

Episode 5

THE JAPANESE PILOT

JAPAN HAS ITS PRIVILEGES but within the hierarchy of rank there were a myriad of unknowns, some sort of intricate system of decision-making based on allocation of favors owed, measuring degrees of influence and prestige in dispensing patronage. None of us understood the system, but one thing we did know was that our Captain had something going with the top brass.

After the atom bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered, the invasion fleet was no longer needed. The surrender ceremonies were to be held in Tokyo Bay aboard Admiral Halsey's flagship, the battleship Missouri. ~~What other ships were to be the first group to enter Tokyo Bay?~~

The USS Cumberland Sound was selected to be one of the first ten ships to enter. So the invasion fleet broke up and the chosen few headed for Tokyo Bay.

But there was one big problem. Japan had surrendered, but Tokyo Bay entrance was seeded with an elaborate minefield. How to solve that problem?

Simple. Find some pilots who know the mine field, and let them pilot us in. . . . Uh-oh! That means Japanese pilots! Banzai! Their last chance to sabotage our Navy! Another Pearl Harbor!

Anyhow, you can imagine how we were shook up when a small boat came alongside and a Japanese man climbed the ladder and came aboard!

He was a Japanese fisherman who knew the safe passage and was ordered by the Japanese Navy to pilot us safely into the Bay. He was dressed in a baggy civilian suit and spoke no English. He was assigned one of the officers' staterooms and ate in the officers' wardroom. You can believe it, there was resentment at these courtesies provided by our Captain.

So he took us expertly into Tokyo Bay with no problem, using his own charts he brought aboard and handling the wheel himself.

We dropped the hook in Yokosuka harbor among the first ten, and a few days later we watched the formal surrender ceremonies of August 28, 1945 on the deck of the "Big Mo" through our binoculars.

Four weeks later our ship received a completely unexpected assignment, one which resulted in a radical change in my duties aboard ship.

(To be continued.)