

OUR HITCH  
IN HELL

10/27/44

Seaman First Class Neil W. Shew writes his uncle, Henry Shew of Bogota, from somewhere in the tropics: "I am just an old salty sailor out to help the rising sun of Japan to set. I sure have seen a lot and learned a lot. The life of a sailor is rough but I'll do my bit the best I know how. It is getting hotter every day here below the equator but it doesn't rain so much now.

"There is an old Jap battlefield which I was going through when I fell into a bomb crater. After hitting bottom a dead Jap's head fell into my lap. Those Japs are not intelligent in the least, as the ones here think they are in California. They all live in holes and caves just like rats. We are sure giving them a beating, but we are unable to find the Japanese navy.

"There are some large snakes in New Guinea, some up to twenty feet in length."

He enclosed the following poem:  
I'm sitting on deck thinking,  
Of things I left behind,  
I'd hate to put on paper,  
What's running through my mind;  
We've swabbed so many decks  
And sailed thousands of miles of  
water,  
A hotter place this side of hell,  
I'm sure cannot be found.  
There's a certain consolation, though,  
So listen while I tell:  
When we die, we'll go to heaven  
'Cause we've done our bit in hell.  
We've cleaned so many guns,  
And ate the cook's buttered beans;  
We've stood a million watches,  
And cleaned the ship's latrines,  
We've scraped filthy grease from  
The knees of our pants.  
We've sweat blood and hollered  
As our guns spit fire and hell.  
When our work on earth is finished,  
Our friends will tell,  
Give these boys from the tropics a  
front seat,  
'Cause they've done their hitch in hell.  
We take our atabrine daily,  
Those bitter little pills,  
To build up our resistance  
Against aches and chills.  
We've seen a million ack, ack,  
Burst about us in the sky,  
As we run like hell,  
For our gun turrets,  
When daisy cutters fly.  
"Put out those lights," the gunner  
yells.  
"This isn't any picnic."  
It's another night in hell.  
When final taps are sounded,  
And we shed our earthly cares,  
We'll put on the best parade,  
Of all upon those golden stairs.  
The angels there will greet us,  
And on their harps they'll play,  
We'll hear Gabriel blow his bugle,  
And St. Peter loudly yell,  
"Front seats for those amphibs,  
From the tropics,  
Cause they've done their hitch in hell."