

William Garner

Tells Experiences

During War

Sept. 21, 1945

Latona Sailor Writes Uncensored Letter About His Experiences During the War Against Japan

Coxswain William Cassel Garner, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Garner of Latona vicinity, who is on the USS Montpelier, writes:

"Here comes my first letter to you that is not censored. I don't know hardly how to act, now that I can write what I want to. First of all, I will tell you where I am. I am at Okinawa. I am going to write you a very brief outline of what we have done, and where we have been since I left the states.

"We left Mare island, San Francisco, went to Honolulu, then to Leyte gulf, where we got in one of the most terrific air battles I had ever been in. The Japs used suicide planes, and one of them hit us. That is how John Simpson got injured. He was hurt pretty bad but has recovered. The damage was not so bad but what we could repair it ourselves. We shot down four planes that day ourselves. One of the planes, which tried to crash us, missed us but came so close to us when it hit the water that the water splashed up into the hot case chute of my gun. However, the Lord was on my side.

"I saw several ships get hit by them and it is a terrible sight. One plane hit an aircraft carrier, and exploded on the flight deck, enveloping the main part of the ship in flames. About eighteen planes were shot down I think. That was the main battle. The other actions were shorter after Luzon was invaded.

Based in Subic Bay

"We made our base in Subic bay, which is just around the corner from Bataan. There we have been all the time just waiting, waiting, waiting for some Japs to come around. The invasions of Palawan, Borneo, etc., helped to break the monotony. After the invasion of Borneo we came to Okinawa and made two partial sweeps up near Shanghai. I saw the coast of China. We saw no ships except some Chinese junks. That is what I was doing when you thought I was in the Third fleet, bombarding Japan, etc. We didn't get to go on to Tokyo.

"We are here in Buckner bay in Okinawa. There are many ships around us and two nights ago we got the order to light ship at night. No more blackouts. Six hospital ships are in here. Three of them are lit up with flood lights all around their hull, a very beautiful sight. To see the thousands of lights around us is amazing, we have been used to having everything blacked out so long, we can hardly get used to it.

Torpedoes Passed Nearby

"Did you read in the papers about MacArthur being on the Boise when he went to Luzon? If you did, you read where a Jap plane came in, in a dive at 4:30 in the morning and dropped two bombs in the water. We were at battle stations but the plane slipped some way, and the first bomb dropped about 300 yards on our post quarter, the second dropped on our starboard side about 700 yards away

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right behind a destroyer's fantail. The Boise was 1,000 yards away. I saw the bomb hit the water and I was sleepy before, but not after that.

"On the invasion of Luzon and Mindoro we fought planes and submarines all the way from Leyte gulf to our objective. We had several torpedoes fired at us, but not a ship got hit. The nearest one ever got to us was close enough that the boys saw it going through the water. I suppose it was 500 or 600 yards away. This is a very brief outline of our activities. It is what I couldn't write you before. My mind is whirling with the things I could write you, but they must wait. I can't write much more, my hand is getting tired.

"We have eleven Jap flags painted on the bridge for the eleven planes our ships has shot down and two Jap ships painted on, for the ones we helped sink in the New Georgia campaign. While we were at Borneo, one night five Jap planes tried some brand new battle tactics with the result that we almost got hit again. Two bombs missed our stern by about 100 yards; maybe you think that isn't close. It's really all right as long as they don't hit, but it wouldn't have been nice if they had been just a little more accurate.

Six Killed in Celebration

"It is enough unpleasant details. I could tell you some more that is much more unpleasant, but when I get home you will probably hear about it in time. I thought I would let you catch up on a little back news. I don't know where we will go next, or what we will do. We are just sitting here going out for gunnery practice about twice a week. I liked the way the president made Japan surrender. The night we got the news that Japan had surrendered the men on the beach cut loose with their guns firing in the air and six men were killed and thirty injured from falling steel. That was a costly celebration. The officers couldn't keep them from firing, they were so happy.

"When we got the news at 8:00 o'clock in the morning that the war was officially over, which was several days after the Japs made the first terms, we were just pulling alongside a tanker. We had been awaiting the news and when it came, they announced it over the speaker. All the ships blew their whistles, rang their bells, and made all the racket possible. Myself, I wasn't excited I was just happy and glad. The strain of being in war wouldn't leave me long enough to get excited. But believe me, when I get home and get back to normal again.

"Altogether, I have participated in twenty-three actions or operations since I have been in the Navy; seventeen times in action and the other operations, although dangerous, did not have us fighting each other directly. I have ten stars authorized so far. I don't know how many more I have coming."