

Dear.....

It hardly seems possible the Big "B" has covered ten thousand (10,000) saltwater miles, visited two (2) foreign countries, passed thru the great Panama Canal and has just started for where we are going Panama was an eye-opener for a lot of us. But sailors just aren't TOURISTS. They're SOUVENIR BUYERS. Tourist like to see more than the froth of life in a foreign city. They like to see some of the reality, too. But not sailors. A few saw the Old Panama. A lot saw the bright, shiny laquer, as native to Panama as it is to Shanghai or Liverpool.

Out of Panama and north we sailed along the Central American Countries of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. We didn't actually see these countries, though occasional glimpses were had by a fortunate few. But as we passed thru these waters we saw one of the strangest sights the sea has to offer....literally hundreds of sea-turtles sleeping and sunning themselves on the slick, calm surface of the gently swilling ocean. We saw turtles of all sizes; small ones, the size of an ordinary cat; medium-sized ones; and monstrous fellows measuring five and six feet across their shells. Sea-turtle Heaven! It's noted far and wide. Hardly a ship passes thru that area which does not disturb the sleeping multitude of hundreds of them. Not too much, tho. For when they feel you coming they just submerge and peddle their lazy way down into the dark depths with scarcely a backward glance. What a life! Nothing to do but lie on the water and sleep in the warm sunshine, waking now and then to snap up a poor little unsuspecting fishie as he tries to wiggle by.

And we crossed PANAMA BEACH historic Tehuantepec, the Home of Bad Weather. Seldom does a ship escape being furiously pitched and tossed, sometimes to the point of extreme danger, by the thrashing winds and swirling tides of that gulf. Hot winds, sweeping down from the high Mexican plateau challenging the cooler, more temperate winds far central, they say, is the cause of it all. The struggle that follows produces storms that bear a description and test the hearts of men "to go down to the sea in ships."

Evil signs were up as we came up the coast. 'Look out for rough weather! The Gulf is it's own furious self! And tomorrow would be Christmas! Wasn't it bad enough that some of us could be away from home, from our families, from our friends for the first time on that day? Wasn't it bad enough the very thought was saking us sick with homesickness? No, we had to hit Tehuantepec on Christmas Day of all days. And it surely spoiled our Christmas. In fact, it caused the postponement of Christmas. But you can't do that. Once Christmas is passed, it's passed. You build up to that day. You anticipate it like you do no other day of the year. If comes, it goes. It can't be retrieved. Our Captain carried on, and the significance of the day was not lost. A very nice Gift was set up on the hangar deck with the altar near by and Divine Services were held there. The Catholic boys had their traditional Midnight Mass and the Protestant lads had their Services in the evening. As things later developed we could have actually carried out the programs of the day because the the Gulf was a bit rough it wasn't what had been anticipated. Signs of Christmas were evident. Trees were set up in all the Mess Halls and Wardroom and one was set up on the hangar deck. The usual red and green decorations were strung along the bulkheads and hung from the overheads along with the pre-earnings we had, we didn't dare propose a big dinner (or carry out any programs). We ended up going mighty homesick sailors filling out a long day with a band concert and a movie in the evening.

Out of the Gulf of Tehuantepec past old Pulp Bilge Point. Bet you never heard of that one? Well, it's the exact spot where the cool Japanese Current coming down from the North meets the warm Tropical Current coming up from the South. And you sure know when you hit it. Not only because one minute you're in the Tropics and the next in the Temperate Zone; but for other reasons, too. Like an old Sailor?

Pulp Bilge means one thing; Point Loma, another. When you round that Point the nostalgia of the sea disappears and the thrill of home coming takes it's place. For Point Loma marks the entrance to San Diego Harbor, the first port you meet coming up from the South.

And this was a special, special occasion. A proud, new Bennington was here to take up where the old Bennington left off. Only two ships have ever