

## THE ATTU CAMPAIGN

At this time, preparations were being made for the Aleutians campaign which resulted in the recapture of Attu and subsequently of other Aleutian Islands. Extreme secrecy of something was evidently in the air: "scuttle-butt" flew thick and fast since it was necessary to take aboard an ample supply of cold-weather gear and since this added fuel to the flames of rumor. The Captain allowed himself to be seen studying maps of the North Atlantic. This bit of "red herring" on his part served to allay the suspicions of many. Still, after the NASSAU had trained off the West Coast from April 17 to 22, speculation was greatly increased. Accordingly, the ship made a quick trip into San Diego on the evening of April 22 and left early the next morning, with no one having gone ashore. .On April 23, then, the NASSAU, the AYLWIN and WILLIAMSON (DD 244) left San Diego steaming for Alaska. On the same day this group fell in with the PENNSYLVANIA (BB 38) and her escorts to make up Task Group 51.1. Two days later a rendezvous was made with four troop-laden transports and their destroyer screen. It was on this trip that the engineering plant of the NASSAU suddenly developed difficulties which would ordinarily have required extensive navy yard availability for repair. Under the leadership of the Chief Engineer, Lieut. (now Lieut. Comdr.) Leslie W. Rivard, USNR, of Alien Park, Michigan, the repairs were effected while the ship maintained her position in formation. For this feat, all officers and men of the Engineering Department were commended by Commander Air Forces, Pacific Fleet. On the last day of April, Task Group 51.1 anchored in the harbor at Cold Bay, Alaska. It sailed from Cold Bay on May 4, bound for Attu. This expedition was a memorable one. The weather was cold, the seas rough. Then, too, there were a number of "firsts" which the NASSAU chalked up during the Aleutians campaign. By virtue of her participation therein, she became the first escort carrier to sail in Alaskan waters; the first to operate aircraft in that area; and the first escort carrier to participate in an amphibious landing. At dawn on D-Day, May 11, the NASSAU and her screen were about ten miles east of Attu. In spite of heavy fog and resultant poor visibility and light, she launched three flights of fighters that day. Each time a group returned to the ship, they were literally "sweated" aboard by all who were watching. Some pilots reported they could not see the ship until they came down to the level of the top of the ship's mast. The Landing Signal Officer, Lieut. Rolla S. Lemmon, USN, (subsequently lost in action while leading his own squadron) was indeed busy those days. Despite adverse weather conditions, the NASSAU'S Composite Squadron 21 continued to support the ground troops by strafing and bombing from May 11 through May 20. On only three of those days were no flight operations conducted, and then because of the fogs having completely closed in all targets on the island. During the first six days of operations, eight planes were lost, three of whose pilots were recovered. These losses and the courageous work of the pilots inspired the following message to the NASSAU on May 17 from Rear Admiral Rockwell, Commander of Task Force 51:

**"SHARE YOUR REGRET FOR PILOT LOSSES X MY PERSONAL ADMIRATION  
FOR HEROIC WORK OF YOUR PILOTS X YOU HAVE EVERY REASON TO BE  
PROUD OF NASSAU PERFORMANCE AND HAVE FILLED A VERY VITAL GAP**

**DURING BRIEF INTERVALS WHEN HOLTZ BAY WAS OPEN WHILE ARMY AIR  
UNABLE REACH THIS AREA AND OUR TROOPS IN CRITICAL POSITION SIGNED  
ROCKWELL X"**

**A total of III missions were flown by pilots of VC 21. All members of the squadron were subsequently given citations for their achievements. Two officers of the ship's company were also given personal commendations by Admiral Rockwell: Lieut. Comdr. (now Commander) Howard E. Born, USN, of Long Island, New York, who directed flight operations as Air Officer; and Lieut. (now Lieut. Comdr.) John A. Adair, USNR, of Mobile, Alabama, who was Communications Officer. When fleet communications were about to break down, the NASSAU'S Communications Department, under Lieut. Adair's supervision, took over the job of relaying messages to all units, with great success. None aboard the NASSAU felt a tinge of regret when the ship was ordered to Adak with her screen on May 20. When the group arrived off Adak late on the following day, it was directed to rendezvous northeast of Adak the morning of May 22 with the PENNSYLVANIA and other ships of Task Force 51. The formation proceeded through Amukta Pass and returned to the United States, the NASSAU reaching San Diego on the morning of May 31. Late in the Attu Campaign, provisions aboard the NASSAU became low. Ostensibly ample stores had been taken aboard in the States prior to her departure, but the appetites of officers and men while up north exceeded all expectations. In fact, hardly a man aboard did not put on considerable weight as a result of hearty eating. During the last two weeks prior to the ship's arrival in San Diego, however, all hands were treated to a meat diet of ham and a well-known meat product whose name is anathema to most men who have been overseas. Still, as may have already been suspected, no one suffered.**