

U. S. S. BENNINGTON (CV-20)
BEN-TRAV-LOG NO. 5

Dear

Some quiet evening in the peaceful tomorrows we are looking forward to, I want to sit down and remember all the places I have seen—even places I'd like to forget now. To help my memory then, my cartooning collaborator has graphically depicted our recent tour including everything from Tokyo to the Brass Rail of the Pacific.

War, they say, is grim business and all one can do is grin and bear it. But, lest we get stale doing nothing but grinning and bearing war, the Navy had added something to the experience which we might entitle "Grim War and BEER."

Since the very beginning of this Pacific War the word 'ATOLL' has been very much in the news. We haven't seen many of them but from what we have seen we would best describe an Atoll as a bunch of coconut trees growing out of the ocean with a tuft of coral wound around their roots. ULITHI, the Brass Rail of the Pacific, is one of these spots. To find it you need a large scale chart of the Western Pacific and a magnifying glass, it's that small. Some charts refer to it as the MacKinzie Islands; others as Mog Mog. But Mog Mog it will always be to us.

You wouldn't think so to see it but two hundred years ago the place was famous. Diego Da Rocha, a Portugese skipper of sorts, stumbled onto it back in 1526. Francis Drake in his meanderings stopped there for water in 1588. But the Spanish Missionaries were the most frequent visitors and they left a paraph upon it, so indelible, succeeding English, American and German sea-goers, or a twenty-five year Japanese occupation could not delete it.

Yet tho' these tiny islands were known, it was not until the early part of the nineteenth century that Mog Mog really became important. Then it became the unofficial "Capital" of the Whaling Industry. Whalers made it a center from which to operate. Whalers from all over the world came there, many of whom were the famous Whalers from New Bedford and Newburyport, Massachusetts. We are not professional Whalers tho' we did get in on the activity that made the area famous. On our way down to Mog Mog WE caught a WHALE. Believe it or not, a great, huge monster, squared nosed and broad of tail, fouled himself up on our bow, and hung there the better part of a day. He was so entangled in our bow chain we actually had to stop the ship and back her down to dislodge Mr. Whale. The first real ocean going whale most of us had ever seen and he did cause quite a commotion.

That was Mog Mog's fame long ago. Today things are different. Until quite recently it was the place where the greatest fleet ever assembled took time out to rest and relax. Mog Mog isn't any Coney Island, or a Nantasket. It has no Roller Coaster, Fun House or even a Shooting Gallery. But it is a spot where sea-weary Sailors can go ashore, stand on solid ground, stretch, go swimming and play ball, if a thousand others don't get to the field first. And you can get a can or two of beer! And let me tell you, a can or two (EVEN) of ice cold beer tastes mighty mighty good in this tropical heat. A guy can dream about the Commodore, or Charlie's joint back home, but two cans of beer in your hand beats wishing and dreaming about someplace else.

And Mog Mog has a real native village. The first one we ever saw. Quaint might be the word for it. A cluster of little huts in a coconut grove, each a one story affair made of coconut trees and thatched with palm leaves. (Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could solve the housing situation at home with a few coconut logs and some palm leaves?). Their floors are raised some two feet above the ground to keep out the rain. They have no doors or windows because they have no solid walls. The space from the ground to the eaves is wide open, closed in with woven palm-leaf curtains only at night and when it rains. Natives - the way they live and dress - do not need the privacy of clothes wearing - 'foreigners'. A great life, no furnace to tend, no washing to do, no servant problem. Just simple people living a simple life.

To us who have visited Mog Mog there is one other thing we will never forget. It's the cry of the leather-lunged S.P.'s: "Men of the Bennington lay down to the stockade! Men of the Bennington, THE BENNINGTON, your boat is ready!" Some day we'll probably have an avalanche of words to describe Mog Mog, it's Native Village, it's two cans of beer, and all the rest. But right now we lack the enchantment of memory so we'll just let these words and Ashare's sketch tell you about this part