

[Operation Flintlock: Invasion of Kwajalein Island  
in the Marshall Islands, February 1944]

February 8, 1944  
Hq. 5<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps, Fwd. Echelon<sup>1</sup>  
In the Field

Dearest [Helen]:

It might have been much easier if I had written a page or so every day,<sup>2</sup> but you know me, and besides, some days only had twenty-four hours.

To start with we boarded the flagship [*Rocky Mount*]<sup>3</sup> at a certain unnamed port and, one morning, appeared two tugs, and we were off.<sup>4</sup> But prior to the appearance of the tugs, there had been a most impressive parade of warships of all descriptions past us that had required some time to clear before we could leave. It seems unbelievable that we can be fighting a war on so many fronts and still concentrate so much power in one spot. Amongst those present were ships with whose names Otz<sup>5</sup> would be most familiar. And, of the same types, there were probably twice or three times as many with which he would not be as familiar,<sup>6</sup> to include Jim's,<sup>1</sup> of course—although Jim wasn't with our

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Charles S. Tracy, Sr., USMCR (Ret.), refers to the headquarters of the V Amphibious Corps, Forward Echelon, which was the amphibious assault force that invaded the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific in February 1944. Colonel Tracy was the transport quartermaster for the "V Phib," commanded by Lt. Gen. Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith, USMC.

<sup>2</sup> The letters detailing the invasion were written in retrospect from February 8 until March 9, 1944, when Colonel Tracy was stationed in Oahu, Hawaii, after the assault on the Marshall Islands.

<sup>3</sup> Amphibious force command ship USS *Rocky Mount* (AGC-3) was commissioned in 1943 and became Rear Adm. Richmond Kelly Turner's flagship for the Marshall and Marianas campaigns of the Pacific War. (*Fighting Ships*: 143)

<sup>4</sup> Task Force 52 (Southern Attack Force), under Admiral Turner, was charged with the capture of the southern half of Kwajalein Atoll, Kwajalein Island. Task Force 52, including the V Amphibious Corps, sailed from Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii on January 22, 1944 to commence its mission against the Marshall Islands. As a part of Adm. Raymond A. Spruance's Fifth Fleet, Task Force 52 was composed of escort carriers, destroyers, cruisers and multitudes of troop transports, cargo vessels and other auxiliary ships. U.S. operations in the Pacific during World War II were planned and sustained from naval and air bases in Pearl Harbor, which was the location of Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet (CinCPac) and Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPoa) headquarters of Adm. Chester A. Nimitz. (Commander Joint Expeditionary Force, Flintlock to Commander-In-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, "Report on Amphibious Operations for the Capture of the Marshall Islands," February 25, 1944, 1, 40; Cooper: 99; *The Pacific War*: 262; Reynolds: 23, 128)

<sup>5</sup> "Otz" refers to Osgood Vose Tracy II (1902-1982), who was Colonel Tracy's brother and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1924. Colonel Tracy states of his older brother's experience in the Navy, "His first assignment was to the Battleship *Wyoming*, which was in dry dock at the Brooklyn Navy Yard for about three or four months. He figured that was about as dull a duty as he could possibly take, and he figured that if he was a very good boy and kept his nose clean, that he might get to be a lieutenant commander some day, as these promotions were very slow between the war years." (Colonel Tracy, Interview, January 13, 2001)

<sup>6</sup> The "New Navy" appeared in the Pacific after 1943 and featured new, fast aircraft carriers, including the *Essex*-class and the *Independence*-class, and large scale amphibious forces. (Reynolds: 53)

convoy; he was with the Marines [in the fast carrier task force]. A most comforting sight, the entire parade.

Then, all of a sudden, on a bright, shiny day we were off. And, as soon as we hit the open sea, the usual lethargic coma hit me. I was actually sick but once—actually, which is quite unusual for me—but, even if I am not sick, I am continuously sleepy. I can sleep all day and all night and, first thing the next morning, be just as sleepy as ever. This and the nausea last for a period of about five days, after which I generally start to feel human again. However, for the record, I did NOT miss a meal en route.

It required most of the first day to get the entire fleet out of the harbor and on the road, and it wasn't until late in the afternoon that the ships were all assembled and in formation. And of it appeared to be an impressive sight to watch the parade of fighting ships in the morning. It was even more impressive to watch the big parade scattered to the horizon. Transports as far as the eye could see—almost—then the battleships, which were like the big brothers walking the baby brothers down the street; cruisers, like the middle-sized brothers not much caring for the stroll, but wandering up and down the street, into someone's backyard and then back to the main group; and the destroyers, which were like dogs, running all around, forward and back, in and out, close in and far away; and not to forget the aircraft carriers, which look to me like dining room tables on the horizon, where they were most of the time.

Each day seemed to run into the next, and days of the week or days of the month were impossible to keep straight. The only way time was expressed was in terms of "D" day, such and such. For example, an air strike by land-based planes was to take place on D-5, or certain ships were to bombard something or other on D-1. If asked the question, "What day is it?" probably ninety percent would answer D+3, or whatever it was, and consider that a most logical answer. That same ninety percent would not know whether it was Sunday or Thursday, or June 1 or July 15.

February 11, 1944—Back "home"<sup>2</sup> (I wish it were) again

The first few days were spent by most people doing practically nothing, except taking an occasional stroll on deck, sun bathing, except your husband who keeps well covered at all times, and reading various types of literature from pure trash to almost anything that is available. Press releases were received everyday as routine by the ship's communication section, which mimeographed most of them and published them at breakfast each morning. These daily newspapers contained mainly what you would read in the headlines and a few bylines of the average paper, which say about all that is

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<sup>1</sup> "Jim" refers to James Randolph Simpson (1916-1997), who was the brother-in-law of Colonel Tracy and served in the Navy from 1942 to 1945 on the USS *Santa Fe* (CL-60), a *Cleveland*-class light cruiser. After being commissioned in 1942, the *Santa Fe* escorted fast carrier task forces throughout the Pacific War. In the Marshalls campaign, the *Santa Fe* was a part of Rear Adm. Richard L. Conolly's Task Force 53, which conducted preliminary bombardment on Roi-Namur. On October 25, 1944, the *Santa Fe* helped sink the damaged Japanese carrier *Chiyoda* and several escorts off Cape Engano. (*The Pacific War*: 170; *Alexander*: 162; *Fighting Ships*: 321)

<sup>2</sup> When Colonel Tracy writes back "home," he is referring to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, his "home" station.