

Coral Sea

(cont.)

American carrier planes on an enemy carrier.

Determining that this was not the main Japanese body, further searches were flown. On the morning of 8 May the Japanese striking force, made up of the carriers Shokaku and Zuikaku, 4 cruisers and 6 destroyers, was sighted almost simultaneously with the reporting of our own carrier force. Both forces launched immediate strike groups, 90 Japanese aircraft and 80 U.S., and the fights passed each other enroute to their respective targets, but inclement weather kept them from sighting each other.

The effectiveness of our attack on Zuikaku and Shokaku was minimized by adverse weather with low hanging clouds affording them some protection, and we were further handicapped by a shortage of fighter planes to adequately cover the slow moving torpedo and bomber planes. Nevertheless, Shokaku took three hits which set her afire and left her wandering in an aimless circle, and kept her out of further action for several months. Zuikaku was more fortunate, with only near misses to contend with, but which did send her limping back to Truk with damage that kept her laid up there for a month.

While Shokaku and Zuikaku were under attack, their aircraft were pounding LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN, concentrating on the bigger, slower turning LEX, three of 12 torpedoes found the mark. Almost immediately the dive bombers scored with two hits. The YORKTOWN, with a smaller turning circle, successfully evaded all the torpedoes, and all but one bomb, which did not impair flight operations.

Lady LEX was in trouble, but while damage control parties were bringing fires and flooding under control, the flight deck was cleared and the proud Lady recovered her aircraft. Within an hour she was conducting nearly normal operation but suddenly a devastating internal explosion shook the ship from stem to stern.

Gasoline vapors, released by

one of the torpedo hits, had been ignited below by a rotor generator which had been left running. 'For want of a nail the shoe was lost.' A chain reaction of explosions followed for the next 6 hours, and finally, for the safety of the crew, Captain F.C. Ted Sherman gave the order to abandon ship. Methodically and extremely reluctantly the crew left the Lady LEX, and watched with tears in their eyes as later the destroyer PHELPS administered the coup de grace with torpedoes.

If one electric motor had been turned off, there would probably have been no explosion and no sinking. This would have made a big difference in the Coral Sea profit and loss column. As it was, the lessons learned in this battle were quickly learned and applied. More and better fighter type aircraft were delivered, faster and more reliable torpedoes and bombs became available, and pilots underwent accelerated training in weapons delivery and fighter defensive tactics.

In the short month remaining before Midway, such improvements and precisions were developed that Coral Sea has been termed 'an indispensable preliminary to the great victory of Midway'. Too, the battle of Coral Sea eliminated the Shokaku and Zuikaku from Midway, depriving the Japanese of these fine carriers with veteran pilots which might have been their necessary margin for victory there. Coral Sea also thwarted the move on New Guinea, stopped and prevented any further attempt to advance on Australia.

The vital role of carrier borne airpower in modern naval warfare was adequately demonstrated in this first purely carrier against carrier naval battle in which all losses were inflicted by air action. No surface ship even sighted a surface enemy--it was entirely a battle of air strength and air defense.

The pattern was set--after Midway a month later, there was no further offensive action left in the Japanese navy. With strong support from Australia and New Zealand, the Allies began the march on Tokyo, sweeping the forces of the land of the rising sun before them.

BENNINGTON Coral Sea Vets

The following named men, presently serving aboard USS BENNINGTON, are veterans of the Battle of the Coral Sea:

LCDR E.P. Halverson Gunnery Dept.
Reich, Robert F. Flag Allowance
Alford, William VF-21
Williamson, R.S. VF-21
Stover, H.D. VF-21
Fitzgerald, W.I. S-Div
Edwards, John T. X-Div (MAA)
Heddal, Earl R. X-Div (MAA)
Hamlin, Frank OE-Div
Sutherland, James OE-Div
Wintken, Perry G. 1st Div
Christofferson, T.R. 2nd Div
Haddix, C. 2nd Div
Howell, D.A. A-Div
Yeargain, S.P. R-Div
Gibson, H.J. S4 Div

The ships represented include: Lexington, Yorktown, Portland, Chicago, Hammann, Dewey, Perkins, and Arlwin.

Navy Writers Get Editor Survey

Navy men who have written or plan to write articles for publication in civilian magazines or other printed media will be interested in a notice recently distributed by the Chief Of Information (CHINFO NOTICE 5727). It covers the results of a survey of editors and publishers and a study of current publications conducted by the Office of Information for the benefit of Naval Personnel who have something to say which will help tell the Navy's story to the public.

The study revealed that interest in WW II and Korean War material which has fallen off in the past few years, is now increasing. Emphasis is on actual experiences told in the first person. Indications are that standard articles of from 1,000 to 5,000 words, short stories of 2,500 to 5,000 words, and book-length treatments averaging 50,000 to 80,000 words

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