wheel should have freed itself. He did a good job, though. When the plane nosed over and ended up on its back, Jim came out from under it with just a slight change in his profile. He now packs a beautiful Roman nose.

We found out that the flotation bags had worked on Blackburn's plane but that the landing was pretty hard, and one bag had carried away before they had been able to get the life raft out. The plane had sunk shortly after, but they could see the lights of the cars lined up on the beach, so they had proceeded to paddle in. Uncle Sam was happy. A plane worth a few thousand dollars is nothing compared to the lives of pilot and mechanic. Once you have been through the Navy

flight training, you never forget the sentence, "We can always buy another *airplane*." You don't buy pilots.

Back at the quarters, I crawled into the bunk once more. Downstairs the boys were still talking over the night's occurrence, reiterating last week's "close one," and carrying on with some first-class hanger talk. But we had had enough for our first day aboard the base. I lay there, thinking back about a week before, when down at Pensacola the captain had issued his last admonition to his departing flock. We had stood beaming, at attention, gold wings secured on white uniforms, orders in hand.

" . . . and remember, gentlemen. When you get out to your squadrons in the fleet, Uncle Sam is putting you in commission like a new battleship. You are going out with a year of hard flight training behind you and a pair of wings. It is up to you to maintain the high standard set up by the Naval Air Force and to perform your mission to the best of your ability. Congratulations and good luck."

That was all. We had shoved off, scampered across the country, and reported in to the officer

of the day, Naval Air Station at North Island, San Diego, California. I kept remembering how often I had heard those phrases, "Now, when you get out to the fleet . . . when you get out in an operating squadron . . . !" We used to spend whole nights listening to the officers who had just come back from fleet duty tell about their experiences—how it felt to land aboard a carrier for the first time, what an operating squadron did, and how little we would actually know about flying until we had been through a couple of months of fleet duty.

Well, we were here—green, gawking, and self-conscious. But we were here and ready to have a mechanic paint our name across the fuselage of the ship we were to fly with the squadron. There was one thing about it. Action was spelled with capital letters out here, and there would be plenty of flying and a lot happening, both good and bad. By the end of the week our whole class of forty-two would report in, and I had already heard rumors of a party coming up at the officers' club as a sort of initial icebreaker and get-together. I fell asleep, wondering what the new squadron would be like, whether the skipper—the old man—was hard-

boiled or "just one of the boys" and whether the squadron was doing gunnery or bombing exercises. Dive-bombing Squadron Two off the carrier *Lexington* had held the annual fleet record for dive bombing several times. I hoped I still had my batting eye.

Chapter X

THERE'S one thing about carrier operation for the pilot who is earning his bread and butter flying from one. Life is never dull. A pilot has to be on his toes every minute of the time he is aboard for fleet maneuvers, or the chances are good that he will find himself holding up the entire ship. When he takes his plane off the deck and when he comes back to land, not only his life but the lives of several of his shipmates are at stake. Some of the accidents that happen just can't be explained, and after a bad one you don't find much talk or long grieving about it. There isn't time. Such was the case during the second week of operations, when McLoughlin and Pickett went in off the starboard bow while their squadron was taking off.

I was flying Number Eighteen that day and had just joined up with the squadron as the last plane

in the formation. Scouting Two were taking off just after us, and we circled back over the stern of the ship at four thousand feet to wait for them. There was a low haze, which extended up to nearly a thousand feet, and our squadron rendezvous had been cautious and slow, to eliminate, as much as possible, the danger of a mid-air collision. Just as the last four planes of Scouting Two were filing up the deck for take-off, the heartbreaking sound of "CRASH, CRASH, CRASH" screeched through the earphones. Almost at the same time, down past the yellow wings of our squadron, I saw a huge ball of black, ugly-looking smoke rising slowly from the water. I knew what that meant. There is something about smoke from a burning plane that you never mistake.

The radio again. "Two Sail Eleven and Twelve just crashed in the water about three miles, bearing 45 degrees on the starboard bow! They are both burning on the water!" It gave you a sudden shock like a dive into icy water. I looked over at Kane, flying Number Seventeen. He was watching that cloud of black smoke, too. Then he looked over and shook his head. I felt sorry for Bill right then. He

had been in Scouting Two before being transferred, and he knew every man in it.

The air was alive with radio transmission between the carrier and the planes that were in the immediate vicinity of the crash as Alex led us out over the spot. The calls were somewhat tense and excited, and all radio procedure was disregarded. "*Lexington*, I am circling right over the spot. There is no sign of any of the occupants or the planes. I can make out what appears to be a piece of parachute a wheel floating free, and a piece of a wing."

Then the commanding officer of Scouting Two broke in. "The planes that crashed were Two Sail Eleven and Twelve. Number Ten stand by the crash spot until the destroyer arrives. The rest of Scouting Two join up on me."

Then the *Lexington* came in. "All planes stand by to land aboard."

A plane-guard destroyer was nearly at the spot, ploughing the seas like some mad porpoise. There was a spreading oil slick covering half a mile of water where the planes hit. Even from four thousand feet I could make out a crumpled wing and a piece of white cloth that must have been the para-

chute. What a tough break. Only two weeks out on the cruise and to have such a nasty accident! There were four men in those two Vought scout bombers—two pilots and two mechanics. We couldn't tell until after we had landed who it was, and the suspense was awful. You just sat there, dazedly flying your plane behind the section leader, trying to imagine who wasn't alive any more and how the damned thing happened.

After we had landed aboard, everyone filed silently into the wardroom. I quietly asked Luchtman, the navigation officer of Scouting Two, who it was and how it had happened.

"Pickett and McLoughlin," he said. "Mac was joining up in the section from the inside. Pickett had already joined up on the outside wing position. Mac must have squashed into him in the haze, trying to judge his distance a little too close. They didn't have a prayer. Only five hundred feet up."

There was no undue sentiment in Lucky's voice but, rather, a tone of shock and disrupted emotion. He didn't say anything more. The rest of his squadron was sitting around a table. Some of the boys were toying with their helmets, some just staring out the portholes at the gray mist that still hung

over the ocean. And that is the way it happens sometimes. Everything going along rosy, everyone striving hard for an objective, and—plunk! The inevitable stretches up into your sky and pulls down a couple of your flying mates. Such misfortunes are the misfortunes of war, real or practice, and there is nothing to do but take it on the chin and keep your sense of humor. Maybe as we first arrived at the base we would have looked for a little sympathy when a shipmate was lost. We didn't now. We were hardened to the hardness of it. Kane came around that night, and we played our usual round of cribbage, but he was thinking back to his academy days and said very little. McLoughlin and Pickett were former classmates of his from Annapolis. Later he told me he used to wrestle with Mac on the wrestling team when they were plebes and that he had roomed with him while in Scouting Two. When the ceremonies were over the next day the *Lexington* got back into the thick of the war.

For two more weeks we pounded the ocean, flying from the first crack of light until dark. The carrier skipped in and out of the main battle line to launch planes; scout, attack, bomb the black

fleet—our big-cruise enemy. Off we would go into the gray of early morning, follow the scouts to a disposition of enemy forces, and try to sneak through their protective patrol in order to score on their main battle line of heavy cruisers and battleships. At night, with all planes back aboard and the ship darkened to fleet blackout, our whole force would attempt to slip away at top speed and be ready to launch the attack from another point the following morning. The black fleet was doing the same. The best way Uncle Sam can be ready for an attack in his waters is to send his fleet out there, divide it like a baseball team, and give each an objective to accomplish. If either is successful, where is the weakness? Find it, return to the base for supplies, new personnel, new equipment, and then out to sea again to fight another "war." That's the why of an air base, and the cruises, war games, maneuvers, and even the cross-country flights around the United States are all a part of the training a pilot must go through to become efficient. There are no short cuts.

One day, as we were returning from an attack on two submarines that Scouting Two had kicked up and reported, an amusing incident took place that

gave us many a laugh when the whole story came out. It seemed that Ensign Kelley, flying one of the big three-passenger torpedo planes, ran completely out of gas some fifteen miles from the ship. He dropped away from the squadron and started down, spotting a tramp steamer and gliding for that bit of refuge from the cold waters that lay below him. Kelley was the kind of man you couldn't help laughing at. He had a big Irish face, jovial and mischievous, knew so many jokes he could keep going for hours without a break, and was liked by everyone. As he neared the water he had almost reached the tramp, and his section leader, who had followed him down, reported his safe landing on the water.

The *Lexington* couldn't turn around and go after him, because we were all low on fuel and had to land aboard shortly. One of the plane-guard destroyers started over to play retriever. The tramp had noticed the plane in distress and had immediately stopped her engines, put out a boat, and taken the three aviators off their sinking plane. The flotation gear had functioned properly, and the bags had inflated, but before the destroyer got there to salvage the plane the choppy seas had

carried it away, and the plane went down. The tramp steamer turned out to be French, out of San Francisco, and the captain entertained the three boys in no uncertain manner.

They went along to his cabin, where he proceeded to open up his choice wine stock. In order not to "embarrass" the captain, the boys drank some long and lusty toasts to everyone's health. Far be it from Kelley not to hold up his end of the Naval etiquette he had learned! After all, here was a captain of a ship saying "drink" to the United States, "drink" to France, "drink" to fortunes of circumstance! As a matter of fact, they were very happy to be guests of the Frenchmen—and very unhappy to leave.

When the destroyer finally arrived several hours later all three of the boys were in fine spirits. As they boarded the quarter-deck of the carrier you could hear the melodious voices of Kelley's trio wafted up even to the bridge. There were more amazed looks on blank faces that day than you have ever seen in one group. Kelley swears that if every forced landing turned out like that one, he would put in a bid for all of them! Whenever we gathered around to do some barbershop harmony

after that, it was known as "Kelley's trio," or, as Vensel put it, "sour notes from sour grapes!" When you hear Kelley—his reddish cropped hair sticking up as if at attention—tell about his escapade, the result is even funnier.

As the cruise goes along and a necessary silence prevails on all maneuvers and results, unanswerable questions pile up.

"How many of the enemy ships does Commander Battle Force give us credit for destroying?" "How did those two submarines slip through the outer and inner screens yesterday?" "I heard that they got credit for sinking a heavy cruiser and three destroyers!" "Wonder where the *Ranger* is operating. Since that second attack her planes made on our carrier, there hasn't been any report of her location." "The officer of the deck told me that we will probably anchor at La Haina Roads day after tomorrow and take a breather."

And so it goes. You spend a lot of time at meals picking up the latest "guess" reports on how the "war" is progressing, asking timely questions, speculating as to the outcome. It becomes like a business organization, in which everyone is wondering whether business is good or bad. You don't

(*Official Photograph, U. S. Navy.*)

Performance of these huge "flying bombracks" is more than gratifying.

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know how the war is coming along while communications are silenced, reports censored, and hits or misses kept secret. I remember how it was in France in the first six months of the present war, how none of us knew where the Germans were, when they might attack, what the British were up to, or just how the Low Countries were holding out. What we had read in papers was little more than a feature writer's brain child, and that was pared and edited by censors. So it went in fleet maneuvers.

Now, out near the Hawaiian Islands, the black and white fleets closed in for the final stage of mock war that had started from the base at San Diego. The steady diet of early flights off the dew-covered deck, the endless track of ocean beneath the wings, the numerous conferences between flight operations, the darkened ship each night—all this became our whole existence.

"The black fleet is now believed to be somewhere in the vicinity of Johnston Island. Our position at present is here." The air officer would point to the map, indicating by the cardboard ships pasted along its lines just where we were and why we were doing *what* we were. Every pilot aboard the ship would be grouped around the tables of the

wardroom during the conferences, trying to see what the war looked like on paper. It was getting hot as we neared the islands, and the smoke was thick, even with the ports swung wide open. "Remember, it is imperative that the strictest radio silence be kept. Any voice transmission at this point would be readily picked up by any ship listening in on that frequency, and any two enemy ships who heard us could get a radio fix at once."

Naturally, in any emergency, radio silence had to be broken, but one day we had a long laugh when a pilot in one of the planes left his radio switch turned to "communications" instead of "intercockpit." He thought he was talking only to his mechanic in the back seat, but every plane in the sky heard him as he shot the breeze with his mech to break the monotony of a long patrol.

"How did you meet your wife in the first place?" said the first voice, breaking the day's silence. "Oh, I knew her on the farm back in Missouri. She came out to Los Angeles to get a job about a year ago, and we started going around again. Shucks, one day I found myself buying a ring—and there we were!"

"Gosh, that's great," the first voice answered.

"Yeah, she's going to meet me in San Francisco when we get back."

Fortunately for them, they didn't mention any names. Consequently, no one ever found out who the culprits were.

"Tomorrow," the air officer would say, "we take off early again and form a scouting line first to try and pick up the *Ranger*. There will probably be three flights, with the last section of Scouting Two acting as the smokers for torpedo attack." (The "smokers" lay down a screen of white smoke around an enemy force to allow the torpedo planes to go in under cover and drop their "fish.") After about an hour or two the conference would break up, and we would pack our weary bones off to the cribbage board for a "quickie" and then straightaway to bed.

Besides all the flying, the conferences, and the interrupting enemy attacks (we always had to man flight-quarter stations during an attack), there were still the regular squadron duties to perform. As assistant engineering officer I had little time to waste. I had my hands full getting the dope from Lyons on the status of our planes, which were ready, which needed engine checks, what planes

couldn't be flown that day because of cracked landing gears or bent propellers. It is a big job to keep eighteen planes flying every day, and Nuessle, Lyons, and I spent many hours figuring what crew could check what plane on the hangar deck and which planes needed new props or landing gears.

From dispatches sent around at long intervals we learned of the casualties that had occurred among our brother fliers on other ships. Jones, one of our class, a somewhat nervous, red-haired individual, who had always been conscientious about his flying, spun into the ocean after he rammed the mast of one of the plane-guard destroyers while he was getting into the groove to land aboard the *Ranger*. Jones hadn't been long enough in the game to learn by experience what he should have been on the alert for. Watching out the left side of the cockpit of his Grumman, he had failed to notice that he was drifting into the destroyer as he swung wide into the groove. The mast sheared the little Grumman's right wings, dropping both Jones and his plane straight down to Davy Jones's back yard. Only the two splintered wings were found, and the *Ranger* held sea services for a shipmate lost at sea.

The battle continued. On our carrier mishaps

frequently were hair-raising, but since Scouting Two's tragedy, they had not been too harmful to personnel. A Douglas torpedo plane hooked a wing in the edge of the curved ramp while trying to gain altitude after a wave-off. The plane dropped straightaway into the boiling wake of the carrier and disappeared. Less than a minute later, three heads popped up in the white froth, signaling that they weren't badly hurt. We all breathed a lot easier, for it had seemed that no one would get out of that one. The nearest "can" sped forward, dropped life preservers, and then lowered a boat to fetch aboard the three bruised aviators.

In our squadron, Ensign Ewers, a tall, clean-looking chap from Seattle, managed to pick out a clear spot on the "island" at the last stack and proceeded to make a crumpled pile of what had a moment before been a sleek, rugged-looking Vought dive bomber. Ewers only got bumped hard on the head, but the mechanic sustained a broken arm. In all, we were very lucky.

One morning before take-off we sat around the table in the wardroom after flight quarters had sounded, awaiting instructions as to what our mission would be, when the word got around that this

was the last day of the "war." It was expected that the order to "cease all present activities" would be given at sundown, and everyone was in great spirits.

"I believe we are going into La Haina Roads late tomorrow afternoon," McClure said, as he handed out the yellow sheets for the pilots to sign. (Yellow sheets are the forms used by the Navy to show the status of an airplane before flight.) Colored mess attendants scurried around the tables answering last-minute calls for coffee. They always seemed to move silently when we came down to flight quarters in the morning; they obviously knew about a man's temperament in the early hours before breakfast.

"If we do," Mac went on, "it will probably mean that the whole aircraft and scouting force will anchor there to refuel and get set to enjoy a few days in Honolulu very shortly."

It was good news, and I noticed that afternoon, as we came back aboard from our last bombing hop, in which we had supposedly laid flat an enemy-patrol base on French Frigate Shoals, that the landings on the carrier were a little snappier than during the last few days. Even old Alex kicked

over the traces a bit while we were on our way back from the shoals. Passing over a few straggling sand bars, which were poking out of the varicolored coral-painted ocean at odd spots, the skipper noticed on one of the strips a drove of huge turtles sunning themselves. We suddenly got the signal to slide over into echelon, followed by the attack signal. Down we came. Alex held the nose of his plane right on the backs of the lazy turtles, and seventeen of us poured down right behind him, engines gunning and propellers whining. We pulled out some fifty feet over the broad, shining backs, one after another, expecting to see the turtles splash into the water to escape what must have appeared to be certain death. To our amazement, there wasn't a stir among the bold critters, not even so much as a raised head or outstretched leg! When I pulled up again into formation, Nuessle turned around, scratched his head under his helmet, and looked askance at me, as if to say, "How do ya like that!"

That is the way Navy flying sometimes goes, and your skipper has a good reason for it. After all, he sits up there in the lead plane, figuring, estimating, planning, flying his plane, and leading his

squadron into attacks and maneuvers. He feels the urge to kick up his heels, too, and when the proper time comes you may find yourself trying to hang in a "squirrel case," a pleasant follow-the-leader maneuver in which the skipper dives, rolls, Immelmanns, and loops, with seventeen fighting planes chasing along after him like a long line of skaters cracking the whip. Or, of course, you could be attacking a flock of mammoth turtles, around French Frigate Shoals, aghast when they almost yawn in your face as you scream by! It serves to break the tension of long patrols, and after weeks of pure concentration on the art of aerial destruction you are happy to whip around the sky a bit for the "sheer hell of it."

By four thirty we were back aboard the ship, and at five fifteen the *Lexington* swung back onto the battle line to prepare for dropping anchor in La Haina Roads off the island of Maui. Down in the officers' mess a radio was twanging out lazy Hawaiian music. Until we left Honolulu some two weeks later, the war was over, and after hurrying through dinner we all scrambled up on the flight deck to watch the land come into sight.

There is a marked difference between seeing the

Hawaiian Islands from the deck of a ship as she swings into port, and flying near them, glancing down past a wing to pick out, several thousand feet below, what spells Hawaii on your chart. For the last few days our mock battles had lead us around the islands, out nearly to Midway and Johnston Islands and across French Frigate Shoals, to end up close to Molokai as maneuvers ended. Naturally, it is around these waters that sooner or later in an actual engagement we may have to meet the enemy. It is because of the vital importance of the Hawaiian Islands that we spent so much time practicing how to defend them. By six thirty the battle line was streaming past that leper colony for which Molokai is noted, skirting the smaller island of Lanai to the south.

"Great balls of fire," Beany said, as the wind shrieked down the Venturi-like channel between Molokai and Maui, "grab me, or I'll go swimmin' with the natives!"

He wasn't fooling. There is a peculiar channel between Maui and Molokai, through which there is nearly always a strong, steady wind of about 25 knots velocity. He held onto a wing of one of the planes, all of which had been securely

lashed down to the deck. The strong wind bustled across the flight deck, banging the loose control surfaces and rustling across the taut fabric wings. We all hung on like Beany. When the ship had rounded the sheltered side of Maui to swing into her berth, we were all sitting down along the edge of the flight deck, feet dangling in the guard net, to watch a typical Hawaiian sunset sink down behind Lanai. To most of us this was all new scenery, and we couldn't have been as excited about the whole thing if we had been aboard the Astor yacht.

There are eight islands in the Hawaiian group that form a hub for United States strategy in the Pacific. All of them lie somewhat close together except Kauai and Niihau, which are perhaps eighty miles from the main island of Oahu. Molokai, Lanai, Maui, and Kahoolawe form a closed array of sea mountains centered between Oahu and Hawaii, and only about eight or ten miles of blue water separates them. Once you have seen the greenness of the foliage on these verdant hills, the warm, peaceful breeze bending the cane rows behind lazy-looking white verandas and rambling houses, the stalk-thatched roofs of the native huts, you begin to wonder how such a peaceful spot could

be one of the strongest naval bases in the world. Yet it is.

That evening, while the two destroyers mothered close by to get their supply of fuel, McClure, a veteran of Pacific cruises, told us what we would find at Honolulu on the island of Oahu. Nuessle, Vensel, Ottinger, and I sat around on the flight deck in the cool evening breeze, watching the big yellow Hawaiian moon glitter across the water. I can see why people go out to Hawaii to live. They must all be perpetually in the throes of spring fever. As Mac gave us the dope, the past weeks of howling engines, racing propellers, screaming dives, and grueling formation flying seemed years back.

"Oahu," Mac said, "is the chief fortified island in the group. We'll anchor just above Diamond Head, almost directly out from Waikiki Beach, and you'll be able to see the surfboarders from the deck. Pearl Harbor, our patrol-plane base, will be jammed with destroyers and submarines even before we get there, and you'll see about twice as many PBY's [Consolidated patrol bombers] as we have at San Diego. Remember the four big boats that flew up alongside the squadron when we were

out to get the *Idaho* and *Tennessee?* They were from Pearl Harbor."

Mac counted off the numerous Army forts on his fingers. "There's Fort Ruger, Derussy, Armstrong, Shafter, Barrette, and Weaver, all located along the edge of the island from Diamond Head to Pearl Harbor. The Army's main hangout is called Schofield Barracks, which is just above Wheeler Field, where they do most of their flying. The island is more like a gun turret with foliage and trees for camouflage than a vacation spot."

Then he told us what to see and how to see it—and how much *okulihow* to drink at one sitting. You soon realize on an air base how pleasant it is to have the "old-timers" around. They give you plenty of good, useful information, and you soon learn to respect them, knowing that what they put out has been bought only through experience. Below again, I found a long letter from Bud that the mail plane had brought to La Haina the day before. One of our motor whaleboats had gone ashore and hauled the pouches back to the ship. After nearly a month without any personal news from home, you get a lot of respect for the mail planes. There was some news about the air station

back at North Island and what was happening, and after Beany settled down to read a "manuscript" from his "friend," as he called her, I got the dope from Bud.

" . . . Don Avrill, the little yellow-haired second looie that you played cribbage with the last time you were up at the squadron ready room, crashed up in the mountains near Falbrook yesterday. He and Mike were climbing to thirty thousand feet to test machine guns for cold-weather operation, when, according to Mike, who was following, Don's plane pulled up in a lazy loop and started down in a dive. Mike followed him down, pouring on the coal to stay with him, but said he hit four hundred fifty, with Avrill still beating him to the ground, and at two thousand feet Mike pulled out. All we can figure is that Don's oxygen failed when he got to thirty thousand, and he just never did wake up.

"When the plane—one of our new Grummans—hit, there was a hell of a fire. Plane exploded and started burning the underbrush up the side of the mountain. It was a pretty nasty mess, and they didn't get much of Don to send home. All we could find of the plane was about half of the rudder. That

was the first bad crack-up we've had in the outfit, and the boys are pretty much down on medical research in general for not figuring out a more positive source of oxygen supply than this 'pipe-stem' hookup the Navy is using. You know, all a guy needs at thirty thousand feet is to let that little stem slip out of his mouth for a couple of seconds, and his number is up for keeps.

"The base is really quiet. Our squadron, a utility group, and one patrol outfit who are getting ready to fly nonstop out to Pearl Harbor are the only units left. I had two cross-country's—one to San Francisco and one out to Las Vegas and Boulder Dam. I gotta admit that excitement is lacking here, and we'll be glad to see you flying gobs pull in next month. How is the war going, and where is my brown-skinned gal? Last dispatch we had here on your maneuvers said that the *Ranger* was keeping your faces red and stealing the show! Keep your wings on, and I'll see you when the cruise is over.

"Like the handle on a soup plate.

"Bud"

Like many of the other boys on their first big cruise, I got just a slight touch of nostalgia from reading about home goings on, even if we did have

several days of sightseeing around Honolulu. Of course, the first big scramble, as always, when the fleet gets into Honolulu, was up to the Alexander Young Hotel to blow off a little steam and see all the boys from the other units of the fleet. You can't blame them for that. Weeks at sea, cooped up on a floating landing field, flying long hours over blank water, seeing the same faces at the same place each day, listening (I believe, even in your sleep) for "man all flight quarter stations" or "man all battle stations," crawling out early in the morning to deafen your ears behind a roaring engine while you strained for some sign of the enemy were definite reason for a little relaxation.

And Honolulu knew it! Signs of welcome were plastered on every store and in every show window. "Welcome, Navy." "Hello, gobs—have fun." The one that got me was in a Chinese gift shop. It read, "Last time you wrecked store but allee samee—welcome back Uncle Samee." (That smart Chinese had probably graduated from Yale or Princeton. He got the business.)

Small deviations from the town rules and regulations were quietly overlooked. We scampered down to famous Waikiki for a swim and out to the Royal

Hawaiian to the welcoming dance that evening. It was a bit stuffy to us, what with all the gold braid in full dress, dancing stiffly around the glazed floor with "their ladies." I cornered "Bushy" Bushman, black-haired, solemn sort of fellow who finished at Pensacola with me. Bushy had been sent out to Pearl Harbor with Patrol Squadron Ten the day he got his wings, and he had been here ever since.

"How do you like living here on the island?" I said. "Don't you get an awful itch to get back to some of Louis Armstrong's dirty swing music, see some good old American football or baseball games, and take a little trip home to see the folks?"

I could feel his answer before he said it. Nearly every man I talked with out there who had been sent out on duty liked it for keeps. They seemed to be completely content to spend the rest of their days in Honolulu, if it was possible.

"It's really swell," said Bushy. "Here we start to the squadron early, about six, and finish up at two or two thirty most afternoons. That gives us the whole long afternoon to spend at the beach, on the golf course, or sailing around the island in the Star boats the base has. I wouldn't trade it for anything,

and if I can I am going to try to get a job flying for Inter-Island when my tour of duty is over."

I thought maybe he was kidding about not wanting to get back to the mainland. I found that he wasn't.

"I guess life is pretty easy here, even though we do fly a lot. My section has been out on patrol duty for the last three weeks straight. We take off about seven in the morning and stay up in a sector between here and Hawaii straight on through until two. A couple of times we have flown a stretch of eighteen hours, taking our coffee mess and lunch pails with us. It isn't all roses."

Bushman was as brown as the natives who were pushing their outriggers into the surf for an evening of riding the crests. A lot of the people stood around the promenade railing, watching the sight you usually see in the movies.

"I'd like to go home about once a year, just to keep in touch with things, but after that—give me the life of an islander!"

That was nearly three years ago. Bushy wasn't fooling. He is still there, from the last report, and quite a few more of the boys are, also. Pearl Harbor seems to be one base that Uncle Sam doesn't have

to try very hard to sell to his aviators. Next day we strolled through the cluttered streets along the waterfront, amused at the conglomeration of races present, which included Caucasians, Polynesians, Chinese, Japanese, and an intermingling that had us stopped. Everyone had something to sell to the American sailor boys, and they were putting on the high pressure before the fleet pulled out. Over at the seaplane and patrol base at Pearl Harbor we spent the better part of two days visiting with classmates who had been sent there for duty, listening to their stories of the islands, who had cracked up, how they enjoyed working from six until two, with the lazy afternoons free to swim on the beach or partake of such strenuous games as tennis and handball. Already the talk was going around about what each fellow was going to do after his tour of duty was up. We heard the usual spiel about the Japanese fishing boats, which were presumed to follow our fleet when the maneuvers were on and get valuable information on our tactical dispositions. (In all the cruises I made in the Navy, I have yet to see the sampans that caused all the talk, though there were many references during operations to sampans and small

fishing boats' being seen in the vicinity of the fleet.)

Down on the big concrete ramps in front of the hangars along the beach were the big boat-patrol outfits, the ones that only five days before we had "bombed" out on French Frigate Shoals. These big flying barns are worth talking about, for they are going to play an important part in any warfare the Navy gets tangled with. Nearly all our present patrol planes are built by Consolidated Aircraft Corporation. There are squadrons of them located at San Diego, Coco Solo, Sitka, Norfolk, and now they stretch out to the new and far-flung bases at Wake Island, Midway, Samoa, Guam, and the score of newest proposed air bases around the South Pacific.

Performance of these huge "flying bomb racks" is more than gratifying. It is reassuring. With a crew of from six to eleven, a cruising range of some several thousand miles, and plenty of striking power in bombs and machine guns, these giants can live in the air for twenty-five or thirty hours and perform miracles as the eyes of the scouting force. Many times during the cruise we had seen them flying far at sea, day and night, keeping their

lonely vigil in a wide radius about our battle line, sounding off the alarm by radio when an attack was imminent.

Here, at their base at Pearl Harbor, they were being scrubbed down and checked, being made ready to go again. Replacements are simply flown the twenty-four hundred miles across the ocean from San Diego. I know of three such mass flights, which included twenty patrol bombers on each one, and not once was one of them lost or even forced down at sea on the way across. In time of actual warfare these flying battleships, with their stately manner, will be invaluable to the scouting force of the Navy, and their striking power is a reassuring threat to any would-be invader by air or sea.

I remember the difference in these long rows of patrol planes, proved and worthy, which lined the ramp at Pearl Harbor and the small scattering of big boats I saw at Brest just before the capitulation of France. The naval base at Brest was the pride of a faltering French Navy, and the woefully few inadequate seaplanes there made me actually feel sorry for the Frenchmen. The nine *hydravion de surveillance maritime* that were concentrated on

Plougastel, the point of land across the bay from the fleet base at Brest, were composed of old Loire 130's, several antique Cams 37's, all wire and braces, and a few Brequets and Latecoere 302's. These were powered by troublesome Hispanos of old and vulnerable design, and even though the sea warfare at that time was intense through the channel the Frenchmen never could seem to get these outmoded machines into the air for any length of time. When one of these lumbering Brequets actually sank a German submarine off the Île d'Ouessant one day early in January, 1940, the crew of six were feted all the way to Paris and back. I thought then how I would have liked to play Santa Claus to them and set a few squadrons of our sleek, high-performing bombers down in front of their lonely ramp.

The last night before we shoved off for San Francisco, Vensel, Garrison, Ewers, and I climbed up to the top of the Punchbowl to watch the twinkling lights of Honolulu and the flashing streaks from the fleet's searchlights as they played through the night, making an aerial display for the townfolk. It was sort of a going-away gesture of *aloha* from the fleet to the natives of the island for a

pleasant shore leave in their port. You can imagine how sad the store and shop proprietors were to see us pull out next day, leaving them to sell their souvenirs to the current tourists. It must have seemed very dead in the city with the noise of Navy gobs on shore leave gone and the thousands of white uniforms that crowded every sidewalk suddenly missing.

In one of the gift shops, I found a brown-skinned, native hula dancer, with grass skirt and all. I purchased it from the jabbering Chinese and stowed it safely in my trunk. Basil Alexander Martin, Jr., could never say I didn't bring him what he asked for from the land of poi and pineapple!

Next morning we weighed anchor, followed the big, squatty battleship, the *California*, out of the Roads, rounded Diamond Head, and lay a course out across the ocean for San Francisco. Our two plane-guard destroyers trailed along behind and were followed in cruising disposition by the carriers *Saratoga*, *Ranger*, and *Enterprise*. We finally had got together with the *Ranger!*

(Official Photograph, U. S. Navy.)

A division of Grumman shipboard fighters in attack formation—the "protective patrol."

(Facing page 198)