

Pacific base. After much coming and going on Parliament Hill, it was decided that Aunt Daisy was the one for the job.

WARTIME security shrouded Aunt Daisy's third departure for the Americas. Finally, after waiting on tenterhooks at her hotel for what seemed endless hours, she was driven to the docks and taken aboard an American Liberty ship. The blacked-out vessel quietly slipped its moorings and slid out through the anti-submarine defences into a grey and possibly dangerous Pacific. Aunt Daisy meanwhile plumbd the depths of the ship and of the American sense of humour.

"The officer at the gangway read my papers," she says, "and said, 'Oh, yes, Mrs Basham, Stateroom number one, please.' I thought that sounded lovely. So I went down one flight of stairs, and then a steeper one, and finally an absolute ladder, I was in number one hold!"

The "stateroom" consisted of a partitioned area containing 27 bunks and lockers, a maze of steam and air-conditioning pipes, 19 home-going American nurses, and three New Zealand girls going to the U.S. to be married. It was all very different from Daisy's last stateroom in the luxurious Monterey, when she travelled to San Francisco only six years before.

Austere though it was, Aunt Daisy preferred present small mercies to might-have-beens. The Americans, as always, were courteous hosts. Major Merrill Moore, a psychiatrist by calling, had personally lugged up the gangway a case of canned fruit juice and instructed one of the nurses to make sure that Aunt Daisy took some each day. The cook filled her thermos bottle with hot water for the early morning tea she would not be without. She drank it in the washroom, where there were a couple of stools—the only place to sit except on her own lifebelt. Deck chairs were extravagances of the pre-war past.

The ship was without benefit of a bugler, but the days began with a verbal substitute, the loudspeaker announcing: "This is Revelly—this is Revelly." Soon afterwards the men would begin to form the "chow line" which wound past the galley for most of the day. Enlisted men received two meals daily, with coffee and crackers in between. Officers and ladies did better. Their meals were served at tables in the cramped dining room, thrice daily.

Among the stewards, Aunt Daisy's favourite was a grizzled Negro named Terry. He was very thin and tall, she says, and during a severe storm his skin turned from black to a strange shade of yellow. Once, when the ship steadied for a minute or two, a relief from the continuous, sickening motion, she said, "Why Terry, it's getting better, I think!" The steward turned up his eyes to heaven until only the whites seemed to show, and replied, "Miss Daisy, when our Lord was on this earth and there was a storm, He used to say, 'Peace! Be still!' An', Miss Daisy, I guess maybe He's saying it now."

AUNT DAISY spent her days on deck, sitting on her lifebelt listening to the GIs harmonising hillbilly songs, handing out gingersnits to the hungry, two-meals-a-day men, and happily watching the wounded grow well again in the benign sunshine and sea air.

At night she sometimes escaped from the heat and cigar-smoke of the packed dining-room on to the deck, but she ventured with caution. Echoing in her ears was the Chief Officer's warning, issued on the first day out: "There's not going to be any larking on this boat.

If anybody falls overboard, this ship don't stop to pick you up. That's the end of it; we go right on. We don't stop for anybody." No shipmaster, in fact, dared stop in mid-ocean in those days. His vessel would become a sitting target for the island-based submarines of Nippon. Daisy was careful not to venture far from the black-out screens by the dining room door. The voyage was a new experience, and exciting, therefore, but she was not altogether sorry when the ship moved, in a blazing sunset, through the Golden Gate into San Francisco.

Next morning, before the vessel docked, Aunt Daisy was whisked ashore by an officer from the New Zealand Legation and met at the quay by another New Zealander, Lieutenant-Colonel Halliwell, who escorted her to an hotel and informed her she had a press conference scheduled for eleven o'clock. Already it was a quarter to eleven, and she was horrified. "I couldn't face a press conference," she protested, "without a cup of tea! And I've got a ladder in my stocking. I must change them."

So the Colonel gallantly averted his eyes while Aunt Daisy changed hosiery, and gallantly joined her in a tooth-glass of luke-warm tea prepared from the packet she carried in her baggage. The water came from the hot tap over the wash basin. San Francisco in wartime was no place to obtain such exotic drinks as tea, especially if one was in a hurry. Nevertheless, the brew, forbidding though it was, had the desired effect. The press conference was an undoubted success, Daisy holding the cynical pressmen of San Francisco spellbound, and discovering afterwards that word of her coming had been flashed across the nation.

DURING this trip, Aunt Daisy recorded no fewer than 54 Morning Sessions, her programme going on the air in New Zealand each morning as if she had never left home. And she gave 26 broadcasts, one telecast, and numberless interviews directed at the Americans. "Someone from the New Zealand Legation went almost everywhere with me," she says. "I think they didn't dare leave me alone in case I wrecked the Empire or something."

She attended the launching of the 541st Victory ship from the Kaiser shipyards at Richmond, California, an unbelievably fast moving concern, which had been functioning for only three years. A ship was barely in the water before the keel was being laid for the next.

Daisy was mightily impressed by the speed, but not so much as Kaiser's workers were by the amount she packed into the lunch-time addresses she gave. For two of her listeners at Kaiser's Aunt Daisy's voice was a breath of home. They descended upon her quickly and introduced themselves — two Hawke's Bay girls marooned by the war while on holiday in California.

After the launching—the ship was named Mello Franco, after a former Brazilian Foreign Minister — Aunt Daisy attended a celebration luncheon. "We had fruit cocktails and celery and stuffed olives," she says, "and hot creamed lobster in the half-shell, and potato straws and plates of salad and hot asparagus rolls and butter; and ice cream and macaroons and coffee." The guests were entertained by performers chosen from among the yard workers—mostly professionals who had taken to industry for the duration. There was a song, "Smooth Sailing," for the benefit of the launching party and its ship, a Spanish love song for a handsome but embarrassed young lieutenant, and for Aunt Daisy a familiar air known as "Daisy Bell." She was taken by sur-

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VICK PRODUCTS INC.

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An open letter to

"AUNT DAISY"

from one of her American "nephews"

Your 21st Anniversary with the New Zealand Broadcasting Service must bring with it many memories.

You must be very proud — and justly so — to have participated so closely in the lives of so many New Zealanders over the past 21 years.

The young brides of twenty years ago — today's mothers of grown children — benefited from your hints and advice ... your poetry readings ... your accounting of the events of the day.

We feel privileged to have been a part of your life, and New Zealand life, for 16 years — a time we look on with great satisfaction and pleasure.

Through you, yesterday's families — along with the new ones now being formed — learned of Vicks VapoRub, and the comfort and relief from colds it always brings. We are grateful to have had our product — an ever modern remedy — associated with your personality, which is ever young.

We are already anticipating the pleasant memories that the many "tomorrows" will bring.

Very sincerely yours,

Ed Anderson

E.P. Anderson,
President.

