

Episode 4

ROUND AND ROUND WE GO

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS at idyllic Mogmog Island at Ulithi atoll, we were ordered to proceed to Saipan, and then on to Okinawa. This was in the spring of 1945 and the war in the Pacific was still HOT. Okinawa had just been invaded in April, and its harbor was a prime target for Kamakazi attacks.

Needless to say we were all shook up. As we approached Saipan the radio shack received a secret message addressed to our ship from CINCPAC ordering us to backtrack to Eniwetok! Great sighs of relief! ~~Our not to question why. . . and it looked like it would not be "to do or die," or at least, not yet.~~ Some were sure the Captain had some kind of inside track. Sometime later we found out that the ship that was sent to Okinawa in our place--the AV Norton Sound--received a direct Kamakazi hit smashing into the sick-bay area of the ship, requiring her to return to Pearl Harbor for repairs.

~~We did nothing. No one ever did.~~ in Eniwetok except swing around the hook and take on fuel and supplies. We were not tending seaplanes; our PBMs were gone, stationed elsewhere awaiting orders.

Finally we received our ¹⁹⁴⁵ orders to proceed to Okinawa by way of Saipan. But by now it was June and Japan was on its last legs, defeated at sea and relying on last ditch efforts to defend its mainland islands. (Massive bombing raids on the Japanese mainland islands began in June, 1944.)

We dropped anchor in Okinawa harbor sometime in early July, 1945. The crew, all of us, were plenty scared, since Kamakazis were still coming in on occasion, but fewer and fewer.

From sad experience, the Navy had learned that you don't start firing on Kamakazis at night until they are at very close range, a dead shot, because if you fire too soon it gives them your location and they follow your tracers in for a sure crash on your ship. Hard to control the itchy fingers. ("Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes!")

What happened next is still not too clear since most of the events were put together from bits and pieces.

We had been at anchor in Okinawa harbor for about two weeks with no seaplanes to tend. We were waiting for what?

One day another AV put in and anchored. Next day there was a big excitement. We got our orders and were preparing to weigh anchor when the other seaplane tender hauled in her anchor and headed out to sea.

Everything on the ship seemed to settle into an ominous silence.

We stayed at anchor. I wasn't on watch, but there was hush-hush activity in the radio shack. The Captain's mouth was buttoned up tight. What was going on?

About four hours later that afternoon, that same seaplane tender re-entered the harbor and dropped the hook. Within an hour our ship had weighed anchor and put to sea. Apparently our Captain had a lot of clout with the big brass and couldn't be outmaneuvered.

Our orders were to rendezvous with other ships at a certain point about 500 miles Southeast of the mainland islands of Japan in the open ocean. Hundreds of ships, going in a giant circle. Round and round. Waiting for the orders to invade Japan. We were refueled at sea while steaming at 15 knots beside a big navy tanker with the hoses strung across.

Round and round for days. Then the astounding and shocking news broadcast over the intercom. Hiroshima was atom bombed on August 6th, then Nagasaki on August 9th. Japan surrendered on August 15th, 1945.

(To be continued.)

Appendix A: Map of the voyage of The USS Cumberland
Sound AV17, 1944-45.

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