

**My Navy Story and
Life on the USS Independence
By: Herman Bell**

I entered the Navy in April 1943 and went through boot camp in Farragut, Idaho. I went aboard the USS Independence at Alameda Naval Air Station, California around the middle of July, give or take a few days, one way or other.

The Independence arrived at Pearl Harbor on July 20, 1943. A lot of time was spent training our squadrons in and around Pearl. Then we went to sea.

We departed Pearl Harbor on Aug. 22, 1943.

Our first taste of action was a Strike on Marcus Island off the coast of Japan on August 31 and September 1. We did not see any Japanese on this raid; however, most of the island was destroyed by our task force planes.

We arrived back at Pearl Harbor September 7, 1943, and stayed until September 29. We were ordered to hit Wake Island, and hit them we did on the 5th and 6th of October. Then we returned to Pearl Harbor. We stayed in and around Pearl Harbor until October 11 when we were ordered down to New Hebrides. I remember this very well since this was the first time for me to cross the equator. Most of the crew had not crossed before either. . We crossed back and forth over the equator, time after time. The old salts really put us through all the rigorous initiation requirements to make us, ourselves, qualify as shell-backs. I was really glad when this was over on October 21.

On November 5, we docked at New Hebrides, remaining there until November 8, when we got underway for a strike on Raboul on the 11th.

Up until this time, we had not seen any Japanese planes. Then all at once, there were about 110 of them over us. They made several strafing runs on our ship; however, they did very little damage. I was told, in fact, that as the Japanese strafed our flight deck, some of our crew members were digging the lead out of the deck for souvenirs.

We returned to New Hebrides November 13 for one day. On the 14th, we got underway to cover the invasion of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, arriving on the 18th. Our planes began flying over Tarawa, bombing the Japanese stronghold, day and night. The battle raged on the 19th, and our planes kept up the bombing, while our battleships and cruisers were shelling the island. On the 20th, the Marines landed at Tarawa and

were slaughtered due to the fact the tide was not such as to allow the landing boats to deploy the Marines on the beach. Our ship was hit by a Japanese torpedo on the starboard side. I was lucky to have escaped any harm, since seconds before. I had been closing all water-tight doors and ventilation in the main mess hall in the compartment where the torpedo hit. I had just finished my duties and was closing a water-tight door between compartments, heading back to my battle station. About this time I heard Father Kelly our Chaplain on the loud-speaker, saying to hit the deck, as we were about to be hit by a torpedo.

I dove to the deck, and all Hell broke loose. We did get hit by a very powerful aerial torpedo from a twin-engine Betty. Then word came over the speaker to abandon ship. I surely hated to hear such a command. Luckily, almost immediately, the order was canceled. This was good news, since I really was not looking forward to going into the water with all the sharks, and possibly the Japanese coming back to finish us off. After being dead in the water for 7 minutes, what a relief it was to get our power back on.

We heard a man was trapped in the shaft alley, and help was needed to get him out. I was in the work party that cut a hole in the deck over the shaft alley where this man was trapped. We got him out just in time. When we got to him, the water was up to his chin. He climbed out of the hole we had cut, made it to the second deck, and passed out. I knew this man since I slept near his sack. He was a really nice fellow, from Colorado, I believe. He was sent back to the states, the lucky stiff.

There we were, with a hole in our side large enough to put a good size house in. We were taking on an awful lot of water which caused our ship to list to starboard. We pumped water over to the port side to level the ship so we could get underway and head to a small island named Funafuti. We made it to Funafuti on November 23 where repairs were made. We left Funafuti December 7 and arrived at Pearl Harbor December 17, on our way back to the states.

We lost 17 people on November 20, and had to bury most of them at sea: some were lost overboard when the torpedo hit. It was an extremely sad experience to see our buddies pushed over the side in burial bags that were weighted down with sand. I will never forget that day.

We arrived at Hunters Point dry dock on January 2, 1944, where we remained for a little over 6 months. After extensive repairs were made to the ship, we headed back to the Pacific as a night carrier for the remainder of the war.

We arrived back at Pearl Harbor July 3. We operated out of Pearl until August 16. when we were ordered down to Eniwitok. We arrived at Eniwitok August 24 and stayed until the August 29, when we crossed the equator for the sixth time.

On September. 6, our task force went on a raid to Palau. The planes from our task force hit Palau the next day as well. On September 8, we left to go on to the Philippines. This was the first time the Americans had been back near the Philippines since the Japanese took them early in the war.

We continued raids on the Philippine islands of Mindanao and Cebu for several days until pulling back to refuel at sea. One of my jobs, when we refueled, was to operate the huge drum holding the lines securing the ships at a safe distance apart. The lines were necessary because of the rough seas. Eight to ten seamen manned these lines. Quite a few hands were required since the lines were four or five inches in diameter. These lines were wrapped several times around the drum I operated; then they went over to the oil tanker. My job was to keep any slack out and to hold the bows of the two ships together.

Many times, as we got the oil lines all connected, the Japanese would send planes out, and we would have to break loose the lines and separate our ships a safe distance apart. Our planes were launched and shot the Japanese down so we could get the tanker back alongside to take on our fuel. Sometime it would take 2 or 3 days to get fueled up and ready for another raid.

On September 12, we were raiding Cebu Island, and our pilots shot down two Japanese planes—one Betty and one Dinah..

On September 13, our pilots raided Mindanao, shooting down one Betty in the morning . We pulled back on September 16 to refuel near Palau. Then on September 21, our pilots hit Manila, shooting down two Zekes and one Betty. On September 22, our pilots got two more Zekes and a Val. Total score for the task force was 144 Japanese planes destroyed and 25 of their ships sunk.

On September 23, we refueled off the coast of Luzon. On September 24, we arrived off Caron Harbor. Our pilots got one Zeke and one tanker.

We left on September 25 for Saipan, and on the 28th we were treated to a 30 minute beer party on Saipan. We could not stay too long due to the risk of so many unexploded shells and hand grenades. Bodies were still in fox holes. This is unforgettable

On September 29, we set sail to an island named Ulithi, arriving on October 1. We were to visit this island on many occasions to refuel and take

on supplies. On October 3. we had to leave Ulithi to ride out one of the many typhoons we had to deal with.

The Independence was a cruiser to start out with and was converted to a carrier. It was said it could easily turn over. In fact I was told, if we rolled over to 32 degrees it might go belly up. I saw it roll to 28 and 29 degrees several times and it was no fun. When you went to chow, you had to hold onto your tray for dear life, or you could be eating out of someone else's tray. One time I remember the waves being so high, you could look out and see a battleship one minute and the next thing it wasn't there. The waves were hiding the battleship which was a good hundred feet from the water line to the very top, so you know the waves were pretty high. When the storm was over on October 4, we had lost one of our whale boats and had thirteen damaged planes. We dropped anchor at Ulithi again on the 4th.

We left Ulithi October 6, and on October 10, we attacked Nansei Shoto (I'm not sure I have this spelled correctly). On October 12, we attacked Formosa which is the big island between Japan and the Philippines. The Japanese attacked, and we were under attack until 0230. Things I remember about this day are eating pork chops and, also being hit by two dead fish, which simply means torpedoes that malfunctioned. Thank the Lord! One torpedo was enough!

On October 13, we attacked Formosa again, and this time we came under attack from noon to 2030. Two of our cruisers were hit, one was the Houston, and the other, the Canberra, was hit by two torpedoes.

On October 14, we were still under attack. Our planes shot down 43 Japanese planes. The next day we shot down one Emily. On the 16th, we used the damaged cruisers as decoys but the Japanese apparently didn't fall for it.

On the 17th, we refueled and on the 18th we sent our planes over Luzon in the Philippines. On the 19th we refueled again. The invasion of Leyte took place the next day, October 20. This was when McArthur went ashore to keep his promise, "I shall return."

On October 24, our pilots shot down one Emily, one Marvis (I think that is the way it is spelled), one Francis, and one Jake. The Japanese fleet, consisting of four BBs, eight CLs, and thirteen destroyers, was sighted 200 miles away. We sent an attack group, and damaged two battleships on the first wave. A second enemy force, consisting of three CVs, two CLs, and five destroyers, was sighted 300 miles to the north. Our ship and the rest of our task force was under attack all night. We had two near hits by 500 lb. bombs dropped by Vals.

We sank two Japanese cruisers and two DDs on October 25. Two BBs and one CV were badly damaged in the battle.

On October 26, Japanese planes attacked our other units in the task force: our sister ship Princeton was sunk. One of our pilots, named Lee, shot down a Betty.

Eleven Japanese planes were shot down over our task force group on October. 29. We had 26 pilots down in the water, in heavy rains, and our night pilots helped locate them so the destroyers could pick them up.

Four Japanese BBs, two CLs, and several Tin Cans were sighted November. 1, but got away.

On November 3, our cruiser Reno and CVL Langley collided.

November 5-Luzon was hit, and our pilots got one Judy during the night.

November 6-Our night fighters struck Manila Bay and shot down two Topsys.

November 7- We left for Ulithi and got into another typhoon which lasted 2 days. The waves were so high we got water in our gun buckets. These guns are 30 or 40 feet above the water line, so you know the waves were pretty high. We had been at sea so long, our food supply was almost depleted, except for salmon, rice, and beans, which we had plenty of, and which we ate three times a day. I could not eat salmon for several years after that. (We had run out of soap during the battle of the Philippines.)

November 9-We were back at Ulithi, taking on some much needed supplies

November 14-We went back to the Philippines. On the night of the 17th, we were under attack all night long. On November 18, our pilots shot down one Oscar, one Emily, and two Topsys. On November 19, our planes attacked Manila: our ace, Bill Henry, got three Bettys.

November 25-Attacked Manila. Our group was under attack all afternoon. From our after elevator, I watched Japanese suicide planes dive onto and crash into the Hancock and the Cabot. Two planes hit the Intrepid, causing one Hell of a fire. We were the only carrier in our group not hit by suicide planes. We did have a close call when two 1000 lb. bombs hit near us and shook the Hell out of our ship, but no damaged was incurred.

Also, on the 25th, one of our planes, a TBM, crashed into the superstructure (or island) aboard our ship, and one of our guys was lost overboard. His name was Ricci.

We left for Ulithi on the 26th, arrived on the 27th, and took on supplies. We stayed till December 1, pulled out for one day, returned on the

2nd. then remained until the 11th. We then headed back to hit Manila again on the 14th. Our ace, Henry, shot down one Emily.

The invasion of Mindoro began. December 15. We attacked Luzon on December 16.

December 17-We refueled at sea. That same day we were hit by yet another typhoon. This one almost collapsed our bulkhead in the catapult room. I was in the work party that was sent in to make the bulkhead secure by shoring with timber we used for the flight deck. Using the 4x6 timbers, we braced from the forward bulkhead back to the next bulkhead about 15 to 20 feet away. This was a really tough job due to the rough seas. When we would hit a wave the bow of the ship would sink down into the water, and the whole ship would shake, then all of a sudden, the bow would come out the water at least 15 or 20 feet. It would almost take your breath away. This made our job a lot harder, since it was so hard to keep our feet under us. I remember this job took at least several hours.

December 18-Another man was lost overboard. His name was Becker. We were still riding out the typhoon when, somehow, one of our 2000 lb. bombs broke loose. This bomb started to roll around in the bomb storage and started breaking all of our bombs loose. They were sliding from side to side, literally tearing everything in their path to pieces. It was decided the only way to stop the bombs was to drop some of the 4x6 timbers down into that jumble of smashed up bombs and twisted steel. This we did, and it took about a carload of timber to stop things from sliding around. We were told there was no danger of any of the bombs exploding because there were no detonators in them. After we got every thing stabilized, the Ordnance people started hoisting the bombs out. One officer said he didn't see why the bombs hadn't exploded.

One thing I failed to mention was, after we almost ran out of food, we took on supplies. We put box after box of potatoes any place we could store them. One place they were stored was in the after elevator pit. This was also where we stored all of the sheetmetal we used for various jobs. When we were in the typhoon, all of our sheetmetal got loose, and broke the angle irons that were welded to the deck to hold it. All that metal sliding around broke up the boxes of potatoes and made mush out of them, and the juice was running down into the compartments below. What a mess this turned out to be! It took quite awhile to clean up.

In this typhoon two of our carriers caught fire, and several destroyers sank.

December 19-Lt.Powers was buried at sea.

December 20-. we were in general quarters all night and left the next day to return to Ulithi arriving on the 24th Dec. 1944.

Jan.3rd 1944 we hit Formosa and no Japanese planes were seen. on the 4th Hit Formosa and Nansie Shoto it is real cloudy.

5th of Jan 1945 we refueled off Formosa and the next day the 6th of Jan.1945 our planes got six Japanese planes to their credit, our planes were the last to hit Luzon before the invasion.

7th of Jan.1945 our planes hit Formosa.On the 8th of Jan. 1945 we refueled off Formosa.

9th of Jan. 1945 our night fighters hit Formosa at night went through the Banshi channel into the south China sea.Luzon invaded by American 6th army of liberation and General MacArthur went ashore.

Jan.10th 1945 our planes shot down three planes just before dawn,on the 11th we refueled 150 miles west of Manila.

12th of Jan.1945 we hit Saigon,French Indo China coast, the battleship New Jersey shelled the coast and our planes sank two tankers and one probable.

13th of Jan. 1945 we tried to refuel but it was to rough,on the 14th of Jan. 1945 we hit Formosa and the China coast which included Hainan,Canton and Hong Kong.

15th we continued hitting the China coast.

17th Jan. we were hit by another typhoon, I was in a work party to repair the flight deck damaged by one of our planes crashing,and we had five men injured by waves over the focle and the flight deck.

The typhoon continues,the forward bulkhead is bent by the waves.

Finally on the 19th of Jan. we were able to refuel. The invasion of Iwo Jima was canceled and we returned to Ulithi,anchoring there on the 26th Jan. 1945.

Jan. 30th we left Ulithi for Pearl Harbor,for some well earned R&R.

All of the dates and events I have written about were taken from a small log book I kept while on board ship the last entry was Feb.10th to March 3rd we were at Pearl Harbor.

Below are some of the dates I recorded as we battled the Japanese right up to the end of the war.

Feb. 10th to March 3rd 1945 we were in Pearl Harbor.

9th and 10th March we are at Enewetak.

13th and 14th March found us back at Ulithi.

17th thru 19th March we were hitting Kyusku.

23rd and 24th we were hitting Okinawa.

26th and 27th March we were Hitting Okinawa again.

29th we hit Kyushu again.

30th and 31st we were back at Okinawa.

Still hitting Okinawa on the 1st and 2nd of April 1945

5th of April we hit Sakiskima.

6th thru the 9th of April back at Okinawa.

10th of april we hit Amimi, Tokuna and Kikia Shima

The 12th thru the 15th we were back at Okinawa.

Also on the 18th thru the 21st found us still working on Okinawa.

22nd of April we were hitting Tokuna Shima.

23rd back at Okinawa.

26th and 27th we were hitting Tokuna, Kikia Shima.

May 1st hitting Okinawa again.

The 3rd thru the 6th of May we were hitting Okinawa and Kikia Shima.

The 9th thru the 11th found us hitting Okinawa, Amimi and Tokuna Shima.

The 14th thru the 24th of May 1945 we were back to Ulithi.

This was the last entry in my log, I am sure there was a lot more to put down but I guess I was too busy as the war was coming to a close and we were right off the coast of Japan hitting them with everything we had.

I just thought about one operation we were in and did not mention and that was Iwo Jima, in this battle we took as long as three months and never once saw land, the same thing when we were at Okinawa.

I remember one of the biggest thrills of my life was when the Japanese surrendered our planes from every carrier in all the task forces was put in the air and they flew over in mass, this was a sight to behold, planes as far as you could see. I knew we had many many planes, but when you put them all in the air at one time it was simply the most exciting thing I have ever seen.

Months before we dropped the first atomic bomb we heard scuttlebutt about some secret weapon that we had and were going to use, of course when they did drop the bomb it was something else we could not believe it.

When the war was over the Navy came out with a point system to release people. It took 33 points to get out and I was so mad I had only 32 1/2 points. But it turned out ok for me as the people who left early on anything coming back to the states most of them traveled all over the Pacific and I stayed with our ship and I beat a lot of them back to the states.

I was discharged November 1945 at camp Wallace Texas between Houston and Galveston and was I glad to get home to my family.