

CARRIER USS "ESSEX"

"FIGHTINGEST SHIP IN NAVY"

Launched Here July 31, 1942 (Our Hull No. 392)

[Editor's Note: Reference is made to a story about the "Essex" which we carried in our December, 1944, issue.]
[Here we present her entire record of combat duty as taken from Navy Department release of October 3, 1945]

THE USS *Essex*, dubbed by her crew as the "fightingest ship in the Navy," is home from the wars with a two-year record of battle action, supporting every major Pacific engagement from Tarawa to Tokyo Bay.

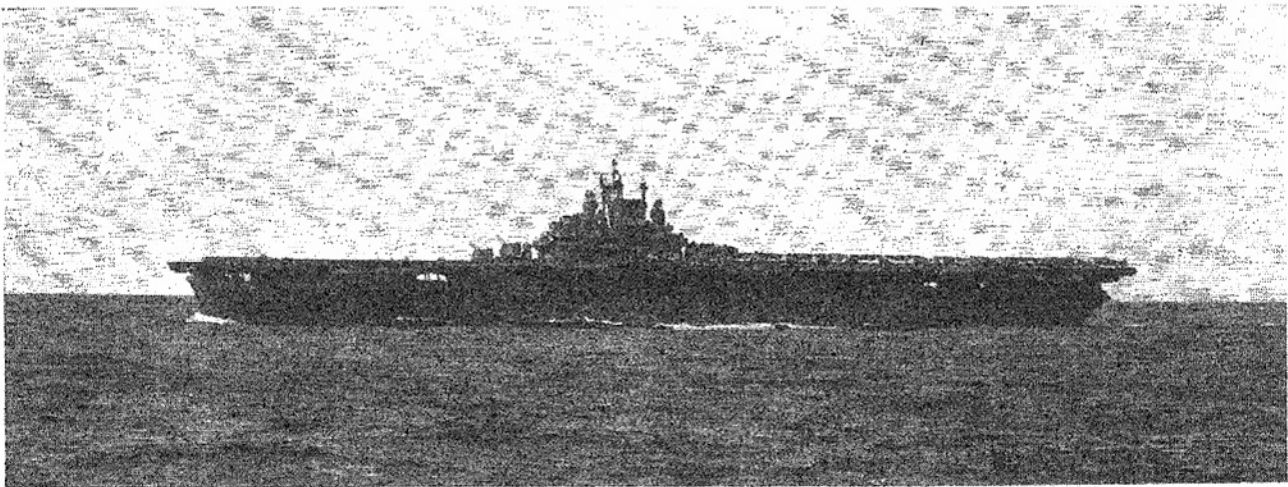
After remaining in the Pacific combat zone for seventeen continuous months—the longest unbroken period for any carrier—the gallant leader of a mighty fleet of floating airdromes steamed into Puget Sound on September 13, 1945, for a complete overhaul at the Puget Sound Navy Yard, Bremerton, Washington. She came direct from Tokyo Bay.

The first of the large carrier class which bears her name, the *Essex* established an enviable record of "firsts" for her class from the time she reported for combat duty on May 18, 1943. The most outstanding is her record of operating combat aircraft for seventy-nine consecutive days in support of the Okinawa campaign, a feat unequalled among existing carriers.

Group 83, which flew 36,841.2 combat hours up to the war's end on August 15, 1945.

The *Essex* was the first carrier to load bombs at sea in a combat area, the first carrier of her class to carry a Marine Corps squadron into combat, and the first of her class to transit the Panama Canal and the Equator. She was also the first of her class to enter Pearl Harbor and to anchor in Majuro, Saipan, Kossol Passage, Ulithi, and Leyte Gulf; the first of her class to land and launch planes with three ships alongside, and a unit of the first task group to hit Tokyo and fifteen other Japanese strongholds with carrier-based planes.

She fought in sixty-eight combat operations against the Japanese, starting with the Marcus and Wake Island strikes, straight through all the stepping-stones to Tokyo. Her anti-aircraft guns shot down thirty-three attacking planes, and her air groups destroyed 1,531 Japanese aircraft in addition to receiving credit



This picture of the USS "Essex," taken early in 1945 in the Pacific, shows the carrier with her flight deck loaded with planes ready to go into action

Official Photograph—U. S. Navy

She produced the leading individual Naval flyer, Commander David McCampbell, USN, of 1271½ North Crescent Heights Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, who shot down thirty-four Japanese planes during his tour of combat duty; and the leading combat air group, Air

for an additional 800 probably destroyed.

Essex aviators sent twenty-five Japanese warships and eighty-six non-combatant vessels to the bottom, while ringing up a total score of 419 ships of all types damaged or sunk. The warships sunk totalled 109,700 tons, the non-



Official Photograph—U. S. Navy
Taken just after a Jap suicide bomber smashed into the "Essex" on November 25, 1944, this photograph of the subsequent explosion shows the disastrous results when the kamikazes found their marks. This was the only direct hit suffered by the "Essex"

combatant vessels, 259,070 tons. Her fliers also damaged 113 war vessels and 195 non-combatant ships.

The invasions supported by the *Essex* read like an historical outline of the Pacific offensive. She "answered present" at Tarawa, the Marshalls, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Palau, Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, besides launching a number of strikes at the Japanese home islands.

Although under repeated torpedo-plane and kamikaze attacks during the nine major invasions she supported, the *Essex* was hit only once. A single-seater Japanese suicide plane obliterated a 20-millimeter gun section when it crashed through the flight deck off Luzon on November 25, 1944. In less than thirty minutes, the fires were extinguished and she was back in the fight with a metal plate over the gaping hole in the flight deck. The carrier was launching planes at the time of the attack.

The exceptional performance of the *Essex* damage control crew in the emergency prompted the commander of the cruiser division operating with the task group to flash her this dispatch: "Congratulations on your splendid recovery. My most sincere admiration to the old girl for licking her wounds and getting back into the fight so quickly."

Her planes continued to take off and land safely on the patched-up, over-age flight deck until the end of the war. A total of 31,015 landings had been made on the strip by the time the *Essex* arrived at Bremerton for a new flight deck and other repairs.

Following warming up exercises in the late summer and autumn of 1943, with diversionary attacks on Marcus and Wake Islands, the *Essex* launched her first major offensive

on Armistice Day, November 11th, against Rabaul, the main Japanese base in New Britain. Although a new fighting ship, her air group shot down fifty-four enemy planes that day to establish a new Pacific record for one-day operations.

During the Mariana "turkey shoot" in June, 1944, when the complete task force bagged 402 enemy aircraft in one day, the *Essex* fliers raised the one-day squadron record to sixty-seven. Commander McCampbell, who is now on duty at the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island, knocked down nine alone that day.

Air Group 83, the last squadron to fly from the *Essex*, hoisted the ship's one-day record to seventy enemy planes on April 6, 1945, while supporting the Okinawa campaign. The score, however, was a few short of a previously established Pacific record.

While the *Essex* steamed off Okinawa for seventy-nine consecutive days without dropping anchor, the pilots of Air Group 83 shot 220 enemy planes out of the air, destroyed another eighty-seven on the ground and probably destroyed or damaged more than 100 additional Japanese planes. At the same time, they sank seventeen ships and damaged fifty-seven others while flying 6,460 sorties totalling 26,103 hours in the air.

As her planes hurled destruction at the enemy, the *Essex* and her formation fought off a total of 357 Japanese raids during the historic seventy-nine-day period. There were 183 daylight and 174 night enemy raids during that time, climaxed by a fifty-one-hour period ending at midnight, March 19, during which the formation encountered forty-four night raids and forty-two day raids, with less than nineteen

hours being free from enemy attacks.

When she returned to Leyte Gulf on June 1, 1945, after the Okinawa campaign, the *Essex* had completed the longest combat cruise ever made by a carrier in a theatre of action. She had steamed 33,865 miles without once dropping anchor. Even then she was not through. After a provisioning rest, the *Essex* returned to the fray to assist in the final knockout blows against the Japanese home islands from July 1, to August 15, 1945.

What other ships of the fleet thought of the

of the Third Fleet during the last days of her stay in Japanese waters.

When she tied up at Bremerton, the *Essex* had steamed 233,419 nautical miles since her commissioning on December 31, 1942. During that time she never had an engine room casualty. Her air groups flew a total of 99,091.6 hours, comprising 22,260 combat sorties during which 4,143.2 tons of bombs were dropped.

In addition to Air Group 83, Air Groups 9, 15 and 4 and two Marine Corps squadrons flew from the *Essex* flight deck during the war.



A towering column of water rises high in the air as a Jap kamikaze suicide plane misses the "Essex" in attempting to crash-dive on the carrier, May 14, 1945, in the far Pacific

Official Photograph—U. S. Navy

Essex was tersely expressed by the *USS English*, a destroyer that operated with her. On August 8, 1945, the *English* sent this dispatch: "What do they mean 'Essex-class?' She is a class by herself."

After hovering off Tokyo for the final signing of the Japanese surrender documents, the *Essex* made a non-stop, eleven-day voyage direct to Puget Sound. She was the first large carrier to return to the United States after the end of the war, and as such, brought home more than 1,000 passengers transferred from other vessels

Air Group 9 flew 25,453.3 combat hours, Air Group 15 flew 23,307 hours, and Air Group 4 flew 13,490.1 hours.

The fourth United States warship to bear the name *Essex*, the 27,000-ton carrier has a displacement twelve times greater than the combined weight of her three predecessors. The first *Essex* was an 850-ton frigate named for a county in Massachusetts which made history during the naval war with France and the Barbary Coast actions from 1800 to 1806 and in the War of 1812. The second was an iron-

clad center-wheel steamer which fought in the Civil War, and the third was a wooden screw steamer of 615 tons attached to the South Atlantic and Asiatic squadrons between 1878 and 1886.

Four commanding officers were on the flying bridge of the *Essex* during her operations between June 1, 1943, and August 15, 1945. They are: Rear Admiral (then Captain) D. B. Duncan, USN, whose address is c/o J. C. Dunham, Pensacola, Florida; Rear Admiral (then Captain) Ralph A. Ofstie, USN, of 1201 Rucker Avenue, Everett, Washington; Captain C. W. Wieber, USN, 2829 Albatross Street, San Diego, California; and Captain Roscoe L. Bowman, USN, of 1411 Ninth Street, Coronado, California.

Air Officer of the carrier during her historic seventy-nine-day cruise off Okinawa was Commander Stanley C. Strong, USN, of 3446 Elliott Street, San Diego, California. He was promoted to executive officer on June 3, 1945.

At least part of the credit for the carrier's record of weathering two years of battle actions without being hit but once goes to her outstanding gun crews which included many survivors of the first *USS Wasp*. The *USS South Dakota* thought enough of their marksmanship on March 19, 1945, to flash the *Essex* this dispatch: "Sincerely admire today's performance by *Essex* gunners. It is a pleasure to be with such a good shooting ship."

Another incident in June, 1945, added to the crew's pride in their ship. A civilian visitor, who came aboard in Leyte Gulf, asked, after studying the *Essex* battle scoreboard painted on the island structure: "Is that the record of Task Force 58?"

One of the greatest tributes paid the *Essex*, however, came from Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, USN, (Retired), when he was aboard the carrier as an observer in July, 1945: "You've got the finest ship and the fightingest shipmates in the Navy," the famed Antarctic explorer told one member of the crew.

The following is a chronological list of operations against the Japanese in which the *USS Essex* has participated:

OPERATION	DATE
Marcus Island (Assault)	August 31, 1943
Wake Island (Assault)	October 5-6, 1943
Rabaul (Assault)	November 11, 1943
Gilberts (Tarawa) (Occupation)	November 18-25, 1943
Kwajalein Atoll (Assault)	December 4, 1943
Marshall Islands (Occupation)	Jan. 29-Feb. 4, 1944
Truk (Assault)	February 16-17, 1944
Saipan-Tinian (Assault)	February 21-22, 1944

OPERATION	DATE
Marcus Island (Assault)	May 19-20, 1944
Wake Island (Assault)	May 23, 1944
Saipan (Occupation)	June 11-13, 1944
Pagan (Assault)	June 11-13, 1944
Iwo Jima (Assault)	June 15-16, 1944
Pagan (Assault)	June 17, 1944
Battle of Philippine Sea	June 19, 1944
Marianas (Assault)	June 20-July 3, 1944
Guam (Occupation)	July 18-21, 1944
Tinian (Occupation)	July 23-24, 1944
Guam (Occupation)	July 25-August 10, 1944
Palau (Occupation)	September 6-8, 1944
Mindanao (Assault)	September 9-10, 1944
Cebu, Bohol, Negros (Assault)	September 12-14, 1944
Manila (Assault)	September 21-22, 1944
Cebu (Assault)	September 24, 1944
Okinawa Jima (Assault)	October 10-11, 1944
Formosa (Assault)	October 12-14, 1944
Battle of Leyte Gulf	October 24-25, 1944
Luzon (Assault)	November 5-6, 1944
Ormoc Bay Sea Battle	November 11, 1944
Manila (Assault)	November 13-14, 1944
Luzon (Assault)	November 25, 1944
Luzon (Assault)	December 14-16, 1944
Formosa (Assault)	January 3-4, 1945
Luzon (Assault)	January 6-7, 1945
Formosa; Okinawa (Assault)	January 9, 1945
Camranh Bay, Cape St. Jacques, Saigon, French Indo China (Assault)	January 12, 1945
Formosa, Swatow, China (Assault)	January 15, 1945
Hainan, Hong Kong (Assault)	January 16, 1945
Formosa (Assault)	January 21, 1945
Okinawa (Assault)	January 22, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	February 16-17, 1945
Iwo Jima (Occupation)	February 19-21, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	February 25, 1945
Okinawa (Assault)	March 1, 1945
Kyushu (Assault)	March 18-21, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	March 23-28, 1945
Kyushu (Assault)	March 29, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	March 30-April 1, 1945
Ie Shima (Assault)	April 3-4, 1945
Kikai Shima (Assault)	April 6, 1945
Yamato Task Group (Sunk)	April 7, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	April 8-13, 1945
Kyushu; Okinawa (Assault)	April 15-16, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	April 17-19, 1945
Kikai Shima (Assault)	April 20-22, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	April 25-May 12, 1945
Kyushu (Assault)	May 13-14, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	May 17-23, 1945
Kyushu (Assault)	May 24, 1945
Okinawa (Occupation)	May 25-29, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	July 10, 1945
Hokkaido; Northern Honshu (Assault)	July 14-15, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	July 18, 1945
Kure Naval Base (Assault)	July 24-25, 1945
Kure Naval Base (Assault)	July 28, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	July 30, 1945
Hokkaido; Northern Honshu (Assault)	Aug. 9-10, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	August 13, 1945
Tokyo (Assault)	August 15, 1945