

1945

and also seen were an orange and greenish-blue kingfisher (The female also having some white underneath), two doves, a kind of flycatcher called the Faintail, one of the few song birds besides the honey-eater, a black storking, a rather ordinary-looking crow, an "edible nest" (soup) swiftlet, and the often white Reef Heron.

Sure enough, we had to have two more carrier landings (This time on our old friend the Naseau) just before we left Guam. Another CVE (our fourth) the V.S.S. which had been in on the invasion of southern France, took us southward to Ulithi, in the Carolines, which had succeeded Majuro, in the Marshalls, as the Fleet Anchorage. There, on Feb. 1, 1945, we finally boarded our own ship, the V.S.S. Hornet, CV no. 12, which had already had two air groups before us and so was already a veteran, not, in fact, having even returned to Pearl Harbor in her year or so of combat.

At Ulithi we got our first look at the Fifth Fleet and Task Force 58, its striking force. Admitted that the lagoon was big enough to hold all the world's navies, but the number of ships, especially the carriers, battleships, cruisers and destroyers of Task Force 58 seemed almost incredible. Here, in fact, were all the

ULITHI

HORNET

MOG-MOG

available new ships of these types, just back from their latest series of strikes, and their train or supply ships, as well as the ships, especially the CVE's and old battleships and cruisers of the 7th Fleet. The small islets forming the lagoon seemed puny by comparison. Only one of them, Mog Mog, was used for shore liberty parties, the natives originally having kindly consented to leave to make this possible, but I can't say much for Mog Mog. It was only a few hundred yards long, by perhaps half as wide, but even so some of it was restricted, being used for a rest camp. There were sections reserved for officers and enlisted men, but the emphasis in both areas was on beer. The only area good for swimming seemed too small or crowded to be worth it. There were, however, a few compensations, the beautiful, all white Love Tern* being much in evidence, and a flying fox was seen on one occasion.

LOVE TERN

FLYING FOX

After a few days in port we went on a shake-down cruise for a few days, making practice attacks on the ship. An unfortunate accident occurred when a division of fighters pulled up from below and raged through our division, led by Doug Kerka. By almost a miracle there was

* WHITE TERN

only one collision. Though both divisions were in close formation, one fighter ploughing into Jim Sipes, flying on Doug's right wing, killing Jim, his aircrewman and the fighter pilot. The fault was the fighter division's leader 100 percent.

We had good word where our first strikes were to be soon after getting aboard, and hearing that they were to be around Tokyo, we felt sort of hollow inside. Japan had never been attacked by carrier planes before except by Doolittle's B-25's nearly three years before. The Hornet, captained by Capt. Doyle, turned out to be the flagship of our Task group under Admiral "Jocko" Clark*. Other carriers in our group included the Wasp and the new Bennington, both ^{also} Essex class, and the Belleau Wood, a CVE or light carrier (Independence class) converted from a cruiser, as well as two South Dakota class battleships, several cruisers and a whole bunch of destroyers. There were other Task groups and 18 carriers altogether (11 large, 7 light).

Our ^{course} would have been straight north for about 25 degrees of latitude or 1500 miles except that an arc to the eastward was judged as having better chance for a surprise. On this trip north we had another practice attack or two, and the

* MY GROTON + HARVARD CLASSMATE, JOHN ROOSEVELT, WAS ON HIS STAFF.

FLAGSHIP

FEBRUARY, 1945

bombers had their only anti-submarine patrol the whole time we were out there.

On Feb. 16, by a curious coincidence my 30th birthday, came the real thing. The shipper led the first hop, which, as a matter of fact, attacked Kachigo Jima, an island some distance south of Tokyo Bay, and those of us who didn't go on that strike felt very anxious about things until everyone came back safe and sound saying it wasn't so bad, there having been moderate anti-aircraft fire and no fighter opposition.

MY FIRST
STRIKE
(ON JAPAN
PROPER)
HAMAMATSU,
HONSHU

Doug Yerxa led the second bombing strike, and those of us who didn't go on the other went on this, the first in our task group as any rate to hit the mainland. Actually, we didn't get very near to Tokyo but aimed for Hamamatsu, well to the southwest, passing some of the rocky islands south of the entrance to Tokyo Bay, however. We passed fairly close to a DD. The weather was terrible until we got close to the "mainland" and then could begin to climb. I remember remarking to Ives something like: "Well, there's Japan," and a little later, "You can just make out Fujiama over there to the

MT. FUJI