

DESTROYERS FIGHT VARIED PACIFIC WAR

AMERICAN TASK FORCE BRINGS DOWN A JAPANESE SUICIDE PLANE

Screen Fleets, Fight Kamikazes,
Serve as Taxis, Rescue Pilots,
Hit Convoys, Shell Shores

By GEORGE E. JONES

By Wire to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

ABOARD A DESTROYER, in the Western Pacific, July 9—Destroyer units from the Atlantic theatre are beginning to join the Pacific Fleet in sizable numbers and already they have become aware of the differences in naval warfare as practiced in the two oceans. They are learning that the destroyer war in the Pacific is just as bitter and arduous and considerably more varied than its Atlantic counterpart.

In contrast with the well-known exploits of the North Atlantic patrol, the deeds of the "tin cans" in the vast Pacific areas seldom reach the public eye, sometimes for reasons of military security. None the less the Navy Department's announcements of destroyer sinkings off Okinawa emphasize once again the invaluable contribution of the tin can navy to our naval successes in the war against Japan.

In the Pacific the destroyer asks for trouble in all shapes and sizes. She challenges shore batteries, makes torpedo runs against much larger enemy warships at close ranges, defies navigational hazards in narrow waters and picks up ditched American aviators under enemy fire. Occasionally she is turned loose against small enemy convoys.

Bulwark of the Fleet

Because of censorship little can be told now of the destroyers in their most magnificent role of the Pacific war, that of holding down a vulnerable and lonely position on the outer screen protecting the main body of warships and amphibious vessels, as at Okinawa. They absorb the full fury of suicide aerial attacks one after the other in utter loneliness and desperation. One destroyer shot down twenty-three Japanese planes in one day and other cans have approached this mark. But destroyers were also sunk and damaged and hundreds of men were killed.

Through all these hardships, and in the humdrum duties as well, destroyer men in the Pacific maintain their traditional humor, pride and informality. Recently a destroyer attached to Task Force 38, after maintaining an extremely exposed position on the outer screen, expressed its loneliness with a sign painted on the bridge, an arrow pointing in the direction of the task force.

The skipper lives in close and incessant contact with his officers and men. Nearly everyone knows everyone else aboard the crowded ship and they unite in asserting the individuality and pride of the small destroyer in the midst of carriers, battleships and cruisers.

Spirit and Fellowship

Even ashore they congregate at their own Despatch (Destroyers, Pacific Fleet) officers' clubs, which, it might be noted, frequently are superior to the large fleet officers' clubs. Destroyer men's spirit and fellowship rank with the best and they prefer their way of life to the more anonymous existence aboard a larger ship.

The captain of this destroyer, Lieut. Comdr. F. Walford Ingling, of Long Beach, Calif., at the age of 31 years, is one of the younger—although not the youngest—destroyer skippers in the Pacific. He believes that the destroyer fights a more versatile war here than "on the other side."

"In the Atlantic the destroyers did mostly escort and anti-submarine duty," he pointed out. "Out here the work of a destroyer is more varied, you might almost say it's more Navy. We do bombardment, we give anti-aircraft support and we have had a few surface actions. The Japanese submarines have not given us as much trouble as the Germans, of course."

Then there are other assignments in the Pacific. For instance, the destroyer carried mail to American bases when planes were not available. Commander Ingling's destroyer had even been dispatched far afield to refuel landing craft.

Taxi Service for Fleet

Within Task Force 38 destroyers have been used as a taxi service, going alongside to transfer personnel and official mail from one ship to another. The technique was perfected in recent months and this job is performed with a casualness hitherto undreamed.

The tin cans also have been instrumental in saving the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of naval aviators who have ditched their planes in the ocean. This duty has become increasingly important with the expansion of carrier warfare. One destroyer paints a stripe on its bridge for each aviator it has rescued, and now has a total of more than thirty.

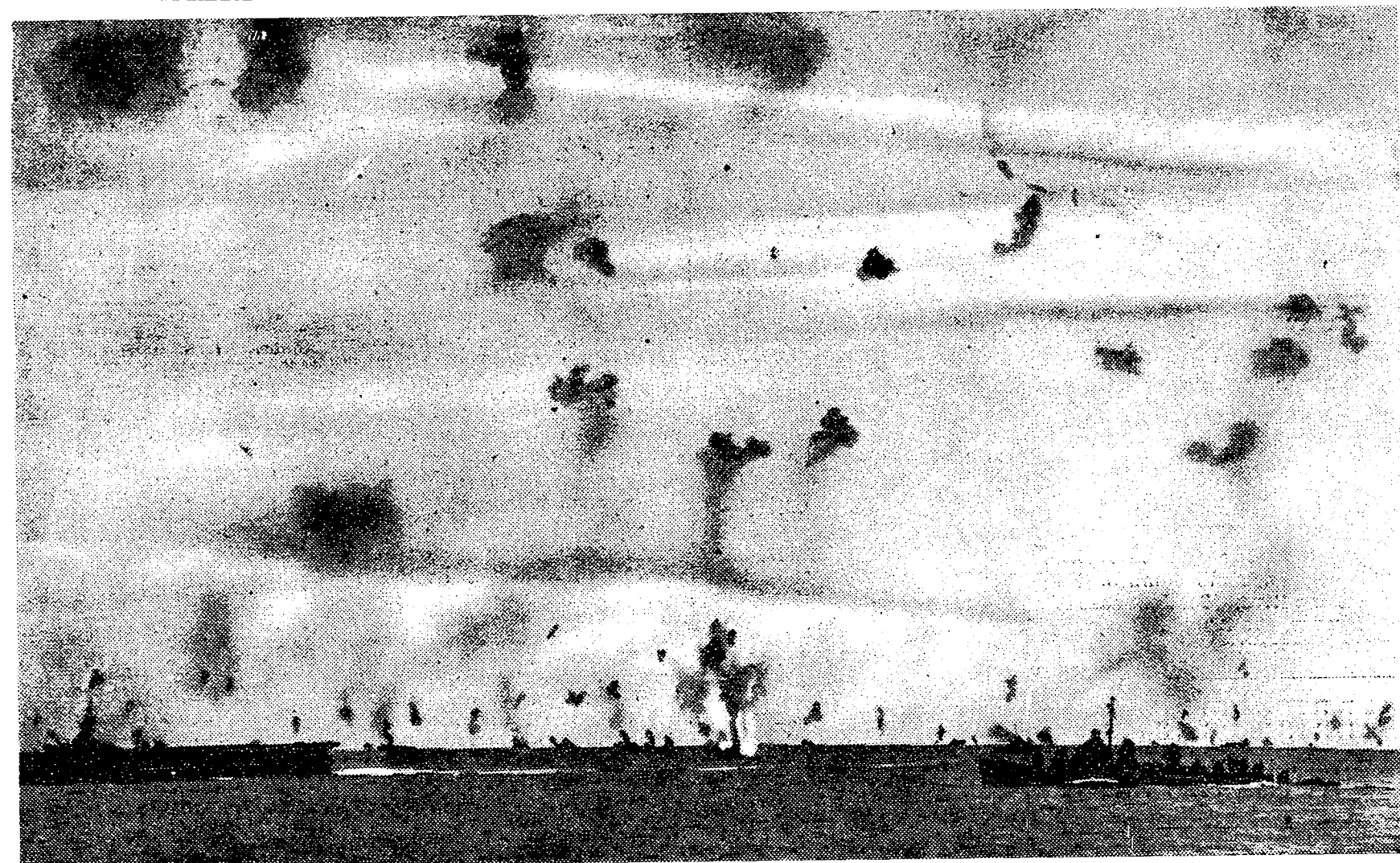
At times the tin cans brave enemy bombs and shore batteries to rescue aviators, and they have earned the undying respect and gratitude of the airmen. It is now customary for a carrier to pass over ten to twenty gallons of ice cream to the destroyer for each rescued aviator.

Destroyers also pick up Japanese airmen and ship survivors. Many stories circulate among destroyer men of Japanese and their reluctance to surrender even as they float helplessly on a raft.

Way of the Japanese

Commander Ingling's destroyer last February picked up three Japanese who were attempting to swim from Corregidor to Bataan. One put a gun to his head as the destroyer approached, but either he did not press the trigger or the gun failed to discharge. He threw the gun away and clambered aboard the destroyer. The two other Japanese floated near by, hanging onto a board on which lay a long knife.

Chief Boatswain's Mate Thomas Westbrook of Tacoma, Wash., leaned over the side, motioning the two Japanese to throw away the knife. They looked up at him



The enemy craft sends a splash into air as it plunges into the Pacific between warships. Anti-aircraft fire from our ships fills the sky

The New York Times (U. S. Navy)

blankly. He motioned again with elaborate pantomime, and finally, in disgust shouted, "Get rid of the damned knife." Whereupon one of the Japanese called back, in excellent English, "What did you say?"

Investigation aboard the destroyer when the two Japanese had been pulled in revealed that one of them had been born and reared in Southern California.

Aboard another destroyer, the ship's doctor, Lieut. Milton Small of Boston, Mass., once operated on a captured Japanese pilot, diagnosing his injuries by means of questions propounded with the aid of a military booklet containing a few key Japanese words and phrases. The pilot recovered.

Ships Now Have Bakeries

At one time a tin can is likely to carry only a pharmacist's mate. Surgical and other critical cases were transferred to larger ships. Now the ship's doctor works only with limited facilities, for there is little room to spare aboard a destroyer.

Since the start of the war, bakeries have been added to the destroyer, but they are for the most part still dependent on the larger ships for ice cream.

In the far reaches of the Pacific particularly with Task Force 38, frequently at sea for long intervals of time, these small lacks sometimes make large difficulties. The officers and men aboard this destroyer, for instance, lived for two weeks on rice and beans because there was no opportunity to reprovision.

The crew of this destroyer went for nine months without liberty, and there are tin cans that have not been back to the United States in nearly two years—much longer than the normal tour of duty for carriers and other warships. Only a glance at destroyer casualties off Okinawa and other battle fronts explains to the men the necessity for keeping their ships on the job out here.

Long Months of Duty

This destroyer has been out of the United States for twenty-one months. Starting in January, 1944, with the Marshalls invasion, she has been continuously busy, conveying and supporting landings from the Solomons to Manila. Yet under Commander Ingling, known to his Annapolis classmates of 1937 as Waffles, her men view their predicament philosophically.

Most of them, whether comparative newcomers to the Navy or old-timers such as Chief Water Tender Charles Zimmer of Jamaica, Queens, New York, like destroyer life and have no inclination for a change to another type of ship.

Zimmer, now 28 years old, has been in the Navy for eleven years. Before the war, he served aboard a destroyer on neutrality patrol in the north Atlantic and later was active in the anti-submarine campaign in the Caribbean.

"Over in the Atlantic we used to go ashore every two or three weeks," he said. "Our main worry was submarines. Out here, the work isn't so monotonous but we don't get much liberty, and the Atlantic now seems like a gray train, except for the weather."

Whether in the Atlantic or the Pacific Zimmer prefers destroyer duty.

"A destroyer seems more like a ship somehow," he said. "Aboard her you know everybody and you know what's what."