

The Story of the Boston

By Henry Leader SP(X)3/C

If you see a sailor whose campaign ribbons, star studded, resemble the milky way. chances are he's off the USS Boston; for this new Baltimore class heavy cruiser has seen a major share of action in the Pacific. Striking with cat's paw swiftness and accuracy at the Jap. she bombarded islands and downed planes of the Rising Sun while carrying the war ,from the islands south of the equator to the home land of Japan itself and chalking up one of the most impressive records of any ship in the Pacific area.

In achieving this she has lived up to her proud lineage, for a "Boston" has served almost continuously in the United States Navy since the first ship of that name, a 24 gun frigate, became part of the tiny fleet comprising the original U.S. Navy back in 1776. This sleek cruiser is the sixth ship to bear the name of the Massachusetts capital and represents the most modern developments in the building of men-of-war.

Built for speed, maneuverability and tremendous fire power, the USS Boston is the second ship of the Baltimore class. Ordered July 1, 1940 prior to the outbreak of the war. her keel was laid June 30. 1941 in the Fore river yard, Quincy, Massachusetts by the Bethlehem Steel Company.

On August 26, 1942, Mrs. Maurice J. Tobin, wife of the Honorable Maurice J. Tobin, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, sponsored the launching, and on June 30th of the following year, the ship's ensign fluttered in a gentle breeze as she was officially commissioned and accepted by her first commanding officer, Captain John H. Carson, USN.

Slipping smoothly through Atlantic waters. the Boston began her maiden voyage on August 13, 1943 en route to the Gulf of Paria, between Trinidad and Venezuela, for the shakedown cruise designed to accustom her crew to the sea and enable officers to detect any possible wrinkles in her makeup. A month later the Boston returned to her home port, a fighting ship with her crew well trained to fight the enemy. On the record of her engineering trials. she was established as one of the fastest heavy ships in the fleet; on the record of her gunnery exercises, she was established as a good gunnery ship.

After a few more weeks in the port of Boston and some trial runs off Rockland. Maine. the USS Boston set out on November 18 to fulfill the job for which she was designed and built-the defeat of this country's enemy in

the Pacific. After passing through the Panama Canal, followed by a two day lay-over in San Francisco, she arrived at Pearl Harbor on the eve of the second anniversary of the Japanese sneak attack. Six weeks were spent in Pearl Harbor waters engaging in more of the exercises that are so essential to the maintenance of the fighting qualities of a First Class Warship.

All hands manned their battle stations on January 19, 1944 as the USS Boston got underway from Pearl Harbor and began her long war career as a unit of the soon-to-be famous Task Force 58. Planes from the old Saratoga, the later-to-be-sunk Princeton and the Langley soared overhead on anti-submarine patrol as the Boston pointed her prow towards the Marshalls. On February 2nd, planes from the Saratoga bombed a direction finding station on Utirik Atoll, and as the smoke from their hits floated skywards men on board the Boston knew that "this was it"

During the following five days the carrier planes struck fiercely at Eniwetok Atoll while the Boston kept a wary eye out for Jap planes and subs. Covering the seizure of the Marshalls, she roamed between Wotje and Eniwetok. After Kwajalein was secured the Boston anchored in Roi Harbor for three days and then returned to Eniwetok where for 18 days she circled the Atoll with the rest of the force, prepared to lend fire support to Marines ashore who fought to secure the base, which was to become so vital in the prosecution of the war.

When Eniwetok was secured the Task Group put in to Majuro, and the Boston's crew received its first taste of "Liberty" in the Pacific. Early in March the Boston left Majuro for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides.

From there the Boston sailed north once more to rejoin Task force 58 in the first raid on the Palaus and the Western Carolines. Radarmen were kept busy detecting enemy planes and in the afternoon of March 30th Carrier Cabot reported that her fighters had shot down all enemy planes in a formation of seven. At dusk Japanese torpedo planes attacked the Task Force and for the first time the guns of the Boston fired at the enemy. Later a Japanese pilot was picked up by a ship of the group, and his story indicated that his plane was the Boston's first victim. It was in this area also that planes from the Boston rescued an officer pilot and two enlisted men from a plane that crashed during one of our carrier strikes.

On the return trip to Majuro, sideswipes were taken also at Woleai and Yap. The Japs, having felt the sting of the Task Force were leaving it strictly alone and no trouble was experienced. On April 22nd, the Boston once more sortied from Majuro with the Task Force to support General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Forces in the seizure and occupation of Hollandia in New Guinea. One week later, on the way back from Hollandia,

the Task Force journeyed slightly afield to deliver a sharp crack at the Jap Fortress of Truk. An enemy plane fifteen miles away sighted the deadly group and radioed a warning to fellow airmen on the island.

Knowing the Jap was alerted, the Carrier Monterey launched ten planes to repel the expected attack. Suddenly an enemy plane was sighted off the Boston's starboard bow and the Boston's guns opened fire. In the subsequent action, which has been recorded in technicolor for the movie "Fighting Lady," the Boston scored her first definite kill, shooting down the attacking "Jill".

Seconds later the drum-like sound of the Boston's Forties and the chattering of her "Twenties" were heard as gunners opened up on a smoking enemy plane which was headed for the Carrier Yorktown. Accuracy of the fire stopped this plane short of its goal. and all hands cheered as it burst into flames after striking the water. In this action the Boston claimed two of the three planes which had pierced the formation.

The next day, the Boston journeyed southward to Satawan where her guns threw five and eight inch shells into that Jap held island without opposition. Explosions were heard and fires were still raging as she turned her back on the island and headed once more for Majuro, and a brief relief from war. Salty, now the Boston was assigned in Mid-way to escort some newly arrived carriers on a combat shakedown cruise to attack the islands of Marcus and Wake, which proved to be more of a pleasure cruise than a war mission.

Formed up once more with Task Force 58, the Boston headed for Guam with a new commanding officer at the helm—Captain E. E. Herrmann, USN, of Washington, D. C.-who boarded the ship on June 5 and was destined to carry it safely through many missions against the enemy

Guam was the first stop on what was to be one of the longest cruises of her career, and also one of the most vital missions of the entire war-the attack on the Marianas. When it had been completed, we had secured operating bases for the B-29s, had nearly snipped in two the Japanese Life Lines to the South, and had almost annihilated Japan's Carrier Air Power.

As the force approached Guam, a Jap plane, spotting the mighty ships, radioed a warning; but fighter planes making a sweep over the island, nevertheless took the enemy by surprise by their departure from the usual procedure of striking at dawn. Results were very successful.

Speeding northward, the group then struck swiftly at Iwo Jima and headed southwestward again with orders to launch a long range search for the Jap fleet reported passing through San Bernardino Straits, their obvious intent being a bolstering of the defense of the Marianas. At 10 O'clock on the morning of June 19th carrier planes were launched to intercept a raid of 30 enemy planes. This was the first of seven major raids during the day, numbering from one to 90 planes. The most significant fact of the action was the complete annihilation of every enemy plane. The following day searches for the Jap fleet were continued, and late in the afternoon one of our airmen radioed that he had sighted the enemy Task Force 215 miles to the west. The Boston increased her speed, hoping for a surface battle.

Again our carrier planes struck and badly damaged one Jap carrier and other units of the enemy's dwindling fleet.

The next day the Jap force was out of range, but the mission was successful for the enemy had been chased back to his lair, and the amphibious landings of the Marianas continued without interruption.

The Commander of our Task Force expressed sympathy that our ship's gunners did not get a chance to take a crack at the Jap fleet and labelled the enemy "Not only yellow in color but in spirit as well."

A summation of damage inflicted showed that 402 enemy planes were destroyed in the action which will be forever remembered by airmen as the "Marianas' Turkey Shoot". Damage to the enemy fleet was also revealed to be substantial, including the sinking of one Carrier, two Destroyers and a Tanker, and damage to three Carriers, one Battleship, two Heavy Cruisers, one Light Cruiser, two Destroyers and three Tankers.

Warm congratulations were received from Admiral Nimitz who declared that "Your Air Groups have just turned in another splendid job."

Another punch at Iwo Jima was landed on June 24th and although our planes were outnumbered, we quickly shortened the odds. Score for the day: 116 planes shot down to our loss of five.

At the end of June, a rush trip was made by the Boston to the new base at Eniwetok for provisioning, and then the ship returned to Iwo Jima to celebrate the Fourth of July by giving that island its first plastering by naval guns. For more than an hour, the Boston lobbed in eight and five inch shells, hitting installations and its Southern Airfield, where almost seventy aircraft were lined up like lambs for the slaughter.

"A splendid afternoon's work," radioed the Commander of the Task Unit, "Smartly carried out by all hands and understood by the enemy."

From Iwo, the fleet headed south towards Guam and for two weeks ably fulfilled its assignment of keeping airfields on Guam and Rota neutralized; intercepting and destroying enemy aircraft approaching the Marianas from the south; and destroying enemy installations on Guam.

After the Guam landings were well underway, the fleet struck at Woleai, Palau, Yap and Ulithi. In giving credit to the Boston and other ships of the Task Force, the Marine Commanding General said, "No higher credit can possibly be given to any force than is due to Task Force 58. You keep the enemy off our necks."

Admiral Nimitz again praised the group and declared that "The successes achieved advanced America far on the road to winning the war."

The first of September found the Boston proceeding out of Eniwetok with the newly formed Third Fleet under Admiral Halsey, on a mission which was to result in shortening the war perhaps by months. Strong fighter sweeps against Palau were launched on September 6th. but were reduced to half on the following two days for Airmen reported that they were running out of targets. In rapid succession, Mindanao, Cebu and the Negros Islands were hit. Over the last two named Islands 35 enemy planes were shot down, 34 destroyed on the ground and 47 damaged. Zamboanga was next on the list, and then the Boston headed for Morotai to support landings there while others of the fleet backed the landings at Peleliu and the peaceful occupation of Ulithi.

On the 19th of that month, Clark and Nichols Fields and shipping in Manila Bay were hit. All hands were feeling a quiet exhilaration and seconded the commendation of the Task F Commander who said "They cannot stop you."

In the second week of October, the Boston was out again with the Third Fleet. after a short stay at Manus Islands in the Admiralties. Taking the Japs once more by surprise carrier planes struck at Okinawa from 20 miles away, downing 120 Jap interceptors, sinking one heavy cruiser, and damaging one light cruiser, and two destroyers.

Formosa was the target on October 12th, and this time the enemy sent planes out in force. The Boston's guns opened up, driving them off and downing at least one. But enemy Torpedo planes succeeded in hitting the Boston's sister ship, the Canberra, which had to be taken in tow by the Wichita. The Houston took the Canberra's place in the formation, and she

too was hit by enemy planes, although the Boston downed two more Jap Aircraft.

The Houston reported her engine rooms and fire rooms flooded, and said that she was abandoning ship. But in the black and squally night, the Boston took the Houston under tow, and through 36 tense hours inched her away from the threat of the Japs on Formosa only 75 miles distant. Just a few hours after the Fleet Tug, Pawnee had taken the tow line, a force of enemy fighters swooped down, only to be driven from the sky by a group of eight fighters from the Cowpens and the Cabot.

Relating to the withdrawal of the damaged ships under tow, Admiral Halsey messaged, "For skill and guts the safe retirement by the damaged Canberra and Houston from the shadow of Formosa, while under a heavy attack. will become a Navy tradition. To all hands who contributed to the job, well done."

Leaving the Canberra and Houston safe in friendly waters, the Boston rejoined the Carrier Group. A short 24 hours later, an SOS came from the Escort Carrier Group off Samar, then under attack by the Japanese Fleet. which had come through San Bernardino Straits early in the morning. Two air strikes from our carriers were launched and our bombs scored hits on three of four enemy Battleships and three out of nine Heavy Cruisers. A subsequent strike scored two more hits on Battleships. and one on a Cruiser with another Cruiser left dead in the water. A Kongo Class Battleship was left burning and listing badly.

More severe damage was inflicted the following day, and with the Jap Fleet knocked out of business for a long time. perhaps for good, our Fleet returned to Ulithi for provisioning and recreation for the crews on Mog-Mog Island. Then back again to keep the Jap Air Force off the necks of our forces ashore on Luzon. In a two day strike at enemy aircraft in the Manila area 750 enemy planes were destroyed or damaged. Considerable damage was also inflicted on shipping in Manila Bay and docks and installations at Manila and Cavite.

The Boston was then detached to proceed to Manus Island for a speedy overhaul of her screws and boilers. A miraculous job of rebuilding the boilers in three days put her back into shape for months more of operations.

In support of building operations at Mindino on December 15th Fighter planes struck at Airfields on Luzon, and in one day destroyed 224 planes and damaged 90 by strafing. Subsequent strikes were hailed by Admiral Halsey as "A brilliantly planned and executed operation."

When the Third Fleet locked horns with a ' typhoon on December 18th, the Boston was there to ride it out. and although she recorded one roll of 46 degrees and many others in excess of 30 degrees, the ship's log solemnly reports that there was suprisingly little evidence of seasickness. Later, the Boston aided in the search for survivors from less fortunate, smaller ships.

Christmas day was spent in the anchorage at Ulithi and a rather sad crew was cheered somewhat by packages from home, taken aboard the night before.

On New Year's Eve the Boston was underway again, and headed for Formosa where our Carrier planes again took a heavy toll of enemy Aircraft. Then Task Force 38 headed south for a two-day strike at Northern Luzon Airfields, designed to keep the Nips grounded so they would be unable to attack our Amphibious Forces approaching Luzon from the south. On January 9th, Formosa was hit again in the first strike of an operation that would take Task Force 38 into the South China Sea to hit at targets on the China coast.

That night the Boston was the first heavy ship of the Force to enter the South China Sea through Narrow Bashi Channel, a difficult feat in itself, for the visibility was such that no navigational aids could be seen and the ship was necessarily maneuvered entirely by Radar.

It became known that the TaskForce 'was seeking some remnants of the Jap Fleet last reported in Camranh Bay on the coast of French Indio-China. Although the emptiness of the Bay was disappointing, our planes took a heavy toll of Jap shipping from Tourane to Saigon, a distance of over 400 miles. Thirty-two enemy ships were sunk, including a Katori Class Cruiser, and 47 vessels (totaling 80,000 tons) were damaged. Twelve planes were shot down, 88 destroyed and 24 damaged on the ground.

Admiral Halsey again recognized the splendid work of the Force in a message which read, "Well done to the Force in superlative attack. The strategic effect of yesterday's magnificent performance will be great."

On January 16th our planes hit Hainan and Hong Kong area, meeting only slight opposition.

It was in this area that the Boston rode out her second typhoon, and escaped with only slight damage to a few of the gun shields, which were quickly repaired by crew members in a heavy sea which tossed lesser ships about like corks.

The Boston attained added distinction in January when she was the last to leave through bottle-necked Balintang Channel, although the Japs hysterically declared that no American ships would leave the China Sea. It was here too, that the Boston added another enemy plane to her mounting score. A twin engined "Irving" passed speedily over the ship at a 300 foot altitude, turned and headed straight for the big cruiser. But the Boston's gunners had been too well trained and the Jap was downed by fire from the five inch and 40 MM Batteries. North once more sailed the Heavy Cruiser and her company for a last fling at Formosa, and this time the Jap's struck in force, probably in an attempt to save face at having been duped in the China Sea operation. The final tally in this all-out Japanese attack was 10 enemy planes downed, 97 destroyed on the ground and 101 damaged.

Admiral Halsey again saluted the Task Force and called it a "Landslide victory for the Big Blue Team."

Before heading south again, the fleet took another swipe at Okinawa, sinking 10,000 tons of shipping and destroying numerous planes.

A proud crew stepped ashore on Mog-Mog Island for much needed recreation, for the Secretary of the Navy had radioed a message stating that "All hands take hats off to the performance of the Third Fleet." In a summation of operations engaged in by the Boston up to this time Admiral Halsey said that "We have driven the enemy off the sea and back to his inner defenses. I am so proud of you that no words can express my feelings." To the traditional "Well done" he added that word "Superlatively."

Early in February the Fleet set sail again, with the Boston protecting the Carriers as before. After a fast run north-- some fifteen hundred miles-- the Boston participated in the first Carrier attacks on the Japanese Home Islands since General Doolittle's raid in 1942.

Closing in on Tokyo during the night of February 16th, the Carriers launched their planes at dawn the next day from a point only 130 miles Southeast of the Japanese capital. All dayFighter sweeps continued over the city, and the next day we struck again, piling up a two day score of 141 planes shot down, 26 destroyed on the ground and 55 probables, 92 damaged in the air and 35 on the ground.

Nine Coastal vessels were also sunk and two major Aircraft plants and four Tokoyo Airfields were severely damaged. Of this operation the Commander of the Task Force said, "I hope that I may have the honor of leading you to victory for you certainly know the road."

The ship then moved south the fleet transport landings on Iwo on February 9th, and on D-Day plus two the Boston was ordered to lend fire support. It was the ship's first opportunity to use her guns in support of a landing and occupation operation.

She opened fire on the Northern part of the island, in support of the Mairnes battling ashore and at 6,500 yards thoroughly covered the target area with shells, destroying gun emplacements, block houses, shelters and ammunition dumps.

With the Carriers once more, the Boston headed again for easy pickings up Tokyo way. A Fighter sweep was launched at dawn of February 25th, while overhead a force of 220 B-29s dropped tons of bombs on the crumbling empire.

As the Fleet turned south towards Ulithi, another blow was struck at Okinawa, and then on March 3rd the Commander of the Carrier Task Force sent the greetings: "Your well earned overhaul and recreation period is at last in sight. may you have a pleasant cruise home and a happy leave."

After sixteen months from home and fourteen months of continuous operations with the Carriers of the Pacific Fleet, the Boston had earned a rest. Streaming a 700 foot homeward bound pennant, she paraded past the fleet out of Ulithi on her way to Pearl Harbor and the West Coast of the United States.

Early in the morning of March 25th, the mainland of the United States was sighted and later in the morning the Boston entered the Naval Operating Base at Terminal Island, California while the N.O.B. Band played and Ginny Simms sang "Oh,What a Beautiful Morning."

Six weeks later all members of the crew had' returned from a short leave. and on May 20th the Boston put to sea again to test the new equipment and rehearse the crew for the next phase of operations which were destined to lead them to final victory. After three weeks in Pearl Harbor, during which time Captain Herrmann was succeeded by Captain Kelley on June 29th, the ship once more got underway for Eniwetok.

After three days at that Atoll, the Boston rejoined the Carriers which launched air strikes, on July 24th, against shipping in and around the waters of the Japanese mainland. At least two groups of our planes were able to attack remnants of the Japanese Fleet taking refuge in the Kure Area, inflicting severe damage on a Heavy and Light Cruiser.

Four days later, extremely damaging blows were struck at the Jap Fleet in the Kure-Kobe Area of the inland sea. Then, on the night of July 29th, the Boston steamed in close to the mainland and participated in the bombardment of Hamamatsu, on Southern Honshu. She rejoined the Carriers the next day for strikes against Tokyo and Nagoya.

Bad weather dogged the fleet again. and for more than a week the Boston was idle off the coast of Japan. On August 9th she participated in a daylight bombardment of Kamaishi, steel center on Northern Honshu.

The next day, when the first reports of Japanese surrender came, the Boston was back with the Carriers aiding in air blows against Northern and Eastern Honshu.

More attacks against Tokyo and the Bay Area came on August 13th, and then the Fleet retired while peace rumors flew.

Returning to attack again on the 15th, the Carriers had already launched their first strike when the Third Fleet heard the final news of Japanese surrender. Thus the war ended for the Boston as she sailed directly off the coast of Japan- a position she had fought for and finally attained 21 months after she had left her name port for the Pacific.

On August 27th the Boston took her rightful place among the first group of ships to sail into Sagami Wan. dropping her anchor in that Japanese Harbor at 17 minutes after two in the afternoon.

The formal Japanese surrender was signed on September 2nd and the following day the Boston's final goal had been reached.

She anchored in Tokyo Bay on September 3rd, 1945.

But although the war was over the Boston was not to remain idle for long. There was still work to be done. A Task Unit composed of the Boston, two Destroyers and an Underwater Demolition Team embarked in a high speed (Destroyer) Transport, all commanded by Captain M. R. Kelley of the Boston, got underway from Tokyo Bay on September 8th for the Katskura, Sendai, Onahama and Chosi Areas on the East Coast of Honshu, Japan.

Their job was to inspect and insure the demilitarization of Japanese Coastal Defenses and Suicide Boat and Midget Submarine Bases.

Landing parties were formed and contacts made with Japanese Military Officials who provided information as to the location of these defenses. Inspection parties discovered caves jammed with small arms,

ammunition, torpedoes, mines, suicide boats and midget submarines. All were either destroyed or confiscated, as the work proceeded smoothly and efficiently under Captain Kelley's direction.

Anchored once more in Tokyo Bay, the Boston's now silent guns pointed towards the Japanese shore line. No threatening planes roared overhead. On deck, sailors pointed at misty Fujiyama in the distance. Others boarded liberty boats to go ashore and purchase souvenirs for the folks back home' knowing but not realizing, the freedom they bought for these same folks back home through long months of deprivations and warfare was more precious than the most expensive remembrance of conquered Japan.

The ship, the officers, the crew had all contributed to making this continued freedom possible.