

MY EXPERIENCES ON THE U.S.S. CLEVELAND
Curtis H. Johnson

I went aboard the Cleveland, a light cruiser, on the third of January in 1945. This ship was going on her second tour of duty in the Pacific.

We were underway almost immediately. It was exciting for most of us, because we had never been to sea. Daily battle drills and tactical problems underway, soon brought us back to the business at hand. By the time we reached Pearl Harbor, we were beginning to learn our way around.

On January 14th, we joined a task group and got underway for Ulithi, in the Carolines. This was the home of the famous Task Force 38. Arriving there on January 25th, we learned our stay would be a short one. The next day we were on our way to Leyte in the Philippine Islands.

The conquest of the islands had already begun. We entered the swept channel in San Pedro Bay, Leyte Island, on January 8th. Although we were alerted several times during the night because of enemy planes operating in the vicinity, no attack developed. The next morning saw us underway for Mangarin Bay, Mindoro Island. Having been forewarned of a possible attack by enemy midget submarines operating from another island, we steamed at high speed, keeping a sharp lookout. The trip was uneventful, however, and we anchored off Mindoro on January 30th.

During the first week in February, we stood by at Mindoro to act as a distant covering force and to furnish fire support if such were needed. The Japanese were known to have two battleships, two heavy cruisers and several destroyers at Singapore, and there was always the possibility of their venturing out to make a strike at our forces. The big news of the week was of the landings of American troops and the three-pronged drive toward Bataan and Manila.

Standing off Luzon Island, we knew we were not to miss the show on February 8th. It was here that our task force of cruisers and destroyers were assembled and made ready to conduct the next operation--Corregidor.

On February 13th, we left for Corregidor at the entrance to Manila Bay. We saw the Army Air Force conduct a strike on the island fortress with attack bombers, and in a few minutes eighty percent of the island was in smoke from the bombs. In the meantime our mine sweepers were busy clearing the waters for our landing craft and opening a channel into Manila Bay. We stood by in support of these little vessels for a while, then began our bombardment. With our entire task force

in line, we poured hundreds of tons of steel into the Japanese defense positions. We received very little return fire, and by nightfall there were few signs of life on these islands.

The next day we continued our bombardment, then on the third day, while we were pouring five and six-inch shells into Corregidor and Caballo Island, the first assault wave headed for the beach in Mariveles Harbor on the southern shore of the Bataan Peninsula. Our bombardment had been so effective, the initial landing troops met little opposition.

During the morning of February 16th, our fourth day on Corregidor, we had ringside seats for a show seldom witnessed by men of the Navy. We were lying several hundred yards off shore when the first Army transport planes came over and began to discharge their paratroopers on Corregidor. Before long, the entire island was transformed into a field of white parachutes. We can only imagine how surprised the Japanese were that such a landing was attempted on such a small target.

As for the Cleveland's part in the Corregidor operation, she contributed her share to the softening-up of the island prior to the landings. Successfully covered the minesweepers, and effectively silenced a number of shore batteries, one of which was taken under fire by her guns within thirty seconds after it had been reported.

Toward the end of February, we returned to Mangarin Bay. A task force was assembled to form an assault group for an attack on Puerto Princesa. Opposition was light and we were able to return to Subic Bay. Another obstacle had been placed between Japan and her crumbling South Pacific Empire.

During the month of March we made additional landings. We were at Panay during the landing there, and later took part in the operation of the Philippine Campaign, the taking of Mindanao.

Our attention was now focused on the forth coming strike at oil-rich Borneo, which would make available quinine, oil and other resources of that rich country. This would strip Japan of one of her richest sources of raw materials.

On June 7th, we headed for Brunei Bay, near the center of Borneo. Our mission was to act as a distant covering force to protect the Australian troops that were to land there. We encountered only one enemy aircraft. When the Australians were well established, we returned to Manila.

On June 27th, General Douglas MacArthur and members of his staff came aboard to observe allied operations in the Balikpapan area of Dutch Borneo. Once they were aboard, we were underway for the return trip

to Borneo. As we joined the rest of the task force, we moved immediately into bombardment position. It was not yet daylight when we commenced firing upon the Japanese batteries of Balikpapan the 1st of July. We could see huge fires burning in the oil fields. When this was done, we took General MacArthur and his party near the shore to disembark for an inspection of the area. Upon their return to the ship, we were underway at high speed for the return to Manila.

Upon joining a task force of cruisers, we were underway for Okinawa. Once there, we then patrolled the China coast.

We were off the coast at Okinawa, August 10th, when the sky became filled with flares and tracers from the beach. At first, we didn't know what to make of it. Soon the general alarm sounded and we hurried to our battle stations. It was then we learned the Japanese had requested terms of surrender. The next few weeks brought the end of the war.

We were dispatched to Japan. After staying there for a month, we headed for home.

The U.S.S. CLEVELAND had helped to win the war.