

Ernie Pyle With the Navy:

Lots of Men Needed to Keep Aircraft Carriers Going

Life Aboard Ship Monotonous, But Preferable to Foxhole

By Ernie Pyle

IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC.—The men aboard an aircraft carrier could be divided, for purposes of clarity, into three groups.

There are the fliers, both officer-pilots and enlisted radio-men and gunners, who actually fly in combat. They do nothing but fly, and study, and prepare to fly.

Then there are the men who maintain the fliers. The air officers, the mechanics, and myriads of plane handlers who shift and push and man-handle the planes a dozen times a day around the deck.

These men are ordinarily known as "Airdales," but the term isn't much used on our ship. Usually they just call themselves "plane-pushers."

And third is the ship's crew—the deck hands, engineers, signalmen, cooks, plumbers and barbers. They run the ship, just as though it were any ship in the navy.

The fliers aren't looked upon as Gods by the rest of the crew, but they are respected. Hardly a man on the crew would trade places with them. They've seen enough crash-landings on deck to know what the fliers go through.

But there is a feeling—a slight one—between the ship's regular crew and the air maintenance crew. The feeling is on the part of the ship's crew. They feel that the plane-handlers think they're prima donnas.

They say to you "Them Airdales is the ones that gets all the glory. Nobody ever hears about us. All we do is keep the damn ship going."

It is these "plane-pushers" who make the flight deck of an aircraft carrier look as gay and wildly colorful as a Walt Disney cartoon. For they dress in bright colors.

They wear cloth helmets and sweaters that are blue, green, red, yellow, white or brown. They make the flight deck look like a flower garden in June.

This colorful gear isn't just a whim. Each color identifies a special type of workman, so they can be picked out quickly and sent on hurried tasks.

Red is the gasoline and fire-fighting detail. Blue is for the guys who just push the planes around. Brown is for plane captains and mechanics. White stands for radiomen and the engineering bosses. Yellow is for the plane directors.

Yellow is what a pilot looks for the moment he gets on deck. For the plane directors guide him as though they were leading a blind man. They use a sign language with their hands that is the same all over the navy, and by obeying their signs explicitly, the pilot can taxi his plane within two inches of another one without ever looking at it.

Comfortable Quarters Enjoyed by Crew

All the pilots and ship's officers live in "officers' country" in the forward part of the ship. They live in comfortable cabins, housing from one to four men.

The crew lives in compartments. They are of all shapes and sizes. Some hold as little as half a dozen men. Others are big and house a hundred men.

The navy doesn't use hammocks anymore. Every man has a bed. It is called a "rack." It's merely a tubular framework, with wire springs stretched across it. It is attached to the wall by hinges, and is folded up against the wall in the daytime.

The "racks" aren't let down till about seven in the evening (except for men standing regular watch who must sleep in the daytime).

A light carrier, such as mine, has only about a third as many planes as the big carriers, and less than half the crew, but it does exactly the same kind of work.

Of the three types of carriers in the navy, ours has the narrowest flight deck of all. It's so narrow that when planes take off they use the left side of the deck, in order that their right wingtip won't come too close to the "island" as they pass.

Our pilots and crew are quite

proud that we have the narrowest flight deck in existence. They're proud they can even hit the damn thing.

It's easy to get acquainted aboard a naval vessel.

The sailors are just as friendly as the soldiers I'd known on the other side. Furthermore, they're so delighted to see a stranger and have somebody new to talk to, that they aren't a bit standoffish.

They're all sick to death of the isolation and monotony of the vast Pacific. I believe they talk more about wanting to go home than even the soldiers in Europe.

Their lives really are empty lives. They have their work, and their movies, and their mail, and that's just about all they do have. And nothing to look forward to.

They never see anybody but themselves, and that gets mighty old. They sail and sail, and never arrive anywhere. They've not even seen a native village for a year.

Three times they've been to remote, lifeless sandbars in the Pacific, and have been allowed to go ashore for a few hours and sit under palm trees and drink three cans of beer. That's all.

Finds Eats Aboard Best of the War

Yet they do live well. Their food is the best I've run onto in this war. They have steaks and ice cream—they probably eat better than they would at home.

They take baths daily, and the laundry washes their clothes. Their quarters are crowded, but each man has a bunk with mattress and sheets, and a private locker to keep his stuff in. They work hard, but their hours are regular.

The boys ask you a thousand times how this compares with the other side. I can only answer that this is much better. They seem to expect you to say that, but they are a little disappointed too.

They say "But it's tough to be away from home for more than a year, and never see anything but water and an occasional atoll." And I say yes I know it is, but there are boys who have been in Europe more than three years, and have slept on the ground a good part of that time. And they say yes, they guess in contrast their lives are pretty good.

Seaman Paul Begley looks at his wartime life philosophically. He is a farm boy from Rogersville, Tenn. He talks a lot in a soft voice that is southern clear through. He's one of the plane-pushers on the flight deck.

"I can stand this monotony all right," he says. "The point with us is that we've got a pretty good chance of living through this. Think of the marines who have to take the beaches, and the infantry in Germany. I can stand a lot of monotony if I know my chances are pretty good for coming out of it alive."

But others yell their heads off about their lot, and feel they're being persecuted by being kept out of America a year. I've heard some boys say "I'd trade this for a foxhole any day." You just have to keep your mouth shut to a remark like that.

At least 50 per cent of the sailors' conversation, when talking to a newcomer like myself, is about three things:

The terrible typhoon they went through off the Philippines; the times they were hit by Jap bombs; and their desire to get back to America.

The typhoon was awful. Many thought they would go the same way as the three destroyers that capsized. This ship is inclined to roll badly anyhow. Today she still has immense dents in her smokestacks where they smacked the water when she rolled that far over. A lot of experienced people were seasick during that storm.

Very few of the boys have developed any real love for the sea—the kind that will draw them back to it for a lifetime. Some of course will come back if things get tough after the war. But mostly they are temporary sailors, and the sea is not in their blood.

Carriers Belie Their Clumsy Appearance

An aircraft carrier is a noble thing. It lacks almost everything that seems to denote nobility, yet deep nobility is there.

A carrier has no poise. It has no grace. It is top-heavy and lopsided. It has the lines of a well-fed cow.

It doesn't cut through the water like a cruiser, knife-romantically along. It doesn't dance and cavort

like a destroyer. It just plows. You feel it should be carrying a hod, rather than wearing a red sash.

Yet a carrier is a ferocious thing, and out of its heritage of action has grown its nobility. I believe that today every navy in the world has as its No. 1 priority, the destruction of enemy carriers. That's a precarious honor indeed, but it's a mighty proud one.

Children at Home Aboard Coast Guard Transports



Troop transports now consider the nursery as a "must." Thousands of refugees, repatriates and babies of U. S. servicemen are being brought to the United States aboard the U. S. coast-guard-manned troop transports, moving east from the Orient and west from Europe. Most of the children are bewildered but soon receive reassurance from Red Cross workers and members of the ships' crew.

Navajo 'Dust Bowl' Brings Disaster to Indians



Economic disaster for 55,000 Indians is rapidly taking form in the rugged mesas of the Navajo country in Arizona and New Mexico. A million or more sheep are the direct cause of the potential blight. The real problem of the Indian Office is the overpopulation of Indians upon comparatively unproductive, deteriorated lands.

Man-Eating Tigers in Burma



Cpt. G. A. McCrary, Centralia, Ill., combat military police, and Carol Hagerman, Kansas City, Mo., Red Cross worker, shown with the 250-pound man-eating tiger killed by the couple in Burma. Servicemen and women on the Burma front have organized several successful tiger hunts in this war theater during the last year.

No Fish Shortage at Wauconda



This is the sight, and the smell, that greeted residents around Slocum Lake, Wauconda, Ill., when the ice went out. More than 100 tons of dead fish were washed ashore when the ice melted. Unfit for food, their only use will be as fertilizer, a shortage of which exists in many sections of the nation. Despite their condition they can be used.

Beethoven Standing



After the symphony of war had thundered through his home town of Bonn, Germany, most of the city was left in ruins, but the statue honoring Ludwig Van Beethoven, one of the great composers, still stands in the town square.

Child Oscar Award



Margaret O'Brien is shown with the "Oscarlette," presented her by Bob Hope, for the best child movie actress of 1944. This is the first year she has been included in movie hall of fame.

Easy to Make Your Upholstered Chairs

THIS pair of chairs, so much at home in a Victorian setting, would be just as appropriate in a modern room. They are comfortable too, and anyone who can nail together a box can make the wooden frame. Scrap or even old boxes will do, for this foundation part is entirely covered.

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