

HAPPY HOLIDAY GREETINGS FROM ARCADIA, AMERICA, HUB OF
THE UNIVERSE, HOME OF THE ROUND BARN AND NEXT TO THE
LARGEST CITY IN THE SOONER EMPIRE!

As William Field, member of Parliament, once said, "The time is here and is rapidly approaching." This year marked the golden anniversary of so many landmark events in our lives that much of it was spent in reliving the past.

January, 1943, found Sara and me in New York. She worked for an oil company in Rockefeller Center while I was in midshipman training at Columbia University.

On March 31 I was commissioned an ensign in the Navy and, to celebrate, Sara and I bought \$2.20 seats in the balcony of the St. James theater to see the opening night of *Oklahoma*. The following day we boarded an airplane for the first time and flew to OKC for a few days leave before proceeding to San Francisco for transportation to the USS Honolulu.

Sara came to San Francisco. She and three other Navy wives leased a completely furnished four bedroom home near the Stanford campus in Palo Alto for \$125 per month (they split the rent - \$31.25 apiece) and Sara went to work in a Henry J. Kaiser plant in San Jose. She was pregnant with Susan Dale at the time and returned to OKC that fall.



I boarded a converted merchant marine freighter, the USS *Munargo*. She was carrying a mixed bag of Army and Navy personnel to the southwest Pacific. We were unescorted so we zig-zagged all the way to Noumea, New Caledonia to avoid Japanese torpedo attacks. As we crossed the equator, the ship's crew (who were almost all shellbacks) beat us poor polliwogs unmercifully, all in the name of King Neptune. We were issued certificates signed by the captain attesting to the fact that we were now *bona fide* shellbacks.

The sight of the USS Honolulu as she lay at anchor in a channel off Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides was awesome. She was a 10,000-ton steel mammoth 600 feet long, 60 feet in beam, bristling with guns and radar antennae and populated by 1,200 fighting men. Commander Chauncey Moore, a huge florid faced

Irishman was the exec. He stood at the head of the gangway and greeted Charley Bennett and me as we dropped our gear on the quarterdeck, saluted the ensign and requested permission to come aboard. Later we met the captain (R. W. Hayler) in his quarters and the gun boss (F. A. "Speedy" McKee). This was to be our home for a year and a half.

In July, 1943, the Honolulu (aka Blue Goose or Pineapple Maru) was flagship of a cruiser task force and was operating in the Solomon Islands. We were based a few miles north of Guadalcanal, which by now was secured, and we were supporting an offensive in the Solomons pointing toward Rabaul, New Britain, a Japanese stronghold with deep-water ports and five airfields. Within a brief eight days we engaged two Japanese naval forces trying to reinforce New Georgia. We lost the Helena (a 10,000-ton light cruiser), two destroyers and had three cruisers, including the Honolulu, severely damaged. The Honolulu limped back to Pearl Harbor for a new 80-foot bow and then to Mare Island Navy Yard in San Francisco Bay for new guns and other modernization. In October Sara came to California and we lived in a quonset hut on the navy yard for a few weeks.

In December Sara was back in OKC and on the 4th gave birth to Susan Dale in St. Anthony Hospital. By that time I had been back in the Solomons for a month or so and didn't learn about the new member of the family until Dec. 23. I was on watch 40 feet above waterline on the after superstructure when a signalman brought me a telegram that Dad had sent on the 4th.

Is it any wonder that 1943 was such a meaningful year? It's the same with so many of our generation. It was a year of excitement: a first journey to New York, girding for war with 980 other midshipmen, witnessing the opening night of a history-making Broadway production, making our first airline flight (coast-to-coast, at that), engaging the enemy and birthing a baby. And there were so many emotions beside excitement. There were fear and trembling on enlisting, on leaving the New York Central train and walking into Grand Central station entirely on our own, on firing shells at the enemy and seeing their guns flash with return fire and their torpedoes running shallow at 45 knots just barely missing us - and sometimes not. There were the intense sorrow of parting and the blessed joy of reunion. And then, two years later, the wonderful relief of knowing it was all over.

Again Sara joins me in reaching out to you. Consider yourself hugged by a couple of masters at the art!

Wale Sara