

on Jap soil," attempted to break through, were swung beam-on and capzised. The remainder, benefiting by their example, then concentrated on those points where there was a better lee, and before long the first marines were safely ashore. Almost immediately there was a rat-tat-tat of small-arms fire; but soon these became more and more sporadic, until about an hour later they finally died away, and it became obvious that the first objectives were secure in our hands.

First to Anchor in a Jap Harbour

Meanwhile there had been no let-up from the bombarding ships and aircraft, and the last fighters had strafed the beaches immediately prior to the assault craft touching down on first objectives. So the whole bombardment had lifted and moved to the next island to be taken. Having safely despatched the landing craft to the assault of the first islands the "Phelps'" next duty was to force an entrance into the lagoon, and take up a pre-arranged position where the next group of landing craft could rendezvous. As we steamed slowly through, now accompanied by minesweepers, everyone was keeping an almost sharper look-out than ever. This was the point, we decided, where the enemy would have placed every trap in the way of mines and under-water obstructions, to stop us and leave us a fitting target for his shore batteries. But almost before we had had time to realize our good fortune we were safely through the narrow channel and inside the roomy waters of the lagoon itself. From there on it was a comparatively simple task to arrive at the point from which to launch the next attack, and as we were receiving no interference from shore batteries the anchor was let go, the first U.S. ship to anchor in a Jap harbour in this war.

It was a strange and unforgettable sight inside that lagoon. There sat the "Phelps," rather like a dignified old duck with all her ducklings splashing and scuffling around her. I couldn't help thinking what a wonderful cartoon Walt Disney would have made of it all. From the entrance we had just come through, more and more ducklings were streaming in towards us, freed at last

from their long captivity in their parent ships. There they came in hundreds splashing along, darting this way and that, and, as you always find in even the best organized circles, the occasional Donald either late or strutting around just avoiding collisions with some one else. On three sides we were surrounded by coral reefs and palm-tree islands. Some of these islands, particularly Roi and Namu, were belching smoke from oil-tanks which had been hit. All, with the exception of two we had already captured, were being systematically pounded with shells and bombs. Outside, beyond the atoll ring, we could see transports steaming to and fro from battleships and cruisers. Occasionally they would be hidden by an island and the flash of their guns would give an impression of having been fired from the island itself. Then, a moment later, they would have cleared from behind to be plainly visible among the white breakers and coral reefs, with great flashes and clouds of yellow cordite smoke issuing from their guns. And again, from beyond them, from carriers away on the horizon, dive-bombers and fighters were continually streaming in to drop their loads and return for more.

Off to the next Islands

Then suddenly a terrific explosion, the loudest I have ever heard in my life, shook and rocked the lagoon, and an enormous volume of white and black smoke shot up as from Namu and belched outwards into a colossal mushroom. Debris and bodies could be seen spinning round like straws in a gale. Obviously a very large ammunition dump had been hit. By now all the landing craft were in position and, at a signal from "Phelps," they steamed off in perfect formation towards the next islands to be captured. Just as in the morning attacks, covering fire from larger craft and fighters cleared the way before them, and by dusk all the scheduled objectives were in our hands. And so, as the night closed down, "Phelps," a few minesweepers, and some of the largest assault landing craft remained inside the lagoon, while the larger ships watched from outside and the small amphibious assault craft were