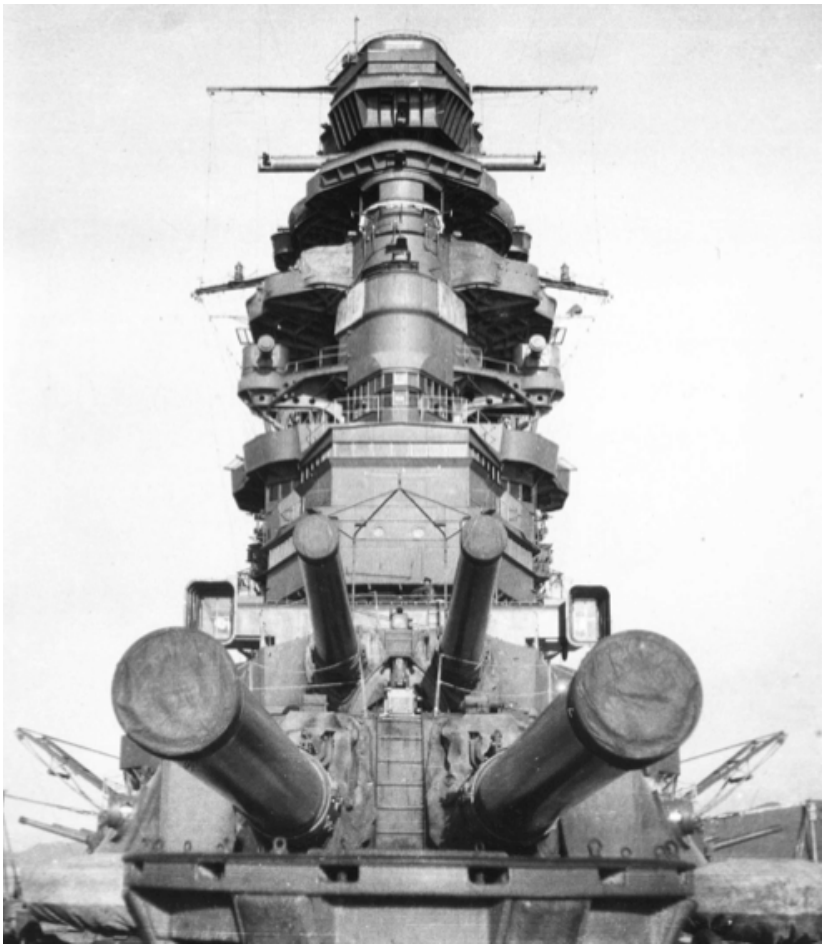
Last Cruise of the Battleship *Nagato*



The Battleship That Started the Pacific War
And Ushered in
The Atomic Age

By
Vic Socotra
With
Edward Smith Gilfillen

Socotra House Publications LLC, 2015

Last Cruise of the Battleship *Nagato*

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Edward Smith Gilfillen, whose story should have been told long ago, and for all the Atomic Veterans whose lives were cut short due to exposure to radiation.

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Forward: Alpha and Omega

This December 7th is the 74th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl. It is always an emotional day for old sailors, particularly those who had the chance to serve in the very place where it occurred.

This year, I find myself attending to the Omega end of the attack- the last deployment of the battleship *Nagato*, whose powerful radio transmitters had sent the three-word command to launch the assault on the still-sleeping island early on a lovely Sunday morning: "Tora! Tora! Tora!"

By the time the Alpha moment in the conflict had passed, there were 2,042 Americans killed and 1,247 wounded. The American Pacific Fleet was largely on the bottom of the shallow harbor, and *Nagato* and her carrier strike force-the Kido Butai- were retiring to the northwest.

It was the "18 huge radio tubes and a big variable condenser" from the radio room of the Japanese battleship that brought me to the remarkable story of the Last Japanese Battleship, that and several exchanges with RADM Donald "Mac" Showers, last of the Station HYPO codebreakers, who had one of *Nagato's* battle flags for years. I will tell you how he came to have it, and why he decided to donate it to be displayed in the lobby of the Office of Naval Intelligence in Suitland, Maryland in a moment.

That would have been enough to pique my interest in *Nagato's* epic saga, but I was brought to her years ago by Uncle Jim, who helped the widow of

an Atomic Veteran get some other artifacts of the venerable battleship to the Antique Wireless Association's Museum in Bloomfield, New York.

http://www.antiquewireless.org/

In the meantime, this was a day to remember the moment when America's innocence was lost amid a humiliating defeat. The great ships were still on the bottom when ENS Mac Showers arrived in February of 1942, and the great struggle against the Empire of Japan was just beginning to unfold.

When I was in Pearl for the retirement of an old shipmate in early 2015, I was sitting on the pier under a white canvas awning, looking out across the placid waters toward the bookends at Ford Island.

Arizona slumbers beneath the soaring white arches of her memorial. She is the Alpha of the conflict. Just to her stern is the Omega, the vast gray bulk of the greatest battleship of them all, USS *Missouri* (BB-63), with the modest brass plaque on her deck that marks the very spot where the instrument of Japan's surrender was signed seventy years ago this year.

Remember Pearl Harbor.

BAKER's Dozen

"Warfare, perhaps civilization itself, has been brought to a turning point by this revolutionary weapon."

- Vice Admiral W. H. P. Blandy, USN, Commander of Operation CROSSROADS

(Combat Artist Grant Powers painted this striking image of USS Arkansas starting to go vertical into the BAKER water column. We watched in amazement from USS Mount McKinley (AGC-7), Flagship of Operation CROSSROADS underway. Photo Navy Historical and Heritage Command).

After we abandoned ship just as we had for the ABLE shot to get a safe distance from the coming atomic explosion. The pirate American crew was dispersed among the dozens of support ships. A dozen of us found ourselves on RADM Blandy's Joint Task Force ONE flagship, *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7), which was anchored about a dozen miles away from the target ships in the lagoon.

We jokingly called ourselves the BAKER'S DOZEN, since we expected to

return to the mighty ex-IJN battleship *Nagato* once the test was complete. We would then try to clean the ship up from any fallout and begin preparations for the third in the series, blast CHARLIE. That one was planned to demonstrate the properties of an atomic explosion in deep water.

As it turns out, it did not happen that way, and like Test ABLE, there was a SNAFU that changed everything.

We rose early on the morning of the 25th of July and got chow in the wardroom before venturing out on deck to find a good perch to watch the test. We marveled at the VIP guests who were aboard to witness the event.

SECNAV James Forrestal himself was there, in plain unadorned khakis, along with congressmen and other Washington people interested in the new atomic technology. CROSSROADS was anything but secret, as opposed to the Manhattan Project that gave birth to the Bomb. These tests were intended to publicly demonstrate the might of this new technology to the world, and it certainly did *that.*

We were told that shot BAKER was expected to cause more damage to the target fleet than ABLE because it was an underwater detonation and closer to the surface. It was also expected to produce more radioactive contamination in Bikini Lagoon, although no one knew how *much* more. As it turned out, contamination from BAKER caused major problems that

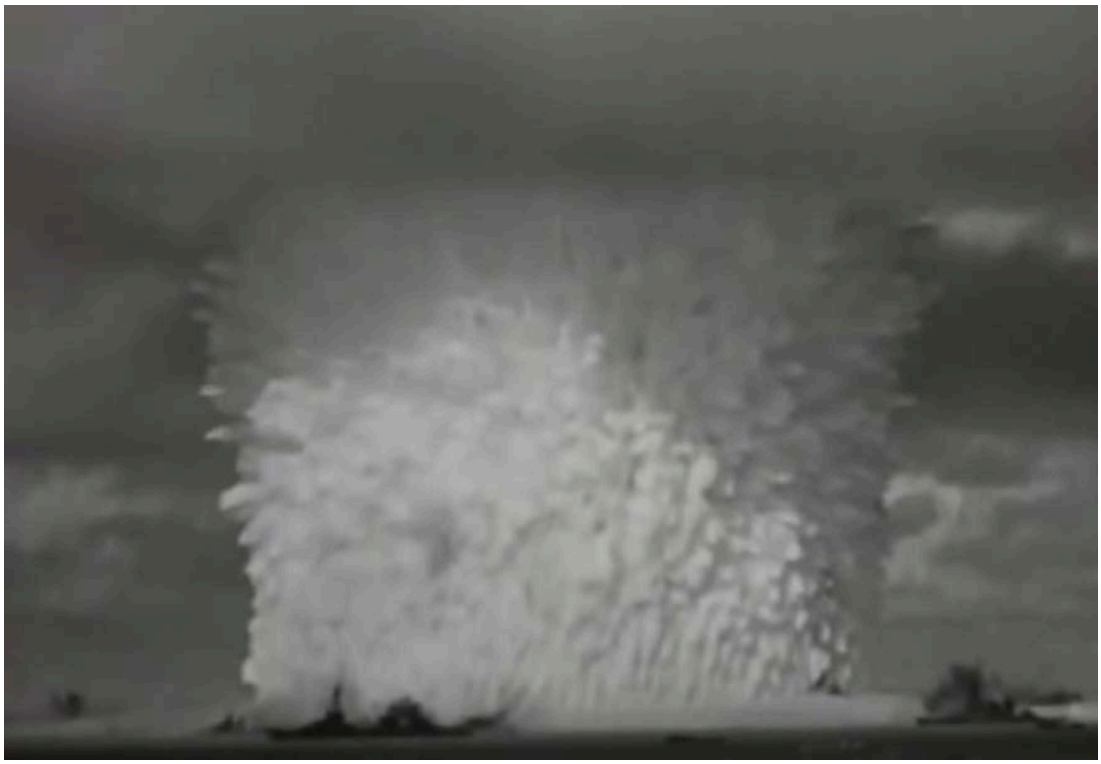
persisted for months and threatened the overall success of the entire CROSSROADS operation.

Pre-shot procedures were essentially the same as for ABLE: 68 target ships were moored in the lagoon and 24 small craft were beached on Bikini; all personnel were evacuated to the support fleet, which retreated upwind; and VIP observers and the press awaited the shot.

There was one important difference from the first test. This time we were encouraged to watch it directly. The scientists told us that since the blast was going to be at a depth of ninety feet, there would be no fireball, so we needed no goggles or smoked glasses.

We were on deck, looking toward the low dark silhouette of *LSM-60*, the heavily modified landing ship that lowered the bomb below the surface of the lagoon. The minutes clicked by, and we were advised over the ship's loudspeaker that preparations were complete and M-Hour would be at 0835. I checked my watch to best advantage and moved to the rail to get the best view I could.

The signal was broadcast to the mast over the landing ship as planned, and then things became very interesting.

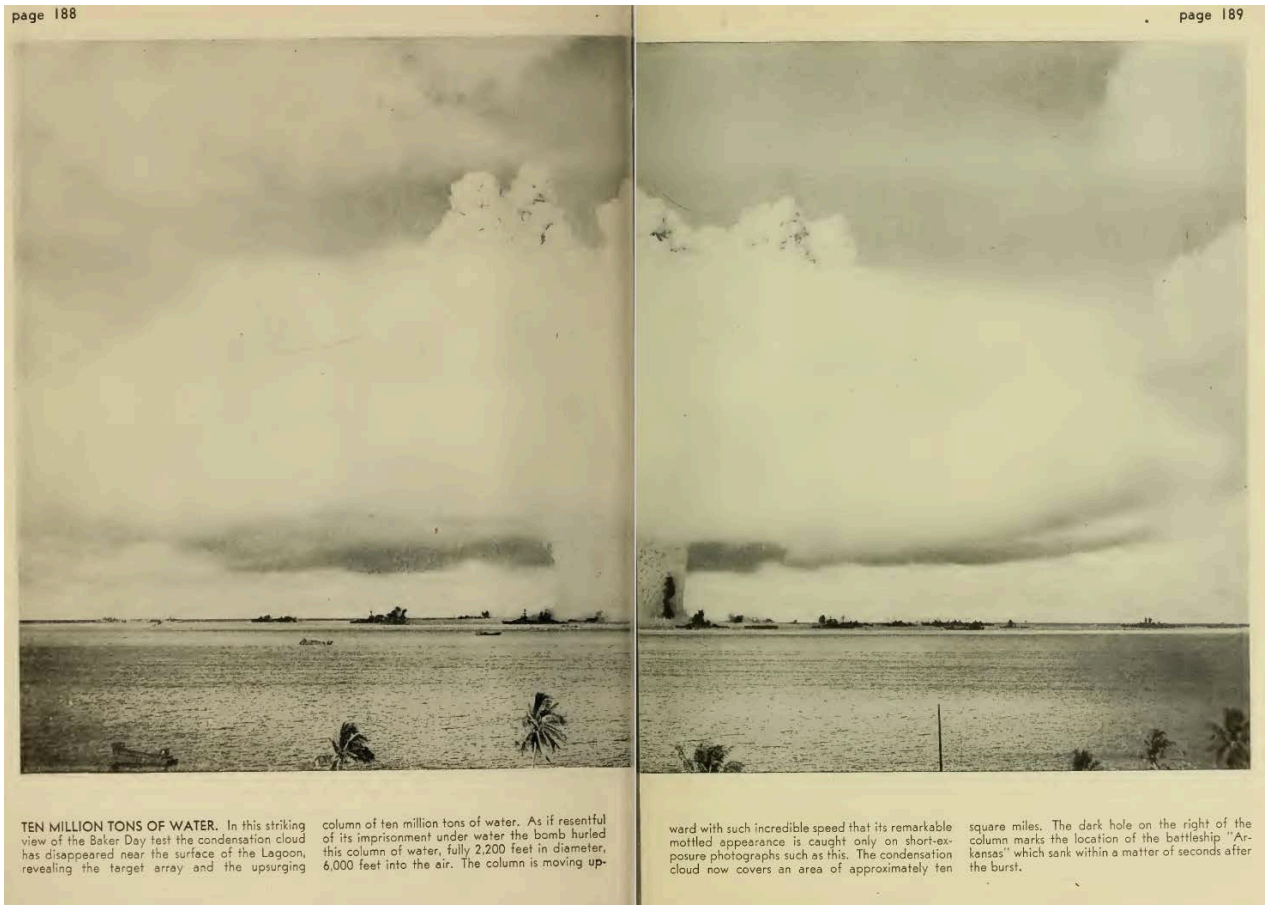


(An image of the initial water column, *Nagato's* distinctive pagoda mast is seen at lower right. Photo USN).

The scientists told us later that the underwater fireball generated by the blast took the form of a rapidly expanding hot gas bubble, which reached down to the sea floor and up to the surface simultaneously. The result created a shallow crater on the seafloor 30 feet deep and nearly 2,000 feet wide. At the top, water burst through the surface like a geyser, creating a massive "spray dome" containing nearly two million tons of highly radioactive seawater.

What we saw was a thing that resembled an angry cauliflower in rapid motion. The expanding dome stretched into a hollow chimney of spray called the "column," 6000 feet tall and 2000 feet wide, with walls 300 feet thick.

I could see *Nagato's* distinctive profile at the base of the column, and then it was obscured as the space vacated by the rising gas bubble caused a tsunami nearly a hundred feet tall. In some of the pictures the CROSSROADS historian published you can see *Nagato* completely immersed in it, though the old girl held her own and stayed afloat.



In one of the images I have in my copy of the pictorial history (H.M. Wise Co., 1946), there is a two-page depiction that includes a dark vertical shape at the base of the cauliflower. That was the *USS Arkansas* (BB-33), closest ship to the epicenter. The raw power of the BAKER device upended the 27,000-ton ship, thrusting its 562-feet hull stern first straight up in the air and then plunging the bow into the bottom of the lagoon before it toppled over backward into the water curtain of the spray column.

By the time the wave reached Bikini Island beach 3.5 miles away, a series of nine 15-foot waves tossed landing craft onto the strand and filled them with sand. Ten seconds after the detonation, falling water from the column created a 900-foot "base surge" which rolled over *Nagato* and the others, coating them with radioactivity so thoroughly that they could never be decontaminated. That was the SNAFU, maybe bigger than the one that landed the ABLE bomb so far off its intended target.

BAKER inflicted heavy damage on the target fleet. Eight ships, including the gallant aircraft carrier Saratoga (CV-3), were sunk; eight more were seriously damaged. Even more important for the remainder of the operation,

the detonation caused most of the target fleet to be bathed in radioactive water spray and debris from the material dredged from the bottom of the lagoon.

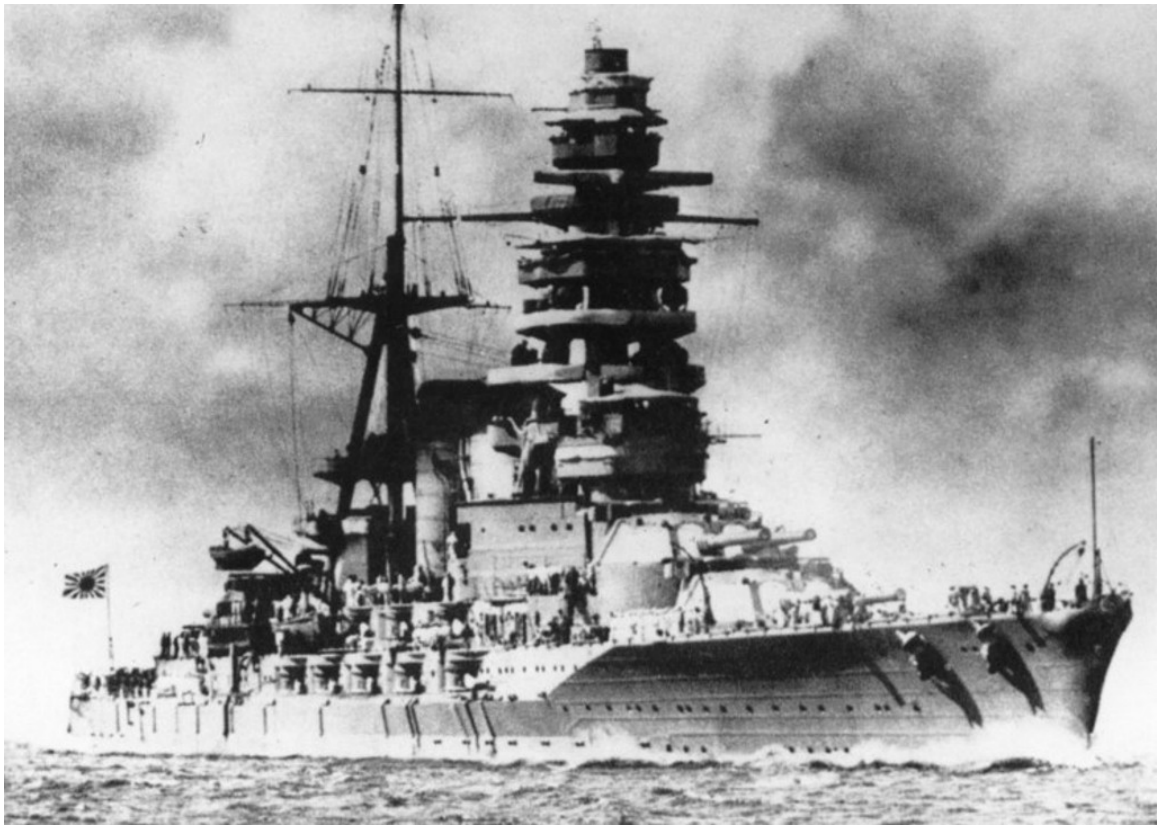
The water in the lagoon near surface zero was intensely radioactive for several days as Admiral Blandy conferred with the scientists and tried to figure out what to do.

One thing I can say with certainty is that BAKER was the most impressive thing I have ever seen. A battleship thrown right into the sky like a toy! I took a certain amount of pride that our ship- Japanese though she might have been- was riding just fine at her anchorage. She was just deadly hot.

I was glad that I had dragged my full seabag along with me this time. We would not be going back aboard, or removing anything from her now. She was *hot.*

(ex-IJN *Nagato* after the BAKER blast. She is taking on some water, but we could not return to pump her out. Combat art by Art Beaumont. Image Navy historical and Heritage Command).

Climb Mount Niitaka



(His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Ship *Nagato*. Photo USN).

On 26 November, 1941, the Combined Fleet and its *Kidō Butai* (also known as the *Carrier Striking Task Force*) set sail from Hittokapu Bay in Japan's Kurile Islands under the overall command of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. He had personally selected the battleship *Nagato* as his flagship, the proud ship to lead the mightiest naval force ever to steam the Pacific Ocean.

Nagato had a bold look that Yamamoto appreciated, and she rode well as she sliced the waves at her best speed of twenty-six knots. She and her sister ship *Mutsu* had been built as *Dreadnaught*-class warships of 38,000 tons burden, 708 feet in length and nearly a hundred on the beam. Both had been extensively refitted with a unique seven-legged mast designed to maximize rigidity for range-finding purposes and survivability under shellfire.

The unique superstructure recalled the design of a pagoda, and consisted of a thick vertical leg in the center surrounded by six outer legs. The central leg was large enough to accommodate an electric elevator running between the foretop and main deck that carried the Admiral to his post on the flag bridge.

As peace talks continued in Washington, the ships made an undetected transit of the North Pacific to be in position for the contingency of war.

Peace was still a possibility. Yamamoto, a graduate of the US Naval War College and Harvard University, was confident that his bold plan to conduct a devastating surprise attack could secure an early advantage in a conflict against the United States. He was a realist, though, and knew that such advantage could not be guaranteed beyond the first year of war. He hoped for peace.

It did not come. Talks in Washington broke down. Admiral Yamamoto was directed to carry out his plan. On 2 December, the radio room in *Nagato* transmitted a message to the commander of the Kido Butai, Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo. The final decision had been made in Tokyo. It was to be war.

Yamamoto directed *Nagato's* radio room to send a message to the carrier striking force. The large vacuum tubes glowed orange with the power of the transmitter:
"NIITAKA-YAMA NOBORE 12 08" (新高山登れ12 08[?]). "Climb Mount Niitaka, 1208.

Admiral looked at the message from Yamamoto and looked at his chief of staff: "Hostilities will begin on December 7th, exactly as scheduled."

By the morning of December 7, from a position some 200 miles north of Oahu, six Japanese carriers began to launch the first attack wave. At 0753hrs, strike leader Commander Mitsuo Fuchida sent the signal "Tora! Tora1 Tora!" indicating that the "lightning strike" on Pearl Harbor had achieved the element of surprise.

A staff officer raced the message from the *Nagato's* radio room to the Flag Bridge and handed the message to Admiral Yamamoto. The admiral nodded gravely. Now it was begun. It would be anyone's guess where and how it might end.

(Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Photo USN).

The Manuscript

“The Nagato was the biggest battleship ever built. It could stand off and blow anything in the US Navy out of the water. We were scared witless of it, of its sudden appearance in the sea-lanes, and we searched unceasingly for it’s whereabouts. The astonishing secret is in here- if you can read it.”

-JCR 11/16/1979

Those were the words my Uncle Jim typed on the cover sheet to the manuscript. He had it wrong, one of the few times I ever knew that to be true. He was thinking of the super battleship *Yamato*, which with her sister *Musashi* was one of two behemoths of the world ocean. *Yamato* was sunk as part of the assault on Okinawa, which our pal Admiral “Mac” Showers remembered well. We were talking about it at the Willow Bar a few years ago about the timing:

(IJN *Yamato* under the final air attack that sank her. Photo USN).

“My roommate in the two-story Quonset hut on CINCPAC Hill was an army Captain named Hal Leathers. He did our ground estimates, and he thought there were 100,000 Jap troops waiting for us, and 2000 kamikaze aircraft ready to strike the Fleet. According to the traffic we decrypted, the biggest battleship in the world, IJN Yamato, was getting ready for a one-way mission to beach itself on the island and use its 18-inch guns as static artillery.”

“The Japanese were determined to make this so costly for us that we would seek options other than complete victory, right?”

“You have no idea. The civilians on Okinawa, like on Saipan, were indoctrinated to believe that the Americans would kill everyone on the island. Admiral Nimitz sent 1,500 ships, including some Brit fast carriers and a half million men.”

I pursed my lips. “Let me get the timing straight. The invasion started in April of 1945, didn’t it?”

“April Fools Day,” said Mac with a smile. “We found Yamato on the sixth, and sank her the next day. The Japs lost over 107,000 military and civilian on land and 4,000 sailors at sea. It cost us almost seven thousand soldiers and another five thousand sailors to the kamikazes. It was something entirely new in battle, and it was a real problem. The running battle went on almost to the 4th of July…”

Uncle Jim had confused his battleships. He was actually talking about a ship called *Nagato*, which had a grand history and an amazing role to play even when the war was over. She was named for Nagato Province at the extreme western tip of the island of Honshu. She had been ordered while the Great War still raged in Europe, a *Dreadnaught*-class warship built as the lead ship

in her class. She was not the biggest nor the newest battleship in the imperial fleet, far from it.

She still was an impressive 780 ft. LOA (Length Overall) and had a beam of 95 feet. Her armor belt was a foot of steel, and she carried four twin 41 cm guns as her main battery, with a wartime manning of over 1,700 officers and men.

Her operational history had some interesting moments. She carried supplies for the survivors of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and was dramatically upgraded in the mid-1930s to improve her armor and machinery. The iconic pagoda mast was added at that time. She was a participant in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937) as the world slid into armed chaos, and had one of her two greatest moments on the 7th of December, 1941.

Nagato was the flagship of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, and it was from her Flag Bridge that the order to attack the American Fleet was issued. As such, she is a special part of the history of her nation and ours.

Uncle Jim had been interested in her for something specialized: Jim was an engineer of the Old School, and fascinated by technology and how it developed in the 20th Century. A former Naval officer named Edward Smith Gilfillen had passed away in1978, and his widow was interested in getting some of his junk to people who would be interested in it.

Ed had been a member of the Naval Technical Collection team dispatched to Japan at the conclusion of the war. While at Yokosuka, he had the opportunity to board *Nagato* as she rode forlornly at anchor in Yokosuka Harbor.

In order to prevent what Uncle Jim called "hanky-panky kamikaze games," Ed disassembled the ship's big radio, and had kept what Jim described as "18 huge radio tubes and a big variable condenser" as war souvenirs, given what they had transmitted on the very first Pearl Harbor day. As he was dying, he asked his wife to contact Jim to see that they were donated them to the Antique Wireless Association's Museum in Bloomfield, NY, as unique specimens of WWII-era Japanese technology.

As far as I know, that is where they are to this day. But Ed Gillfillen was going to get to know *Nagato* a lot better. In fact, he was going to be selected- or shanghaied- into being the XO on *Nagato's* last cruise.

That was the other thing that Jim got- the unpublished manuscript of Ed's account of the most remarkable experience a sailor can have.

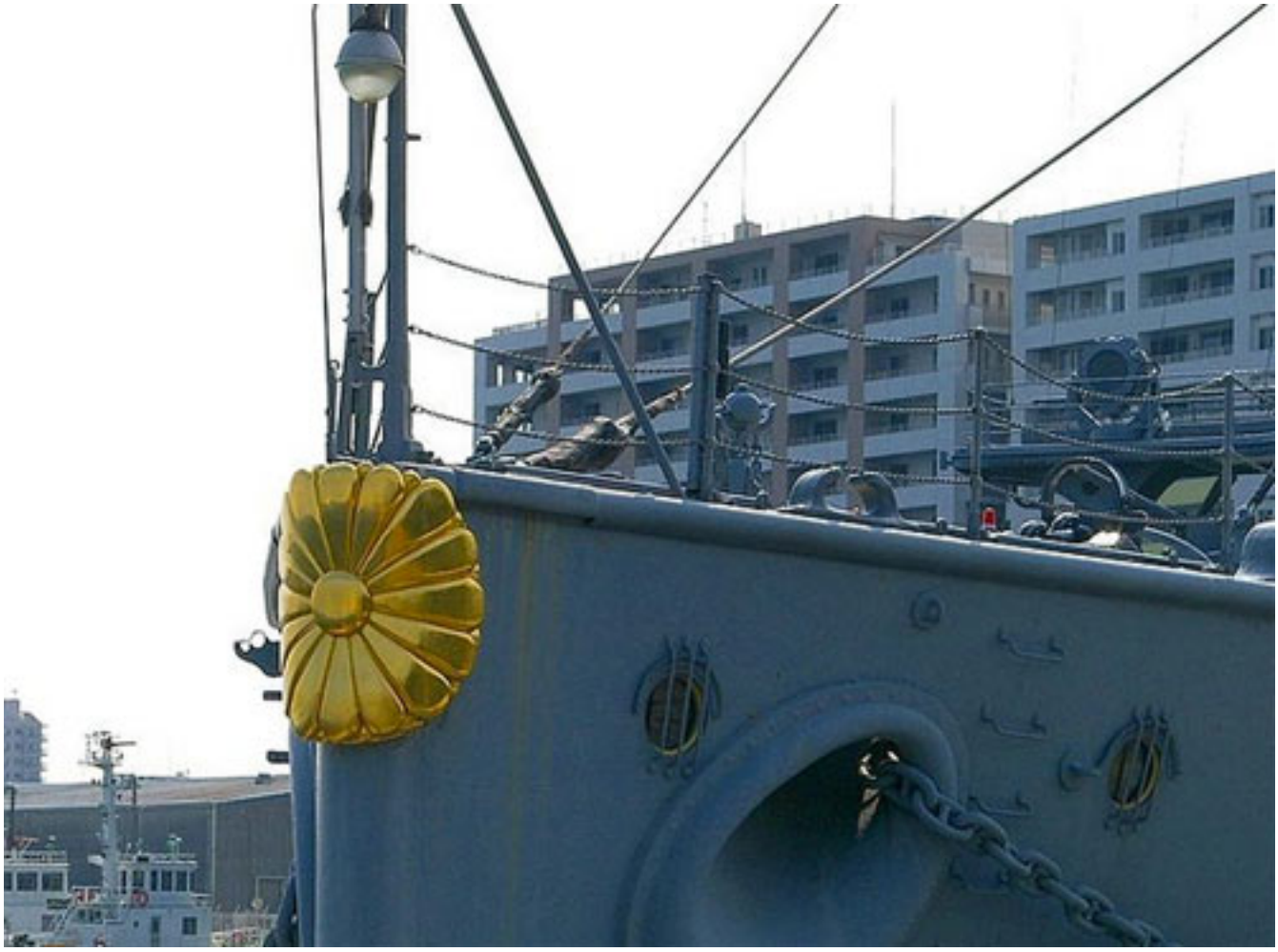
IJN *Nagato* was moored at the entrance to Yokosuka harbor when the American Fleet arrived in the Sagami Wan. They were here to accept the unconditional surrender of the Empire. The Americans were wary, and startled by the appearance of the dreadnaught, but *Nagato* was there to witness, not fight. The Americans saw that her mighty guns were pointed fore-and-aft, not at battle stations. The big gray ships steamed slowly past- USS *South Dakota* (BB-57) was the first. Everyone was tense, not knowing what was going to happen to those arriving in the homeland of a fierce and implacable foe.

Captain Sugino Shuichi arrived to assume command as last Japanese master of *Nagato*. Her previous Captain, RADM Otsuka Miki, had been killed at his post in the last American air raid in July of 1945. Shuichi was an officer of considerable combat experience and distinction, and now he was preside over the surrender of Japan's last operational ship-of-the-line.

That day of formal capitulation was only twelve days later, but before then, there was one thing Sugino could do to mitigate some of the sting of capitulation.

With surrender imminent, he had a sudden recollection of the fact that a lifeboat of the Czarist Russian battleship Orel was still displayed at Eta-jima Naval Academy, the Japanese bastion of tradition whose pride was as resolute as that of Annapolis. The lifeboat was a constant reminder to the Japanese midshipmen of the greatest moment of their Naval history: the victory of Admiral Togo over the forces of the Czar in the Tsushima Strait, the first time a Western colonial power had been vanquished by a rising Asian nation.

Now, it was the Japanese fleet doing the surrendering, and Sugino did not want to leave `trophies' for the Americans to exhibit in Annapolis. He sent word to gave orders to remove the imperial chrysanthemum crest from Nagato and had it burned on the afterdeck. It took nearly all of a day for the large crest to burn.



(A golden seal similar to that worn by *Nagato*, this one adorning the bow of Admiral Togo's *Mikasa*, flagship at the battle of Tsushima Strait. Now again a memorial ship, in 1945 the Americans stripped the land-locked ship of its weapons and made it into a dance club during the Occupation).

That collision of pride and humiliation naturally led to misunderstandings. A pal wrote me yesterday with a sea story from the agonizing weeks of transition from martial independence to vanquished vassal.

Sid wrote: "Once upon a time in an O'Club in Okinawa, VQ-1 was flying VADM Frederic Bardshar, JR, the Commander of Task Force 77 from Vietnam to Atsugi, Japan, in an EA3B. He was a great guy and a big man,

probably 6’3 or 4″. He was an aviator who flew and fought in WWII, becoming an air ace at the Battle of Leyte Gulf where he shot down eight Japanese aircraft in his F-6 Hellcat fighter. “

(F6F Hellcat preparing for deck launch. Photo USN).

“The EA3B pilot, navigator, and I went with him to one of the USAF Officer Club for dinner – in our flight suits. The USAF club managers didn’t want to let us in, But VADM Bardshar noted that he saw USAF officers in the club in flight suits.”

Club manager: “but they are on alert duty.”

VADM Bradshar: “So are we, right out of Danang Air Base just a few hours ago.”

“OK.”

“While we were having dinner, he told us about that day aboard *Missouri*. Immediately after the signing he was assigned to Shore Patrol in Yokosuka. He and his armed guards walked out the gates and never saw a live person on the streets. He reported that eerie fact to his seniors upon return to the base. He was told that it wasn’t too surprising since the Japanese government had warned its people over the radio that they should stay indoors because the Americans would kill and eat their children.”

“True story.”

When I read it, I had to nod in agreement. The Occupation was a very strange thing, and some vestiges remained even in my time on the Sagami Wan decades later. I am surprised that the Occupation went as well as it did.

Three Feathers and a Flag

(RADM Donald "Mac" Showers is flanked by a pair of Socotras in the Hoyer Foyer at the Office of Naval Intelligence in Suitland, MD, on the occasion of Mac's donation of the battle flag of the IJN Battleship Nagato in 2012. The Foyer is so named irreverently in honor of the former House majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-5th, for his efforts to have the new ONI building located in his district. Photo USN).

The proud battleship *Nagato* had been pinned down in port for all of the last year of the war, and would not get underway again before the end. She was pier-side at the Yokosuka Naval Armory, heavily concealed with camouflage nets and plywood structures in July of 1945.

Soon-to-be Fleet Admiral William "Bull" Halsey had a personal thing about the ship from which the orders to attack Pearl Harbor had been issued, and he directed the THIRD Fleet to conduct a series of air raids on the base in order to put her underwater. Task Force 38, under Vice Admiral John S. McCain, was the blunt instrument of choice, and his force included nine fleet carriers, six light carriers, their escorts and a thousand aircraft.

On 10 July TF 38 pilots struck airfields around Tokyo and claimed to have destroyed 340 Japanese aircraft on the ground and two in the air. No Japanese aircraft responded to this attack as they were being held in reserve to mount large-scale suicide attacks on the Allied fleet during the impending invasion of the Home Islands. Mac Showers was unperturbed by the revisionist history about the use of the atomic bomb in later years. He and his pal Hal Leathers in the Estimates Section of the Forward Headquarters on Guam were reasonably confident that a million Americans would be killed or wounded in the assault, never mind the military and civilian population of Japan who stood in their path.

The strikes against Yokosuka were *Nagato's* last combat action, mostly serving as an American target.

Only two bombs actually hit the ship. One impacted the 01 deck aft of the mainmast, port side. It detonated at the base of the Number Three turret, and the occupying Americans of the Naval Technical Group marveled that although it had distorted the barbette, the turret was undamaged. The blast scar left a nearly perfect image of the rising sun flag on the surface of the armor plate. Worse, it had penetrated the ceiling of the lightly armored deck near the wardroom, killing over twenty men.

(Pictures)

There is some lingering controversy about a possible third hit. Something, possibly a five-inch rocket, tore through the port side stern and passed through the Admiral's mess and out the other side without exploding.

The technical team reported there was a gouge on the surface of the dining table, and markings that looked like they might have been made by teeth. The team was astonished that no one was killed there.

Between the two bombs, *Nagato* lost thirty-five officers and men.

The Allies lost fourteen planes and eighteen fliers, most of them over the harbor.

That was the last action of the war for the old battleship. Rear Admiral Ikeuchi Masamichi was recalled from retirement to assume command in late July due to the death of RADM Miki .

The newest Special Weapons of the Allies were employed against Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6th and 9th of August, respectively. At noon on the 15th, the Admiral called the crew to quarters to listen to the unprecedented broadcast of the Emperor, calling on his subjects to end hostilities.

On the 20th, Captain Sugino Shuichi, an active duty officer arrived on the ship and there was a small change of command ceremony to make him the last Japanese commander. The position she occupied at the pier would be needed for other uses. Under his direction, Nagato was relocated to the Number One buoy in Yokosuka's inner harbor.

On the 28th, the Americans arrived. There are several accounts of who "captured" Nagato. The official legend is that "a boarding party composed of about 35 men from the USS South Dakota, symbolically on surrender day (Sep 2nd). The version some like to believe goes like this: "Many artifacts were brought back aboard USS South Dakota. The battle flag of the Nagato was acquired at this time."

Charles M. Cavell, QM1, USN, preserved a *Nagato* flag and donated it to the crew of USS South Dakota, and then the USS South Dakota Memorial in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Other credible reports of the disposition of the flag locker include this entry from the diary of the Skipper of the USS Buchanan, CDR Daniel E. Henry, USN, who reported this on August 30:

“Battleship *Nagato* boarded; San Diego docks at Yokosuka Naval Yard; first sighting of POWs; transferred 40 POW correspondents with horrifying reports on POW treatment. Awakened at 0700 and found the DD *Nicholas* (DD-484,) captained by D.C. Lyndon, my first classmate at the Naval Academy) was waiting to relieve us. They had met a Jap DD on the 27th and taken some Japs to Admiral Halsey on the Missouri. We proceeded to anchorage but found our berth occupied by transports busy sending Marines ashore at Yokosuka. We anchored and watched the show. American planes are landing at the field at Yokosuka, says the commodore, but I am not sure.

0830 our APD (USS Horace A. Bass (LPR-124)) went alongside the BB Nagato, boarded, hauled down the Jap flag and hoisted ours. They report *Nagato* #10 boiler still warm, a diesel OK as is the anchor engine and steering gear. Other steam lines cut.”

I think that may have been the first boarding right then. Others followed over the next few days.

We talked about the whole thing at the Willow Bar in Arlington where we gather to swap lies. There was more than one flag from the battleship, and our pal Mac got one of them. Now it is at ONI, and it hangs in a place of honor at the Office of Naval Intelligence out in suburban Maryland. ONI is a gleaming building of steel and glass, one of the last of the Cold War buildings to be erected to replace the crumbling old buildings that had served in World War Two.

(This flag from Nagato was brought home by a Horace A. Bass crew member named William Wilson. It measures an impressive 134 inches by 69 inches, and was sold at auction by Mark Lawson Antiques in Sarasota, NY, for $1,800 in 2013. Photo Mark Lawson).

In the course of its construction, a former Director of Naval Intelligence had the high-security facility designated an official depository for the combat art commissioned by the Government. Accordingly, there are some spectacular original paintings dotting the corridors between the anonymous cipher-locked officers.

One of *Nagato's* Rising Sun Naval ensigns is there as well, in a wooden frame, preserved behind glass.

It is a centerpiece that connects the young sailors and officers of ONI with their history. I asked Mac how the flag came to be in his possession as we sat at the Willow bar one lazy afternoon. He summarized it this way:

"By 1945, I was with Fleet Admiral Nimitz at the forward headquarters at Guam, doing estimates for the carnage that would come with the invasion of the Home Islands. I was slipping target nominations on the sly to General Curtis "Iron Pants" LeMay. Admiral Nimitz took his Intelligence Officer Eddie Layton- my boss- to the surrender ceremony on the *Missouri*. Eddie felt bad that none of the younger officers got a chance to see it, after more than four years serving in the conflict. He cooked up a semi-valid requirement to send me with a courier package to Yokosuka just a few days after the surrender, and I jumped at the chance to go and see up close just what we had done."

"One of our shipmates was on a ship out there, and I decided to take him some whiskey, thinking that would something useful. I went to the wine mess on Guam and got a bottle of Three Feathers Whiskey to tuck in my bag, and caught a flight on a seaplane to Yokosuka."

"I have never heard of the brand," I said. "Did it go well with Lucky Strike Greens?"

"As a matter of fact, it did," smiled Mac. "So, I delivered the package of papers and walked around the base, marveling at the idea the conflict was really over. I could not find my friend, and didn't really want to take the whiskey back to Guam with me. That is when I saw *Nagato* out at the buoy in the harbor. She was the last of the big Japanese ships in port."

"My flag came from a Marine sentry on the Yokosuka docks (about 4 or 5 Sept. '45) who told me he was a member of the boarding party on *Nagato*, and that his duty station was the flag locker. With this convenience, he said

he had “liberated” four Rising Sun flags, two large and two small. Desiring such a souvenir, I told him I only wanted one and would take a small one. Then we negotiated the price and the whiskey trade, and he disappeared for a few minutes.”

“He returned with a brown paper package that looked about the right size. I tore open just a bit of the wrapping to confirm it was the Rising Sun design, we completed the deal, and I then caught my boat for the seaplane tender from which I would depart the next morning for my return to Guam. I didn’t open the package until I was back in my private quarters on Guam, and then was pleased with what I had. I showed it only to Captain Eddie Layton, who confirmed I had a genuine souvenir.”

“There’s more that can be told, but that’s the most authentic account of my procurement. In summary and in short, I’m sure there are other *Nagato* flags, but mine was clearly used, obviously had flown from the ship, and was from a believable source. More than that I cannot say.” Mac raised his glass and took a sip.

“As I look back on the encounter and the bargain I struck, I now believe I could have talked the Marine out of all four of his flags in trade for the bottle of Three Feathers Whiskey I provided. But I was satisfied, I’m sure the Marine was, and I have no idea how he disposed of the other three flags.”

Nagato was systematically plundered for the next few weeks, and formally stricken from the Navy List on the 15th of November 1945. Rust streaked the hull and the proud pagoda mast, and gulls of the Sagami Wan rendered their opinion of the works of man in streaks of white down the superstructure.

But that was not the last of the story, nor even the best part. That was going to come when the Last Battleship got a new crew. An American crew, and in the process, the enlisted ship-fitters discovered the *Nagato’s* store of grain alcohol, which may not have been Three Feathers, but suited them just fine on the last deployment of the battlewagon.

The Last Cruise of the Battleship *Nagato*

Part One:

Meeting the XO

Meet the XO

It was one of those sleeps that are more than that: a retreat, a partial death, a cushioned slide into the past. From the cozy bunk of a Ship's cabin I had slipped back to the coast of Ceylon, living against in the wild beauty of the tropics. But there was something wrong: the nodding palms did not focus and on the horizon was a baleful yellow glow. With infinite labor, I climbed back into reality to see what had happened. It was a seaman squirting the light of a dim flashlight in my eyes. It seemed a long time before he spoke.

"Sir, there's salt water blowing on the starboard generator." His eyes popped a little. "It's coming right through the fan, Sir."

It took me a little time to adjust to this news. "Is the Chief down there?" I asked.

"Yessir."

I stretched inn the luxurious manner of one who does not have to get up. My two cent's worth would be quoted at something less than that amid the mysteries of the engine room With a bored "Very well," I turned over and went to sleep again, but that did not serve to get me back to Ceylon or anywhere else. I resented the next intervention by the flashlight.

"Sir," came the report. "It's all right now. The guy on the deck above had a leak in the bulkhead and he drained down a rat hole. He never looked to see where it went, but actually it went into an airshaft which filled up in time, as it would, naturally, and the water spilled over into the fan. It is all squared away now, we drained the duct."

All this was, of course, extremely interesting in the midst of a vague speculation as to where the water would appear next, I drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

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That night is a fair sample of life in the *Nagato.* I was the XO to CAPT William J. Whipple, along with a handful of officers, chiefs and generally reluctant sailors. There were 180 of us all in total. We were an American crew trying to run a Japanese battleship. It was high adventure when we weren't too tired. We were to take the big ship to the Marshall Island for the CROSSROADS Atomic Bomb tests.

My first sight of *Nagato* came at the end of a seaplane ride to what I thought was Tokyo, but was actually south of Yokohama. The vast sprawl of the Kanto Plain made it difficult to ascertain what was what. At the terminal ship I was pushed with my gear into an open boat. Then began under a sullen sky a three-hour boat ride down into the lower Sagami Wan with sleet and spray stinging in over the bow of the utility boat. In spite of what I could do in the way of rigging tarpaulins, salt water worked its way through all my possessions.

Drenched and shivering, I had to shake saltwater .to make out the end of the breakwater ahead. The suggestion of shelter stimulated me to look around; there were ships at anchor in a harbor fringed by low brown hills. The scene was dominated by the sheer size of a red-rusted hulk with a pagoda-like superstructure forward. Below that loomed the black outlines of great guns, The Jack forward and the Stars and Stripes aft did not disguise the bulk of a Japanese Battleship. With a mental note to board her, sometime, I relapsed into the apathy of suffering.

When the *Nagato* was complete in 1920, she was without about the most powerful warship of the time. Only the passenger ship *Leviathan* was larger. Her 41CM guns were a little bigger than any mounted in ships of the U.S. Navy, even to this day. With a turbo drive and high degree of electrification, she was in advance of her time. Through the twenties and thirties, she and her sister ship *Mutsu* were the core of the expanding Imperial Japanese Navy.

Even at the outbreak of the war, she was regarded as a first line ship, and the Japanese Commander-in-Chief Isoroku Yamamoto used her a flagship until just before the battle of Midway.

When hostilities began, she was in the Inland Sea. Sortieing several times in the early going, she was present at the battle of Midway, but did not sight any USN combatants. After that, she went with the rest of the IJN fleet to be based at the bastion atoll of Truk, and while in that operating area made calls in the Marshall Islands.

After the invasion of the Gilberts, she had to retire to Lingga Gulf near Singapore. As further invasions became imminent, she came out to Brunei Bay on the coast of Borneo to be ready to shield Palau, the Philippines, or the Marianas, whichever might be attacks.

In defense of Saipan, she came out through the San Bernardino Straits where she was attacked by a submarine but not hit. No other American forces were sighted and she retired to Brunei Bay when the battle for he Marianas became hopeless.

When Leyte was invaded, she joined the task force that sortied through the San Bernardino Strait and got hit by two small bombs from a P-38 Lightning, which did some damage between her proud pagoda and stack. She sighted the Jeep Carriers of Task Group Taffy-3, and hit one of them with her main battery.

From there she returned to Japan and thence to Manila as a supply ship. From the P.I., she was dispatched to Yokosuka for a navy yard overhaul. By the time she arrived, a major decision had been made from Fleet Command: there would never again be enough fuel available in Japan to take her back to sea! The full significance of this was not to strike us until later.

Mounting a dozen twelve centimeter guns- the best antiaircraft weapon the Japanese possessed- she was used in the defense of Tokyo Bay.

Tabis

My initial sight of the massive hill and pagoda of the ex-IJN *Nagato* came after arriving at Yokosuka by sea-plane. My next sight of her came as an incident of a scheduled air-voyage to Hokkaido.

We were weather bound a day in port, as nothing was flying to get us to the inspection sites up north. Fascinated by the big ship, I asked how I might get aboard for a tour. I was informed that visitors were not permitted on the *Nagato*, but after hooking a ride on a passing Mike boat, I found no resistance was actually offered at the gangway.

If I had known to look, I might have seen a signal flag run up from the flag bag on the pagoda to signal that an unknown officer was coming aboard, and any unscheduled non-regulation activities should be suspended immediately.

Nothing was quite what it seemed on the battleship, and I found that an un-conducted tour of the ship was depressing, since it reflected the filth, destruction, confusion and all the drabness of war. The thrill of treading the deck of a Japanese Battleship lasted but a moment.

After a brief inspection, I was ready to go back ashore, and was intensely annoyed when I could not get a boat. As I paced off my bad humor on the forecastle, I was joined by a little Japanese fellow with a respectful manner, He was wearing a pair of curious black leather, split-toed shoes called “tabis” on his feet. These were a type of unique outdoor footwear worn by construction workers, farmers, painters, road workers, rickshaw-pullers and others since the late Meiji Period in Japan.

The most distinctive characteristic of Tabi Shoes is the split-toe design that separates the big toe from the other toes. This feature enhances their comfort and stability, important qualities in a shipboard environment. The sole of traditional Tabi shoes are made of pliable natural rubber which is soft enough to be flexible, but stiff enough to protect the wearer's foot from ground debris.

The little fellow wore a frayed mustard-colored uniform with a matching cap with a short brim, almost like Japanese military fatigues. His face was nearly toothless and his skin was as gray as a mouse.

In a mixture of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian he related who he was. He gestured as he said his name was Matano, and that he was an electrical engineer who had graduated from the University of Sao Paulo, and had practiced his profession twenty years in Brazil. Returning to Japan for a visit in the fall of 1941, he had been caught in the toils of the war.

Strange phenomena and tales of harrowing adventure were no longer a novelty to me; I listened to his tales of bomb-dodging not out of interest but from sheer boredom as I scanned the harbor for a boat to hail and return ashore. If I had thought about him at all, it was to tick him off subconsciously as one of the resident ghosts of the massive haunted warship. But I was to think much of him, and his formidable skills, later on in a desperate dark night far from shore.

And to be intensely thankful I had made his acquaintance that foul day at the anchorage in the Sagami-wan. At that point, I had no idea I was to be the

Executive Officer of this ghost ship, or custodian of the well-being of the merry pirates who would take her on her last voyage.

General Quartering

Nagato's appearance had been altered from her war-time look when I first saw her. There was plywood and camouflage stacked all over the superstructure to distract the American pilots. To render her less conspicuous, the tops of her mainmast and stack had been cut off and plywood structures erected on her decks. Rust blended in with the forlorn hills ringing the Yokosuka Ko, but a few patched of brown, green and black paint were added. No doubt she was difficult to see, but the July raiders of 1945 found her and scored two major hits.

Just before hostilities eased, her crew left her, abandoning ship, so to speak.

They may have looted her as well, though much food was left aboard After that, she was systematically exploited by various American units who took even her electric-blue plush upholstery and smashed what they could not carry away.

Seen from a distance, *Nagato* had a low, rakish and characteristically Japanese profile which gave her something of the appearance of a submarine. The resemblance was not wholly by chance; the designers had put most of the bulk of the ship below the waterline where it could not be hit by naval gunfire. It was also reflected in her trimming gear. Instead of flooding tanks on the opposite side to trim, as a surface ship normally does, she blew her tanks on the same side like a U-boat. This has the disadvantage of requiring dangerous high-pressure airlines but it cancels loss of buoyancy due to a hit instead of doubling it.

Herr freeboard was less than that of any American ship of comparable size. Later, we were to put her lee rail underwater like a racing yacht. Hers was a fierce, grim outline—not a nice thing to see looming through the mist.

Her main decks were wood laid on steel. The space forward of the number one turret was devoted to anchor gear as in our naval ships. The system was so simple that one man could perform the sea and anchor duty without assistance, if need be. The system was so rugged that it could go without maintenance for long periods. From two holes in the deck, the chains came up around power capstans that gripped them, routing them straight forward to great steel nostrils in the bow.

Puttering about the forecastles in the gray light of early morning, I used to marvel at these chains, for every link weighed more than a hundred pounds. This fact was to be brought forcefully to my attention several times during the last cruise of the last capital ship of the Imperial Navy.

Standing in the eyes of the ship with your back braced against the wind, you could appreciate the sweep of the deck back to the muzzles of the guns with the squat turrets behind them.

From there, you might glance up to the slotted steel box from which the Admiral and the Captain used to watch the course of battle. Behind that towered the pagoda, mighty in its complexity of detail: battlements, , cat-walks, bridges, guns, range-finders, revolving anti-aircraft turrets, radar search-lights, signal-yards and platform upon platform piled up for 150 feet. Inside the pagoda was a mass of switchboards, offices and living spaces, every compartment with an oxygen bottle for protection against gas attack.

There even was an elevator to take the Admiral as high up as he wanted to go.

The heart of this edifice was the conning tower already mentioned, a steel box with slotted walls a foot thick. One entered through a bank-vault style hatch. The narrow windows had been cleverly places to give an unobstructed view three-quarters of the way around the compass. Inside were a steering wheel and gyrocompass repeater, the engine room telegraph and dials to show the speed of the ship, what the engines and rudders were doing and where the guns were pointed.

On the port side- the place of honor in Japan- was the Admiral's upholstered settee. Few Americans could stand upright in the conning tower, but otherwise it was roomy. From the back wall was a cluster of speaking rubes and telephones that led to all communications centers in the ship. The tower had taken a direct hit from a heavy bomb without any of the instruments being damaged. In the heat of battle, the occupants may not have even noticed the explosion.

Most of the arrangements about the ship were conventional, reflecting British practice more than the American style. Baths were special- there wasn't a single shower in the ship. Instead, there were burnished copper tubs so deep you could sit in them on a little wooden stool and just peep over the edge. In this fashion the Japanese sailor takes his scalding bath. In Officer country the tubs were single.

(American sailors use the Japanese bath on *Nagato*. Photo USN).

The crew had bigger ones, ten or more bathing at a time. Sanitary arrangements were of all sorts, from high stools one had to climb up on through scuttled to the old-fashioned *benjo* toilets.

Room furniture was like that of a passenger liner of the 1920s, including polished metal wash-bowls that folded away out of sight when not in use and which drew water fro a tank that had to be filled by a steward. There was no piping of any sort Interior decoration was along somber British lines; oak panel effects were so cleverly painted on molded sheet steel that you had to tap to be sure what was real wood and what was not.

Wood and metal were, in fact, mingled throughout the design, with the more easily fabricated material being used for each part, Drawers were mostly wood, panels were mostly constructed of metal. Bunks were arranged just the same way as in our ships.

Officers were served Japanese-style breakfasts- but European lunches and dinners. The men had rice with pickled rashes, canned fish, soy sauce and occasional delicacies such as salmon, crabmeat or pickled tangerines. Apparently they ate where they worked and lived, squatting on mats behind gun shields or in the passageways. Food was fetched from the galley by one of the sailors in the duty section.

This system has many advantages. No one who has witnessed the chaos and confusion on US Navy ships when General Quarters is sounded at night will deny the strengths of this system. On our ships men come running half the length of the ship to their GQ stations. We used to say it this way: “All hands forward run aft, all hands aft run forward and all hands amidships block passageways.”

The Japs didn’t miss a chance for education: in their leisure time, the sailors studied silhouettes of American aircraft painted on bulkheads and gun-shield everywhere throughout the ship.

The officers lived in the extreme after-part of the ship on two decks: senior above and juniors below. Originally, these had larger port-holes than any of our ships. These compartments very comfortable or even luxurious; truly pleasant places to live.

The Admiral’s Mess was a large room extending right athwart the stern and had skylights and electric fans for ventilation. Aft of this was what we called a ‘shrine room,’ also with a skylight and fans where pictures of the Emperor, Empress and Crown Prince were kept.

There was also a desk in this room, which was used only the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Fleet, and thus must have been used by Admiral Yamamoto himself.

Of course with the coming of war, the ports were sealed off, spoiling the whole effect. We used the Admiral's mess as a wardroom, since *Nagato*'s original wardroom was completely destroyed by a bomb hit in July. But we wouldn't have used it anyway, since it was a dingy, noisy place, cold in winter and hot in the tropics. All the officers would have gladly traded their traditional quarters for rooms up forward that still had their portholes for ventilation, but our sailors had got on board first, and it was wisely decided by Captain Whipple not to try to evict them.

The cruise south was going to be hard enough as it was. We didn't need to add resentment to the challenge of learning how to operate a ship with all the instructions written in Japanese!

Naval Architecture

(Two members of the Nagato's IJN crew in 1942. Photo IJN archives vis USN.)

I have to state that life on *Nagato* was as much a cultural experience as an engineering one. There was something new to discover each day, and sometimes each hour as new challenges presented themselves.

We are all products of our own cultures. The design of USN ships, for example, are shot through with definite principles, all born of experience and most have the force of an article of faith. We American sailors like clean lines. No matter how useful a ladder, a pad eye, an anchor platform or bearing for an outboard davit might be, we cannot have them. We hoard space and weight with single-minded intensity. If a pump can be made a little smaller or lighter by using alloy steel bearings and supplying the highest-grade lubricating oil under pressure, we do it.

Around the guns we allow exactly enough space to protect the men from the recoil- not an inch more. Cleanliness aboard our ships matches that of hospitals If that requires a clean sweep-down six times a day and a quarter of the crew busy chipping pain, no matter. By which is called "preventative maintenance," we keep our ships always in fighting condition, It is a way of

thought which has produced the most effective ships in existence, and which won the war in the Pacific.

Japanese practice is different, or at least it was before the Imperial fleet was reduced to *Nagato* alone. This ship was roomy, to a degree, even in the turrets. Machinery was simple, rugged and large, made of easily-obtainable materials with plenty of room around it to maneuver. There was no such thing as preventive maintenance. Engines were designed to operate a long time without repair and then to be replaced inn a Navy shipyard. The crew was there to fight, not to clean ship; every aspect of their lives focused on the single issue of battle. This is in marked contrast to our way of doing business, which was to keep the ship squared away and ready for action.

Other navies of the world operate closer to the Japanese principles than to those of the Us Navy. The war has just proved that our way is superior. Whether it will continue to be best in the face of new developments seems problematical.

During the July air raids of 1945, *Nagato* was hit on the port anchor chain, losing the anchor and holing the bow just above the water line. The patch placed over this rent in the hull was going to give us trouble later. Another large bomb entered the superstructure just under the catapult deck, exploding on the face of the Number 5 barbette, on which it etched a mark that resembled a rising sun, The face of the steel was left smooth at the point of impact. From there out the metal was spattered and gouged in outward as though a firecracker has exploded on softened butter. The interior of the barbette was quite uninjured- the face of the turret was protected by nearly a foot of armor steel.

The space around the barbette had been cluttered with ventilating shafts, bulkheads, and other impediments, but all of there were carried away by the blast that also bulged the deck over it upward. The result was to form a large hall, partially open to the weather where we later showed the movies. At sea, waves sometimes burst in through the shattered bulkhead, swishing and gurgling through the chair legs as the movie-goers raised their feet out of the water without taking their eyes off the action on the screen.

Some sort of projectile traveling upward entered the wardroom to port and went out to starboard without detonating. I don't know whether anyone was in the compartment at the time, but there were marks on the table that might have been made by teeth. I have no idea what it might have been.

The gross detail of the engineering equipment and spaces of *Nagato* were obvious enough, and conventional in appearance, but the piping and trunk system was so complex that we were never able to use it with any certainty. All about the deck, and below, were hand wheels to open and close valves. The problem for us was that in most cases, the valve was not co-located with the wheel. The turning force from the wheel was transmitted through Rube Goldberg-style reach rods to the actual valve. These in turn were routed right through bulkheads and inaccessible spaces. To have traced them all would have been a prohibitive effort and we did not bother.

Some were important, though, and we had to investigate by direct observation, sometimes helped by Japanese inscriptions, sometimes by experiment to see what happened when we turned them. We managed to identify some of the more important valves, but there was always an element of doubt.

One night in Yokosuka, the petty officer of the watch noticed that the end of the accommodation ladder had sunk underwater. He took a sailor's fatalistic view of that and joisted it out, but when it went under again he thought it worthwhile to call the Command Duty Officer. Investigation revealed what had occurred. A visitor to the quarterdeck had turned a hand-wheel on deck out of idle curiosity and had managed to flood the Number 3 Magazine!

We scrambled around and had to bring a tug alongside the mooring to pump it out again. I always had the feeling that some of the crew knew far more about the valves than the officers did.

In fact, several times I seemed to hear a disgruntled sailor mutter: "I know just where that valve is!"

They could have sunk the ship at any time without risk of being identified and court-marshaled. All I knew was that sailors are sailors the world over, and many of our guys thought the war was over and wanted to go home, not steam a Japanese battlewagon to the Marshall Islands to blow it up with an atom bomb.

Water, Water Everywhere

The situation with respect to water and oil tanks was a nightmare. Most of the valves controlling the fluids were inaccessible and one could never be sure they were completely closed. There was no reliable way to find out what or how much was in the tank.

Oil circulated through the ship continuously; it might be anywhere. From the same tank one night got oil one day, nothing the next, the salt water and perhaps after a week oil again. We kept watch over the side and know that all the oil we took stayed with us until it went up the stack.

We did not know how much was in the ship to start with, nor could we be sure how much of the tanker pumped in was actually salt water. Some of the most conventional-minded officers had difficulty adjusting to the situation.

The idea of shortages of fresh water brings sailing vessels and oak casks to mind, but we had the same problem with a modern twist in the *Nagato*. We were distilling five or six tons an hour from seawater. Much of that went into the boilers. Theoretically, they use the same water over and over again, but

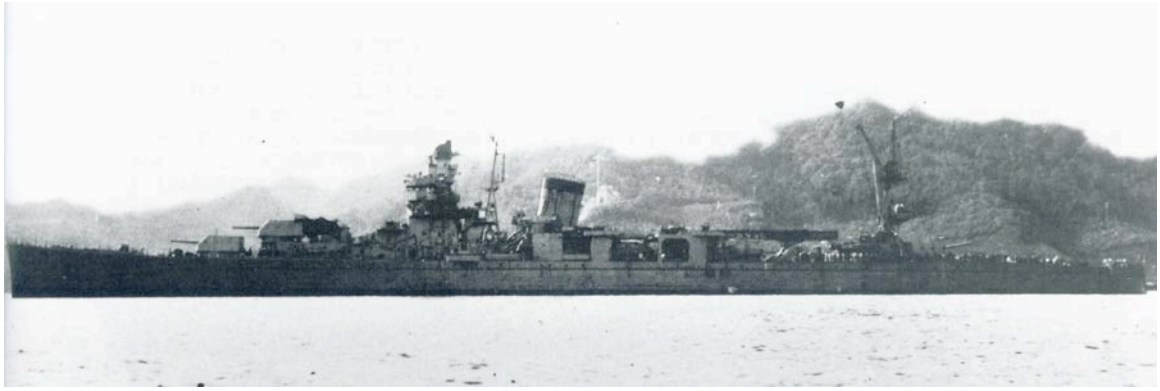
some was lost each pass through the mass of not-so-tight steam pipes. What did come back was always contaminated with seawater. This would make the boilers sick and they would vomit to the sky as the steam roiled and have to be purged into the bilges.

We would have liked to use water drained from the boilers in the laundry, but never found a practical way to get it there. What would be spared from the boilers was pumped into the fresh water arteries of the ship and some of it actually got to faucets, but most of it mixed with saltwater seepage in remote compartments. We were always looking for those locks, forming the habit of tasting anything that dripped, and we finally stopped many of the leaks, but our fresh water accounts never came anywhere near balancing.

What with all this food scattered about- the Japanese crew ate at their duty stations, unlike the USN which had dedicated mess decks and wardrooms, it was inevitable that there should be rats in the ship. We were told by Commander Inoda, *Nagato's* former First Lieutenant, that during the Japanese reign "there were always very many (rats)."

Actually, they were not much bother and never a cause of sickness, as far as I could tell. I valued them as indicators of the ship's seaworthiness. I figured that if they ever started to make the gangway *en mass*, I would have been right there with them along with my seabag. The only protest from those came when some officers tried to sleep on deck in the base of Number Four Turret. The rats came out in force, chasing each other around the turret, hissing and squeaking. After hearing about such things for a long time, we were at last caught in a rat-race.

All Bets Are Off



(IJN *Sakawa*, fitting out at Sasebo Naval Base in 1945. She never fought, but served to bring home some of the 3.5 million Japanese troops stranded overseas at the end of hostilities in a great arc from Manchuria to the Solomons, and across the islands of the Central and Southwest Pacific. Photo USN from IJN archives).

I had originally been sent to Occupied Japan as part of the technical collection team tasked with examining the war machine we had just defeated. It was a big job, and there were places to visit all over the Home Islands.

Not long after returning from the snow-buried villages of Hokkaido on an inspection tour to collect and assess items of Japanese war technology, I was ordered to the *Sakawa*, the only remaining Japanese cruiser. She was an *Agano*-class cruiser, second of her class. Named after a river in Kanagawa Prefecture, she would wind up with us at Bikini. *Sakawa* had been intended for use as a flagship for a destroyer flotilla, but never saw combat duty, since she was completed at the yard in Sasebo in 1945. She had a graceful and uncluttered deck line with a single stack and had suffered no war damage, so she was a rare pristine example of the Japanese shipbuilding art, at least from a distance.

At the time of her surrender, her guns were removed; later she had made two trips to Wekwak and one to the Palava returning Japanese prisoners to the homeland. When I boarded her with a group of American officers, the Japanese flag was still flying from her masthead, which may have made her the last actual IJN ship afloat. It was a bitter winter day. Sleet and sheets of spray were driven over the bow of the boat. It was painful to look ahead. *Sakawa's* decks were deserted. We waited a moment, looking for the Officer of the Deck, but seeing no one, we entered the superstructure.

At the top of a ladder, we found a little blue-uniformed Japanese boy who stared at the group of us uniformed Gaijins for a moment and then ducked below. Presently, a middle-aged Japanese in a formal blue uniform with chrysanthemums in his collar appeared and motioned us to descend. He was the Captain. We entered his cabin, an elegantly furnished compartment complete with portholes, a fine mahogany table, upholstered settee and an ornate desk of the type so often seen in the Orient.

Whiskey was served all around as the Captain introduced his senior officers. Then we made a tour of the ship. The decks, navigation spaces, and radio rooms were in perfect order with al fittings and instruments visible and working. Engineering equipment and spaces were modern and well kept up. There was some poor welding in evidence, but that was to be expected in a vessel finished so late in the war.

The living spaces, however, were neither clean or in order. In most of them an extra wooden desk had been inserted, doubling the sleeping space but leaving little head room. The whole ship smelled horrible of human bodies and stale food. On the fantail were wooden troughs for washing and wooden privies that hung out over the water. Such were the necessities of the reparation services. In spite of the smell and improvised nature of the accommodations, there could be no doubt that the Sakawa was a going concern.

I became quite well acquainted with these officers and others, including a rear admiral who helped us on the *Nagato.* No amount of prejudice could disguise the fact that they were capable professionals would do well in any navy in the world.

At the high levels of the Occupation there were policy debates about what should be done with the captured materiel of the war machine. Clearly, these relics of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere would have to go- and perhaps a test of the new Atom Bomb might be the best use for them.

As the largest remaining capital ship, and the symbol of the attack on Pearl, it was decided that *Nagato* should be manned by a brave band of American volunteers and adventurers who could accommodate the unexpected and unusual with aplomb, and none-the-less completely be completely Navy in terms of the orthodoxy of their views, and more than capable of sustaining any difficulty which might be in the offing.

The officers would lead harassed subordinates who cherished the “points” they had accumulated to prioritize their eligibility for demobilization and a trip back to the land of the Big PX.

The sailors were uniformly were tired of the War, the Navy and Japan, in that general order, and their main object was to get home without a nervous breakdown. The problem of building a crew for the last battleship was a challenge. They had to get a list of 180 names from a naval establishment desperately short on men. They would do it in such a way as to minimize contact with angry individuals.

By one of those bits of luck (without which nothing works in this man’s Navy), we got a handful of petty officers just in from de-commissioned vessels. About a third of the rest came straight from Boot Camp, while the remaining sailors were Shanghaied by levy imposed on the commanding officers of ships currently in the harbor.

It would have been more than human for officers in that position not to send their boat-adjusted men and these skippers were very human. Many whose points would come due in a few months were included. Not one man aboard was a volunteer.

This was an era of corrosive cynicism on the waterfront in Yokosuka. Everyone as concentrating on getting home, and when frustrated on that front, the endless quest to find their *own* souvenirs. Any old excuse for disobedience of orders would be accepted by officers, who feared that any official motion they might take might delay their own release to deal with holding mast or bringing a court-marshal.

(View from *Nagato's* damaged Pagoda of USS *South Dakota*. Watercolor on Scratch Board by Standish Backus; 1945. Image Naval History and Heritage Command).

It was from this atmosphere that men came to the *Nagato*, a ship stripped by scavengers and herself being the biggest souvenir ever lifted. It is not surprising that all of us considered that all bets were off. Sailors and officers proceeded to adjust themselves pragmatically to conditions as they found them.

Their first impression of the *Nagato* was not reassuring. Everything but the hull seemed damaged beyond repair. In fact, it was hard not to believe the scuttlebutt that the battleship would never steam again under her own power, and that all this was just another foul-up, and that what they did really did not matter. Before the arrival of responsible officers, they sensed a lack of leadership and lack of plan, and were morally damaged thereby.

Enterprise and ability to adjust to circumstances are American characteristics. These men did not long waste time being sorry for themselves. They found a diesel-electric plant on board. It was intended for

emergency use, but they started and ran it until it wore out. Meanwhile they had lights and electric heaters in every room, hotplates on which to cook chow, and so were able to live in comfort. By the time the emergency diesel was burned out, they had a boiler operating on salt water and one of the steam driven electric generators working. The salt water ruined the boiler, but before it was completely gone, they had distilled enough to start another boiler on fresh water, and after that they could make enough fresh water for washing and cooking.

They selected the best staterooms in the ship – those having portholes – scrubbed and painted the walls, arranged places of honor for their precious pin-ups, ransacked the rest of the ship for furniture and found that the rapacious souvenir hunters had overlooked much good stuff including Japanese food.

Soon they were living better than anyone afloat in the bay. They reconstructed the radios left on board and got them working for entertainment and a loose command and control. They rearranged the ship's public address system to pipe music everywhere. All the while, they were exploring the more remote fastness of the ship. The ship-fitters discovered a store of grain alcohol, had it analyzed, found it drinkable. Later I tried hard to find it, but never did. There are some secrets Sailors know to keep to themselves.

There was no need to bother with the formalities of the Plan of the Day, like reveille, Quarters for muster, or liberty lists. Instead, they got up when it felt right, ate and went ashore as they pleased. It was a sailor's dream, clouded only by the thoughts that someday someone might want them to do something.

Let him who rails against the ancient officer's caste-system first live in an unsupervised detachment of enlisted men. He will find out how hard class distinction can really be driven. The crew broke up into little groups of professional people intensely jealous of their prerogatives. The signalmen took over the pagoda and industriously got the Japanese signal lights going. They rigged a flag-bag and signal pennants, and thus got in touch with other similar groups of signalmen all over the harbor.

Once established in the larger brotherhood of those who know what is going on, they were able to warn of impending visits by dignitaries and of the birth of policy.

The ship-fitters were a hunter clan – the only ones who knew exactly where all the desirable stores were, and ready to tell the right people for a consideration in kind. Under the spur of private enterprise, they became more thoroughly familiar with the ship than any regular regime could have made them. That intimate knowledge of detailed arrangements was later to save her from sinking.

Under the stimulus of professional rather than material motives, the electricians likewise put forth a mighty effort during those free-and-easy days. They had a sound appreciation of the principles of electricity, but therefore little practical experience. On a proper man-o-war they would have been rewarded for good conduct by being allowed to knock off paint-chipping once in a while to screw in electric light bulbs. In *Nagato* they could do anything that struck their fancy, and they did.

All conceivable material was there at hand: big generators, wire of all sizes, motors, vacuum tubes, batteries, communication circuits. They could work with thousand amperes or a thousandth of an ampere, as they pleased. Their services were in demand; they could ask and get anything they wanted for rigging hot plates, radios, special telephones, etc. When something went wrong and burned up, as so often happened to the electrical equipment, it was only to be expected in view of the rundown condition of the ship. If a motor went “phut,” they knew just where there was another like it.

Giving their imaginations full reign, they produced some weird Rube Goldberg contraptions to make life easier. Experience gained during this period of experimentation paid off later when the electrical system became a menace to the survival of the ship. No one could tell them what to do then, and no one had to. You would see them plodding wearily along the dripping corridors, tired, grey-faced, streaked with dirt, but carrying on whole days without sleep, doing all that would be done.

The ship had had an elaborate communication system; there were several control switchboards and phones hanging on almost every bulkhead in battle clamps from which they could not be dislodged by the shock of gunfire. Whether the electricians ever understood this system completely I did not know, but probably *they* did.

They never put the switchboards into full operation but, grudgingly it seemed, they connected permanently the few lines needed to operate the ship. Phones so activated officially were tagged Most of the untagged phones hanging on the bulk heads were dead, but not all; each clan of enlisted men had its own private system known only to its members. Those were used mostly to prevent narrow-minded individuals from seeing anything that might disturb them.

Such was the situation facing Captain Whipple when he took over. Neither the ship nor the crew were ready for sea. The one had to be got in condition mechanically and the other brought to the state of discipline without which any ship is but a floating coffin.

Discipline must be tough with bread in one hand and a stick in the other: privileges to grant and punishment to inflict. Neither was easy. You cannot offer thrills to a man who believes that the great and final adventure of his life will be his return home. You could not offer privileges ashore. The town of Yokosuka and the Honcho-ku ginza outside the gate was so depressing that most men preferred to remain onboard.

The usual Navy punishment for minor offenses is extra duty, but the smallness of this crew and the bulk of the ship made it necessary to demand extra work of everyone. To have used confinement as a punishment would have required setting a guard on this brig – there were just not enough men to do it. The final resort of a bad-conduct discharge would not only lose a irreplaceable man, but is scarcely applicable to youngsters – it is wrong to mark a man for life for a minor indiscretion of youth.

Captain Whipple's status was further complicated by the anomalous status of the ship. Though not a ship of the US Navy, it was flying the Jack forward; aft, she flew the Stars & Stripes without being recognized under them. She had been officially declared not a prize of war, but no one had said just what she was. She was a study in ambiguity. Captain Whipple had

been designated commanding officer, but not by the President, whose prerogative that is.

Courageously laying himself open to actions in the civil courts, he decided to assume the disciplinary duties of a regular commanding officer. My own theory was that since the ship was not registered under any flag, she was subject only to the unwritten law of the sea – that her officers were not bound by the troublesome restrictions of Navy Regulations or union contracts, and in fact – but never mind that now. The officers soon found that these men could not be driven. One could call for a working party and get it; but the minute his book was turned, the men would melt away into the caverns of the ship, where no one could find them.

An officer would explain how he wanted a thing done and go to the wardroom for a cup of coffee, but nothing would come of it; he could inquire why and be told that the necessary materials could not be found. Being sure that the men know full well where the materials were was no help – he didn't. Any attempt to stand by and instruct the men step by step was frustrated by passive resistance; they would stand, helpless, asking, "What do I do know, Sir?" as though they had never seen anything done like that before.

In time, even the dumbest officers realized that the men could not be driven, and one or two of them found that they could actually be *led.*

Montana

So, as the mighty battleship rides at anchor outside the breakwater in the Sagami-wan, it is time to talk about how important the little man I first met in my impromptu tour of the battleship. I considered him an apparition of the ship, which clearly was haunted by the history of what she had done as part of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The cultural side of the international cooperation was furnished by Y. Matano, the electrical engineer and one of the resident ghosts of *Nagato.*

Matano-san somehow emerged as the vital middle-man between the Americans and the Japanese workers who were brought aboard each day to help prepare us for the long voyage to the Marianas for the demonstration of the power of the atom. He was a muscular little man of about forty, with bulging spectacles. He wore an armband signifying rank, but was otherwise dressed like the others in mustard fatigues and black split-toed shoes that made me think of the feet of frogs. There was nothing perfunctory about the services rendered; he loved work, accomplishment and discipline for their own sake. With us on *Nagato*, he was just as happy with us as he had ever been under the Emperor.

I would judge that he probably found one naval officer quite like another, regardless of national origin: all of us unreasonable and inconsistent, and all

completely comfortable in imposing impossible tasks on him and his workers. That notwithstanding, we developed a mutual liking and understanding which smoothed over many difficulties between our cultures, and I am sure he was as sorry when we sailed south as I was to lose his services.

To the men he was simply know as "Montana," and he was as integral a part of the ship as the great guns. He had the run of the place, and was occasionally useful as an interpreter. In view of the strict rule that no American food could be given to the Japanese, it was astonishing how the old man fattened on air.

A carefully lettered sign "Y. Matano, Office and Quarters" had appeared over one of the
hatches when I paid a visit down there one day. He had a desk, a cot and blankets in a spot close enough to the boilers to be cozy. Much of his time he spent lettering signs in English or Japanese, as requested, and much of the rest inscribing "memorials" to me, of which the following are samples:

NECESSITY OF SHIP'S BOAT

On Sunday, Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday (today), I saw at the Officer's Landing (from where those Jap workmen come up in the morning) the following:

Boat situation *is getting day by day harder, and, if the ship wants to have them on board at fixed time, punctually, in every morning, then the ship should have her own BOAT to them at the Officer's Landing, sending every morning their big size Boat , while she wants them before her leave. If the Ship relies on the efforts of the Yard Crafts Office, the Ship will not have them at the fixed time every morning. They are waiting for Boat, from 7:30 every morning, at the said Landing point, wasting 2-3 hours without working.*

The necessity of checking-up with regards to the GUARD who take charge in these jap workmen. For an example, this morning he came down to the GATE to take them in, just at about 9:00. He used to appear at the GATE at 7:50 to 8:00, formerly. The action of their GUARD, from the GATE to the Landing (where he gets boat for them) and the carrier-BOAT are 2 important factors.

JAP WORKMEN STOLEN

According to the Jap foreman, some of those Jap workmen have been stolen from their money and watch, on board the Ship. And it is likely to be "many cases." This is causing a kind of consternation in their morality.

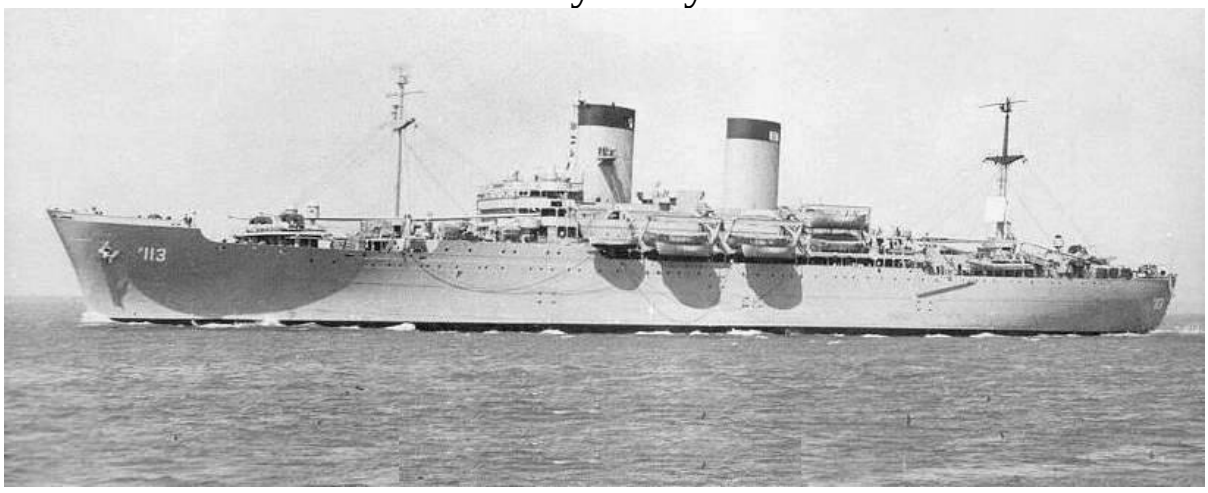
If it be so, I hope that the Ship's side takes it into consideration, MODERATELY. A satisfactory result will not come from an abrupt measure.

To the men, having Matano around seemed perfectly natural. They treated him with the same affectionate fondness formerly bestowed on an old, dependent Uncle George in their own homes. To the Japanese foreman, there was nothing mysterious about either officers or crew; they were just like all the other naval people he had known. But to Matano, a man of the world, the whole *Nagato* episode was a seething turmoil of contradictions. Loving this ship, he was glad to see her active again, but distressed that an enemy should tend her holy decks.

He was a devotee of rules and adherence there to, but glad to see rules broken in his favor. He was loyal to his fellow Japanese, but in minor disagreement he was continually finding that the Americans were right. He found himself coming to like Americans whom he ought to hate. What really burned him up, though, was that the American government should pay his daughter more than it paid him. He couldn't understand why.

I did not tell him that to the young men of the American Fleet so far from home, there was something his daughter could offer them that he *never* could.

Liberty Party



Though I slept through few nights outside the breakwater, what with one thing or another carrying away, I remember particularly the visit of the liberty party from the *General Butner* (AP-113).

There was no need for anyone to wake me. Heavy blows against the hall, shouting, the pounding of running feet on deck, were conclusive that something had come adrift. I slipped on a pair of overshoes and one of those fine, hooded great-coats the Army issues for foul weather, vaulted up the ladder into the thirty-knot gale tinged with puffs of whirling snow.

Running over to the port side, where the noise was, I peered down. A tank lighter was tied up there. I was checked her linen before turning in, but then she was empty. How I looked down on a lot of people. As my eyes accommodated to the dark, I made out officers in blues without overcoats, soldiers, sailors in dress blues without pea-coats and a Negro steward.

The immediate problem was not how they got there, but how to get them aboard before they froze. The tank lighter was bucking and plunging against the side of the ship; it seemed impossible to get them out without crushing someone in between. We lowered a cargo net, but their hands were too numb to grasp it, and some were too terrified to try, but we got a few that way.

Then someone noticed that every fourth or fifth wave that ladder-like ramp of the lighter reared up to the level of our deck. We made them climb it one by one, as a crew of six deck hands picked them off on the rise, like ripe fruit. Our galley had been manned; as each came aboard, he was hurried

down there for a cup of hot coffee while the Master-at-Arms broke out cots in the warm compartment near the boilers. No one was hurt.

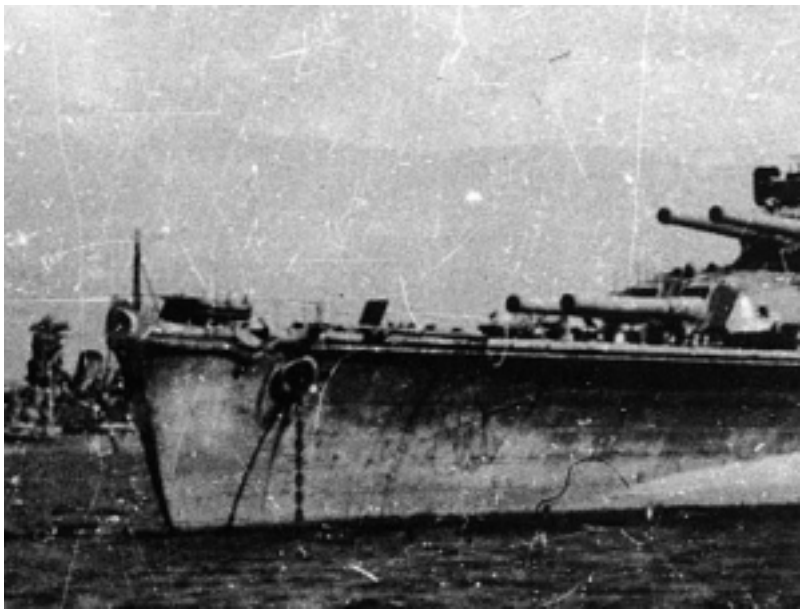
Then we got the story. They were the liberty party of the *General Butner*, a transport that had shipped out of San Francisco in January of 1946, with ports of call at Yokohama, Shanghai and Tsingtao supporting our efforts to save the Nationalists in China. Somehow the Liberty Party had missed the last boat back to the ship.

There had been no place for them to sleep at the landing, and the addled Beachmaster had loaded them all into a small landing craft, dreaming no doubt, that it was the Ark. As soon as they turned the breakwater, it began to fill with seawater. The crew had very little time. They saw our great bulk and made for it, dumping the passengers into the tank lighter and running for the beach. Later we heard they made it.

The only noteworthy sequel came next morning.

One of our officers, who had a big night on the beach, felt his way up the passage to the wardroom and peered in. He seemed to see Marines, rubbed his eyes, but could still see them. He tottered back to his room for his glasses, came back but, it was no go, they were still there. He sat down and ate his cornflakes glumly, without a word, passing the whole thing off as one of the mysteries of the *Nagato*.

Shackles



Browsing around the Navy Yard in Yokosuka looking for likely opportunities, one of our officers found an anchor stamped with the name "*Nagato.*" It was a huge thing, as befits a hook intended for a dreadnaught and nothing would do but we must have it onboard to replace the one lost in the chaos of the last American bombing of the harbor.
Never mind that it weighed twenty tons.

The operation was carefully planned. Personnel at the Yard were assigned to pick the anchor up and put it on the deck of the large tank lighter. A floating crane was to accompany the lighter to our side, draw out the end of our anchor chain and lower it to the deck of the tank lighter where we would be ready to shackle it on the anchor. Then, as we heaved in on the chain, the crane was to pick up the anchor, and when we had all but a few links hove in, they were supposed to let the anchor down until it hung from the chain and go their way in peace.

It didn't work like that. The anchor was in the tank lighter, all right, but the Jap-operated crane hooked onto it and hoisted it out without bothering with our chain. They hoisted it right up over our deck where it slipped and flopped about as the crane teetered on the swells, lending its full weight to the ensuing negotiations. The deck began to fill with jabbering Nipponese, some coming up over the side and others inexplicably from the rear.

I was standing fast, insisting that they put it back in the lighter and start all over again, but I noticed the whites of the boatswain's mate's eyes as they flashed between the crowd, the mighty anchor and its pendulous arc.

Although the day was cold, beads of sweat glistened on the Boatswain's forehead. So, I let them lower it on deck, which they accomplished with scarcely a bump. Then, having delivered the anchor, they were all for getting back to their warm quarters. If I had let them, the anchor would have stayed right there for as long as the battleship lasted.

We are at the mooring outside the breakwater, and except for the floating crane there was no way to move it. So, I made them haul a hundred feet of chain out through our bow chocks while our crew let down the safety lines on that part of the deck.

(Chock from an IJN Battleship on display at the Kure Naval Museum. Photo Punynari)

The Japs brought the chain back on board and put it down by the anchor, leaving a bight of chain hanging over the side. The boatswain was ready to shackle it onto the anchor but the shackle weighed four hundred pounds and took considerable manhandling and persuasion with a maul. Although our crew could have handled it without much trouble, the Japanese had gotten into the spirit of the thing, swarming all over it at the risk of getting their fingers nipped right off.

They were a good-natured bunch, and when all was ready, the crane picked up the anchor again with chain attached and lowered it to their own deck. We heaved in on the chain. There was an anxious moment when the two

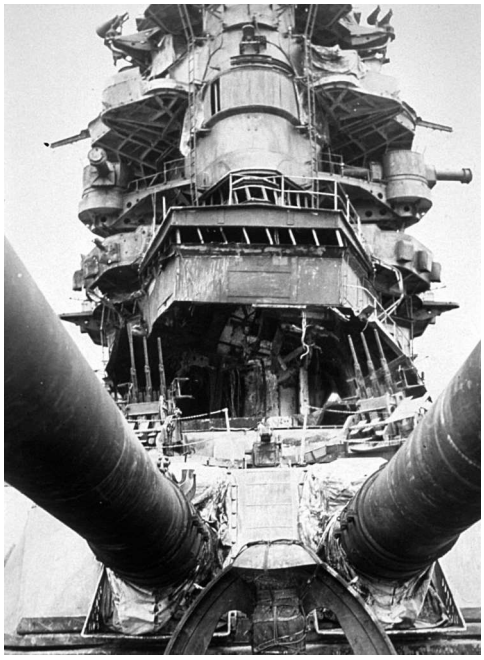
ships shared the weight between them; then they had to unshackle their hold on the anchor with the awful risk of being crushed between the ships.

They managed to do it, and broke away clean. Then we heaved in on the chain until the anchor nestled into the hawse pipe without any fuss at all.

It had come home.

(Anchor at the Kure Naval Museum from the battleship Mutsu, sister ship to Nagato. Photo Punynri).

Sea and Anchor



(Nagato's pagoda superstructure showing the damage to her flag bridge where ADM Yamamoto heard the fateful radio call "Tora! Tora! Tora! DADM Bill Halsey would have been pleased. *Nagato* was a particular favorite target for him. Photo US Naval Scientific Team- Japan).

We had three trial runs for the old battleship in March of 1946. On our next trial run, it was inevitable that we try the anchor we had just installed, since some of the associated gear was untested. Everything had gone well as we got steam up and performed some basic maneuvering drills in the Sagami-wan in the approaches to Yokosuka Harbor.

Captain Whipple decided to approach the anchorage from seaward in the direction of the breakwater. On the pagoda bridge, a continuous flow of reports was reaching him and his helmsman and navigation team.

"Three thousand yards to the anchorage, Sir,"

"Course to anchorage four degrees to the left, Sir."

"Estimated speed three knots, Sir."

"We seem to be set a little to the right, Sir."

“All engines stop!”

“All engines answer stopped, Sir.”

Glancing over the side I could not see our speed diminishing- we were still moving along at a fair clip, from what I could observe, which is not the place you want to be at sea and anchor detail. I could feel the tension rising on the bridge.

“Distance to anchorage, eleven hundred yards, Sir.”

“Right on course Sir, allowing for the set of the anchor.”

“All engines back one-third!”

Captain Whipple judged that it would not do to hit the breakwater, since a collision at sea is one of those events that can spoil the whole day. The Captain was watching over the side now. We still seemed to be making about three knots speed-of-advance, which is a practical demonstration of just how hard it is to stop a mass of forty-five thousand tons once it is set in motion. I toyed for a moment with the abstractions involved, mentally calculating momentum, mass and kinetic energy.

“Seven hundred yards to anchorage, Sir.”

“All engines back full!”

“All engines answer back full, Sir!”

We could feel the deck shudder as the screws took hold. Would she stop in time? There was only one more resource to try. I noticed the cone of Fiji over the harbor, now black and sinister in the gloom. It seems we might be slowing a little, but floating objects continued to drift aft as fast as a man walks.

“Five hundred yards, Sir.”

She wasn’t going to stop in time.

“Two hundred yards, Sir.”

“Drop anchor!”

This is what it had to be, the last chance. The ship-fitter and the boatswain’s mate grappled warily with the brake wheel on the forcastle, opening it. Nothing happened. They spun it to full open. The anchor suddenly went with a rush. Straining now with the terrible intensity of men who fight for their lives, they spun the wheel back, their muscles bulging under torn shirts.

No go.

The chain roared out ever faster, striking showers of sparks as a red pall of rust rose over the forecastle. The ship was shuddering in every part. Through rifts in the dust I could make out men diving for hatches or crawling for shelter behind solid objects. We did not have much experience in our pirate crew, but they knew that as the end of the chain came thrashing out of the chain locker it would sweep the deck, pulping everything in its path.

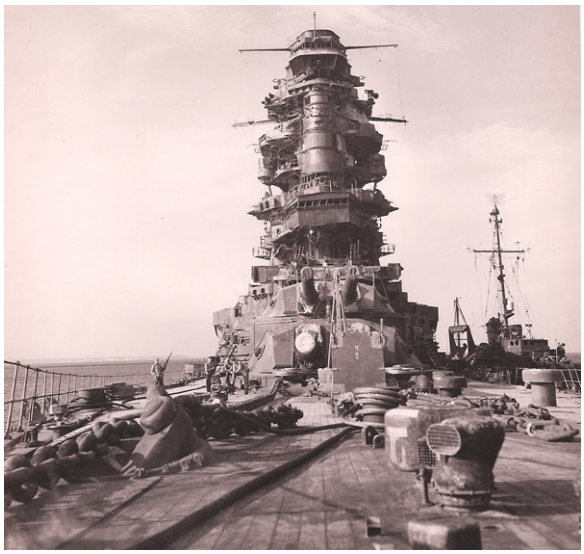
The ship-fitter and the boatswain made a final try at the brake-wheel, then dived together headfirst down a hatch. The red pall covered the forecastle; I could get only occasional glimpses of the thumping chain. How long? The rumble of it filled the ship. There was a grunt as the bitter end came up on the chain-locker strongback, then silence.

The red cloud drifted off to starboard uncovering the crouching men. No one had been hurt.

Nagato continued to forge ahead at nearly three knots, dragging the anchor and twelve hundred feet of chain with her. But even forty-five thousand tons could not continue to transfer momentum at that rate. She began to slow, and with the breakwater looming, stopped short. The anchor buoy showed only a few yards further in than had been planned in our pre-sail meeting.

I turned to the Captain and we both smiled. “Only 2,400 miles to Bikini,” I said, and remembered to breath again.

Hairless Joe and the Lonesome Polecat



When I first realized that of twenty people in the deck force only three had appreciable sea experience, I wondered what would become of us. The decks were so vast, the gear so heavy, that it seemed we must be overwhelmed if we tried to handle her in a gale. As the days passed in Yokosuka KO, it sank into my consciousness that in the boatswain we had a true seaman and leader of men. Once I realized that, I was no longer apprehensive, but only curious to watch how things would work out under stress.

The boatswain was a small man, well-muscled and cat-like. One's first reaction to him might be that submerged thrill of terror the subconscious recognition of an elemental character always inspires, but it was his beard which caught the eye. Flaring straight out around his face, nowhere cut square, firm but silky, it was an ornament the like of which has not been sported since Charles V sat for his portraits. I have tried to describe the color officially. Sometimes I thought it was black with a hint of brown, sometimes brown with a hint of red, sometime mahogany, but of this I am sure – if you could get cloth of that shade it would be expensive.

It seems doubtful that the boatswain ever thought very much about himself or anything else except the situation at hand. Certainly he never weighed his words for the disconcerting effect they might produce. I shall not soon forget the day I explained to the deck force how I wanted a towing-bridle rigged. The boatswain looked up at me with all the bright-eyed benevolence of an otter appraising a proffered fish and remarked: "I didn't just understand the malarkey about frapping lines, Commander."

We then decided not to use frapping lines. Be that as it may be, his judgment was sound and he had that rare attribute of a saint or a prophet: men would follow him into any situation without question.

The boatswain's mate was a study in contrast to his Bo'sun. He was huge man, also richly muscled. A coarse black beard was trimmed close to the outlines of his massive face and he had a blank stare of an ogre out of Grimm. The Japanese lived in dread of

him, and it was only after long acquaintance that I realized that for all his bulk and mien, he was only twenty-two and thought just like any other college boy, except for that one thing the war did for most young people – he no longer kidded himself. "Commander, I'm scared" he would sometimes remark as we looked over a situation.

I was genuinely sorry with a wave caught him on the forecastle and scrubbed the anchor chain with him.

There was a rare bond of sympathy between the Bo'sun and his Mate. They were unlike men. Each had what the other lacked. Until the sea itself forged one for us, they *were* the deck force. They kept pretty much to themselves. The pirate crew nicknamed the Bo'sun "Hairless Joe," and his hulking Mate "Lonesome Polecat."

Perhaps I should have realized what continuous failure can do even to the strongest characters. The deck forces spent days rigging ladders, hanging boat booms, stringing guest-warps and knotting fenders day after day. Then a single rogue wave would sweep along *Nagato's* low freeboard and reduce them to a tangled mass of rope, wire and splinters. The disappointment took its toll upon the Bo'sun.

After all, he had his pride. He was a man-of-war sailor, used to doing things in a Navy way. The sloppy habits and un-nautical phraseology of our boots distressed him no end. One morning muster, he simply wasn't there. The Mate and I realized at once what happened, and within a radius of a few miles where he was: in pastoral Japan, having some fascinating adventures in an alien culture without a word of Japanese to aid him.

(Yokosuka Honshu-ku Train Station 1945. Photo USN).

It would have been convenient to assume he had gone to Tokyo, which was the partially correct answer. But he was not lying in some *benjo* ditch intoxicated. He had done the right thing and boarded the last train to return to the harbor, but had gone to sleep on the ride back to the Honcho-ku station and therefore missed the connecting train at Ofuna. He would not be back for a few days, since he had to thumb his way from Nagoya.
The trouble was that on the evening of his disappearance the date of our sailing was advanced from eight days hence to just two, and he didn't know the new urgency that went along with his hitchhiking adventure back to the harbor in the countryside.

For our part, he was so essential to my Deck Department that it would have been unsafe to sail without him. The Eighth Army could have picked him up for us easily enough, but that would have brought him back to *Nagato* plastered with charges and with a file of official correspondence I would have had to answer. In our extremity, recourse was had to the humble Japanese police. So the Bo'sun was restored to use on time, somewhat dazed but otherwise in good condition. I doubt whether he ever found out exactly what happened.

During the days of preparation, there had been much bantering in the bars outside the gate of the Fleet Activities- Yokosuka between men of the *Nagato* and the cruiser *Sakawa*, which would accompany us to Bikini. The latter taunted the former with being stuck on an ancient beaten-up old hulk of a dreadnaught instead of a fine modern cruiser. When the news came out from the Fleet Commander that the *Sakawa* was to sail in company with *Nagato* as junior ship in the formation.

This indignity was met with gnashed teeth and lamentations; why should a ship capable of making eighteen knots, with two months to spare and the world waiting, be tied to a hulk which couldn't make ten, and probably would break down at sea?

Feelings grew bitter. Later, we were to feel the effects of the bad blood.

Preparations for sea never come to an end; you keep on repairing things while other things break down until someone's blood pressure rises and the decision is reached that, ready or not, you will sail on a certain date. The

pirate crew was ready mentally; they had confidence in the ship. Morale was high with everyone anxious to get away from Yokosuka. Though I had enjoyed my stay in Japan and would feel the hurt of parting, I, too, was ready to go.

On the last afternoon I managed to get away from the ship for a few hours to visit the shrine of Kamakura an see the gigantic statue of Buddha- the *Daibutsu.* The first cherry buds had burst along the path to the temple, and I felt a the sense of peace that seemed to radiate from the great figure seated in the lotus position. Coming back to the waterfront, I passed the file of workmen returning from the *Nagato.*

All bowed deeply, and I gave them a salute. Then, reluctantly, I boarded a landing craft for the stinging, icy ride to the ship. As we neared her red-lead painted bulk, the grey cone of Fuji was delicately etched against the greyer sky.

Sayonara, Yoko!