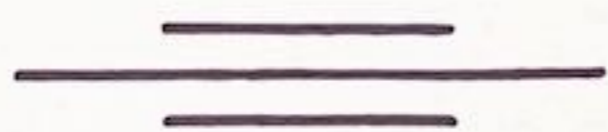


# CRUISE BOOK

OF THE



U.S.S. WASHBURN

1944-45





## U. S. S. WASATCH

The U.S.S. WASATCH was built by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Corporation, Wilmington, North Carolina. Was originally laid down as a class C-2, S.S. FLEETWING and later, before commissioning, purchased by the Navy for conversion into an Amphibious Force Flagship.

Keel Laid	- 7 August 1943
Ship Launched	- 8 August 1943
Delivery Date	- 31 December 1943
Sponsor	- Mrs Paul Wilson, Oleander Court Apartments, Wilmington, North Carolina.
Length	- 459' 3/8"
Beam	- 63 feet
Gross Tonnage	- 9,800 tons
Conversion Yard	- Navy Yard Norfolk, Portsmouth Va.
Start Conversion	- 2 January 1944
Commissioning Date	- 20 May 1944

Main engines consist of two turbines connected through double reduction gears to a single shaft. The backing turbine is included on the low pressure turbine shaft. Steam from two Babcock and Wilcox boilers is supplied at 440 pounds per square inch pressure and 740 degrees Fahrenheit. Normal output is 6000 horsepower.



# SHIP'S HISTORY

LT. JG JAMES CONWELL WELSH

EDITED BY

LT. JG JACK HOLT BOGER

As an Amphibious Force Flagship the purpose of the Wasatch was to provide for coordination of land, sea and air forces in an amphibious operation. Among the many things included were accommodations for the Amphibious Force Commander and the Commander of the Coordinating Forces and their staffs. Facilities for communications, of course, had to be immense. The Wasatch has done her job well - and much more. During the last 18 months she has operated as tanker, supply ship, hospital ship, transport and floating hotel for transients.

In Volume I no. 7 of Wasatch News Notes published 9 May, 1944, there is an article which is quoted because of its significance in connection with this publication:

## Light Off

The first entry in one of the ship's log was made Monday: to wit, "1510-lighted fires under number one boiler." Five minutes later, number two boiler sent its smoke column up the stack. Somehow, it seemed as though the ship had taken her first breath of life and was signaling her intention to take an early departure

With the boilers lighted off she began to generate electric power and aboard the Wasatch, electric power is used for so many pieces of gear it staggers ones imagination.

While work on conversion was going on space at Portsmouth, many of the officers and men were being organized into divisions at the pre-commissioning headquarters at Newport, R.I. Here, under the direction of the Executive Officer, Comdr. Wm. B. Tucker (now Capt. Tucker), organization began to take place. Division officers were appointed, divisions formed and men assigned to each. Friendships were made--friendships that have endured through those 18 months of sea duty, friendship that will last as long as life itself; friendships welded on the forge of each day's work, of each day's hours of relaxation, and tempered in the heat of battle. By the time the detail was ready to entrain for Norfolk much of the frame work had been built. The various divisions reported aboard ready and eager to take up their duties only to find that there was much more to do before the ship would be completed and so little time in which to do it.

On our first trial run a breakdown occurred making it necessary to be towed back to the dock. Somewhat crestfallen but not disheartened, we set about repairing the trouble and soon were off on our formal shakedown in Chesapeake Bay. After some days of steaming, gunnery drills, calibrations, turning circles and whatnot, plus a liberty in Annapolis, we returned to the yard for final check and adjustment. It was not long before all hands were loading stores, last letters were hurriedly posted and we were on our way to the Panama Canal with two destroyer escorts, the USS STAFFORD and the USS La PRADE. None knew just where we were going after the Canal but scuttlebutt had us first in Australia, then the Aleutians and even Pearl Harbor.



At 1215, July 3, 1944, we took pilot aboard and proceeded through the Panama Canal. It was a thrilling experience for all hands and one we shall never forget. One day's lay over and an opportunity to see Panama City and then we were off across the Pacific bound for Milne Bay, New Guinea. This was the last we were to see of the Western Hemisphere for 17 long months to come.

As we headed south in the blue Pacific, little did any of us imagine the brilliant and leading role we were to play in the vital operations to come. Still south we sailed and soon rumors that we were entering the realm of Neptunus Rex were confirmed when Davey Jones boarded us with greetings from his Royal Majesty. We carried aboard a large and unruly number of polliwogs and from the beginning the trusty shellbacks feared mutiny. Watches were set in the spud locker, in the forecandle and on the fantail. Riots broke out all over the ship as the shellbacks clamped down with an iron hand. It was at 1320 on 7 July that we crossed the equator and ere the minute hand of the clock made one full turn polliwogs had been inducted by one means or another into the society of shellbacks. Already we felt we were becoming a "Seasoned" crew. Day after day we practiced our drills - general quarters, abandon ship and all the other emergency bills until we became so proficient that a surprise GO would find us at our battle stations in one minute. Our gunners sharpened up by firing at star shells, balloons and shell bursts. We felt they were mighty good and that faith was later justified by performance under attack.

The letters AGC attached to our number nine on the bow have been the subject of some controversy as to their meaning. It is believed that the black gang and ship-fitters had the best interpretation - Almost Got Completed. Certainly those two divisions deserved and did receive our admiration for the splendid job they accomplished. The generators gave us much trouble but under the able and intelligent supervision of the Chief Engineer, Comdr, W. F. Eglit, now our Executive Officer, we made Milne Bay, New Guinea at 1725 on 31 July, 1944.

It had been a long tiresome trip and land was a welcome sight even if it was New Guinea. Everyone was over-joyed to see the sacks of mail come aboard for that meant word from home, letters from our wives, mothers, fathers and friends. There is nothing like mail to pep up a ship's spirit unless it be orders to return to the States.

On 2 August we were ordered to Humboldt Bay and on 5 August, 1944, at 1100 we came to anchor there.

On 10 August we received our first flag aboard - Rear Admiral William M. Fechteler, U.S.N., Commander Group ONE, Seventh Amphibious Force. At last we were beginning to fulfill our mission and it did not take us long to become acquainted with the many new duties required of us by the flag.

The heat was almost unbearable and little relief was afforded at night. There was, however, one welcome break - a trip ashore now and again and an opportunity to enjoy some iced cold beer. We always established a ball-playing, beer-drinking beachhead at the first opportunity, and all hands will agree that they were welcome spots.

On 10 September we set out on our first invasion with Admiral Barbey aboard. The Wasatch was formation guide bound for Morotai Island, our objective. On 15 September we landed the army ashore and it was here that the custom of taking General Douglas MacArthur ashore began. In all our landings except one this honor has been assigned to us. We are proud to have had this opportunity. It was here, too, that we experienced our first attack by enemy planes, a preview of what was to come at Leyte.

It was not long before we were back in Hollandia chipping, painting, loading stores and drinking an occasional beer.

On 14 October we received Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid and his flag aboard. We were now the Flagship of the Seventh Fleet.

On 15 October we departed Humboldt Bay for Leyte. Early in the morning of 20 October we were proceeding up Leyte Gulf, just 1200 yards ahead of the U.S.S. NASHVILLE. In the grey mist of morning the radio crackled, "You are twelve miles ahead of the mine sweepers." This in itself was enough to startle us, but at the same time one of the port lookouts reported a mine on our port bow. A destroyer sank it by gunfire. On up the gulf we steamed, the ever increasing crescendo of gunfire from supporting battle-ships, cruisers and destroyers sounding in our ears. Overhead our Hellcats and Wildcats were eager for the Jap to appear. We were somewhat surprised at first by the lack of opposition. It became clear now that we had caught the enemy completely off balance. We had hit him where and when he had least expected. His reaction was not long in coming, for in a few days all hell broke loose. It was now that the Wasatch came into her own. She was the heart, brain and nerve center of that tremendous assembly of ships and men. She then and there became the Queen of the Amphibious Force Flagships. In and out of her communication room poured message after message, order after order. Up in the combat information center the enemy was tracked for course, speed and size of raid from the time he was within 110 miles.



Those pilots from the baby carriers were the most magnificent men of the battle. They were the men who couldn't be beaten. To them we owe so much for their courage and heroism. With their carriers sunk and no place to land except a small rough strip at Taoloban, they put 'em down, refueled, rearmed, and somehow managed to get air-borne to give us that air cover we so desperately needed. From we who worked with them and from all ship's company on the U.S.S. WASATCH, hat's off. The final score for one week was more than two hundred Jap planes destroyed.

While all this air attack was in progress word was received that the Jap battle fleet was on its way from Singapore, Formosa, and Manila. Constant reports kept us informed as to its size, course and position. The southern part was due to enter lower Surigao Straits at mid-night, 24 October. The northern group was due to pass through narrow San Bernardino Straits at the same time. We were caught in a pinchers - so the Jap thought. From Admiral Kinkaid to Admiral Olenorf's battle-ships and cruisers went the order to intercept the enemy to the South and destroy him. What a night it was, brilliant with the flash of gunfire and the glow of victory against numerically superior forces.

We had barely caught our breath when word was received that the Jap fleet had gotten through San Bernardino unopposed and had our baby carriers under close range fire. The situation was desperate. A call for help went out to Adm. Halsey who had engaged the Jap carrier task force off Northern Luzon. Racing south, he launched a long range strike which caught the retreating Jap. This was the end of Japanese naval power. We knew it and so did the enemy. No accounting of that battle would be complete without mentioning our own gun crews. They were really hot. Although only given credit for one plane shot down we know they hit many more. Through it all they were helped by C.I.C. who gave them such accurate information that they knew in advance the very minute the Jap was to arrive.

On 29 October we left for Hollandia in company with battle-ships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers and destroyer escorts. That was the night we experienced our first typhoon.

On 21 November we again returned to Leyte to experience more air attacks. It was from the Wasatch that the battles of Ormoc and Mindoro were planned and directed.

Despite all air raids, Christmas was celebrated aboard. Packages from home brought happiness and memories to us all and everyone enjoyed a generous portion of turkey. 6 January saw us off to Luzon by way of famed Surigao Straits where some months prior our heavy and light surface ships had won such a brilliant victory. Near Manila we were under violent air attack by Jap suicide planes. One hesitated above us, then plunged into the side of the carrier Kitkun Bay. A half hour earlier another suicider had crashed into another carrier just ahead of us. Finally, enshrouded by darkness we moved northward of Manila and on into Lingayen Gulf. Again the Jap was hurling his full fury at us - suicide planes, suicide boats, suicide swimmers, all in vain for nothing could stop the gigantic forces of American Amphibious power from pouring men and material on the beaches. The Wasatch earned the right to retain her title, for it was from her that all this was directed. She was again a gigantic nerve center where information vital to the success of the operation was received, controlled, disseminated.

From Lingayen we sailed to Mindoro to await the final assault on Subic Bay. This completed we set out for Tolosa, Leyte. Once more as after the battle of Leyte, we received a "Well done" from Adm. Kinkaid.

On 3 February we had a change in command. Capt. Granum was relieved by Capt. Ringle. The following day Adm. Kinkaid shifted his flag ashore and for the first time in several months we were without a staff aboard.

These days were pleasant ones for us for they were filled with plenty of baseball, softball and beer drinking. It was here that the softball teams and baseball teams were formed. The record of the baseball team is particularly note-worthy because they literally cleaned up on all opponents. They may have lost a game or two but none of us can remember that. It would be unfair to single out any individual for praise inasmuch as they were all so good.

On 22 March Adm. Noble and staff came aboard.



On 31 March we again set out on another operation, this time to Mindanao. After staging out of Mindoro we headed south, past Zamboango - the same Zamboango so famous in the song, the land where the monkeys have no tails. It wasn't long before the towns of Malabang, Parang and the city of Davao were secured and we were ashore trading with the Moros. Many of us have some handsome knives as souvenirs.

On 17 May we sailed for Leyte but after a short stay were ordered to Morotai, the scene of our first action. What a surprise we had to see the changes six months had made. Here we made friends with the men from down under - the Aussies. Quite a friendly lot, don't you know!

From Morotai we staged for Balikpapan, N.E.I. Again the Wasatch had the leading role - this time in triumph she steamed through Makassar Straits where earlier in the war our outnumbered forces had suffered heavily at the hands of a numerically superior Jap surface and air force. How sweet the taste of victory as we passed through those straits that day in June 1945.

Balikpapan was tough in as much as the shallow water prevented us from bringing the heavy guns of our surface units to bear on the enemy shore emplacements. It was not long however before the Aussies had landed and reported the situation well in hand. This was our last Amphibious landing prior to the surrender. This was the last time we were to be under enemy attack.

After Balikpapan we returned to Morotai where Comdr. Eglit relieved Captain Tucker as Executive Officer. On July 4th we crossed the line bound northward. Old Davey Jones and King Neptune came aboard for a visit and much to everyone's delight - found numerous polliwogs in our midst. A gala time was had by all the trusty shellbacks.

On 11 July we arrived at Manus and began undergoing repairs, alterations, scraping and painting. Many of the officers and men went to Lake Sentani in New Guinea for ten day's rest and recreation. Eventually everyone was able to go and all seemed to enjoy it. It was a most welcome break after months of continual duty. There was all sorts of entertainment; swimming, games, hiking, sleeping.

Finally on 4 September we sailed for Manila, P.I., arriving on 10 September after a short stop at Samar. Manila was a disappointment to most of us for here we saw for the first time the destruction wrought by land warfare. A once beautiful city, the Crown Jewel of the Orient, was now a pile of rubble. One or two trips ashore was all that most of us could manage. Soon we staged for our trip to Wakayama, Japan. This trip was much quieter than we had expected. After our arrival we had to ride out numerous typhoons of varying intensity, all of which delayed our final operation some weeks. On 26 October, we left Wakayama for Nagoya. This was one of the largest Jap cities that had been attacked by B-29 fire bomb raids. It was pretty much gutted and ruined but after having seen Manila we found little or no room for sympathy.

The last of October found us ready to sail for Tokyo for one last look at Japan. A few days before we were to sail orders were received to proceed to Taku, China, where we were to exchange our staff for ComPhibGr SEVEN.

On November we left Nagoya for Taku, arriving on 5 November. Here we hauled down Rear Admiral Noble's flag and ran up the flag of Rear Admiral Kiland.

On 7 November we began our long voyage to the States by way of Pearl Harbor. Some of us would no doubt realize our cherished hope -- Christmas at home.

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