

He Led

Task Force 58 *to Glory*

Pete Mitscher is modest and soft-spoken, but he blasted the Japs out of the Pacific

I WAS WITH Pete Mitscher and Task Force 58 for two years. I know them both well.

Pete Mitscher is little and skinny and he's got blue eyes and shaggy eyebrows and a wrinkled-up face. He hardly talks above a whisper, and from all he'd tell you, you'd never guess he was boss of the biggest naval force ever set loose in the Pacific. I'll never forget the day ace Vraciu shot down six Jap planes and landed on our carrier. Mitscher very politely asked the photographer, could he get his picture taken with Vraciu—just for his scrapbook, of course.

Quiet, and modest—but tough. They used to think a carrier was a hit-and-run fighter, but Pete changed that. He said "Hit 'em, and stay. Hit 'em again tomorrow." And he did. Our outfit knocked out 800 Jap ships and 4,500 planes in less than nine months. The Japs won't forget Pete Mitscher.

Nor will he forget them. He hates Japs. He wouldn't even look at prisoners we took on board.

Marc A. Mitscher was studying how to catapult planes in 1917. He wears a sheath knife he used in 1919, when he was piloting an NC-1 and his and three other planes tried the first hop from Newfoundland to the Azores. He didn't make it. That knife is the one he used to punch holes in a bucket to

Admiral Mitscher on Borad the Lexington



Admiral Mitscher

make a sea anchor. Some Greek ship picked him up. The point is, he was trying everything we're doing now, only *he* tried it 25 years ago.

Then the time came when we got together the biggest, fastest, toughest fleet the world has ever known. It had the best of everything that brains and muscle and courage and determination could fashion, and it set out one morning to do the biggest and most terrible job that men and guns had ever done. The head of that giant force was Pete Mitscher.

He blasted the Japs out of Truk. He skippered the ship that was Shangri-la for Doolittle's Tokyo raid. He hit them at the Marshalls, the Marianas, Saipan, the Bonins. He's proud of those things, but prouder still that he's been in love with his wife for 33 years.

He's a big guy who never forgets the little guy. Last year, during the first battle of the Philippines, some of our boys were coming back at night. It was so dark they couldn't spot the flattops, but if the searchlights went on the Japs could see the whole task force.

Pete said, "My boys have done a good job and I'll be damned if I don't do everything to get 'em back. Lights on!" On went the lights, and the boys got in safely.

—KEITH HARRIS

Coronet

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