

45123 5
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITS OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF
NAVAL SEA AND AIR ACTION IN THE PACIFIC

From hundreds of thousands of official Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps photographs of our war in the Western seas, the men who fight it and the weapons they use--ships, guns, airplanes--Captain Edward Steichen, USNR, made the final selection of 156 murals which, arranged in dramatic sequence, compose the exhibition Power in the Pacific: Battle Photographs of our Navy in Action on the Sea and in the Sky, opening today (Wednesday, January 24) at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. Assembled and directed by Captain Steichen, in charge of Naval Aviation Photography, the exhibition has a brief commentary by Lieutenant Roark Bradford, USNR.

Lieutenants V. H. Jorgensen, USNR, and W. E. McNaught, USNR, assisted in the preparation of the exhibition, and Lieutenant G. E. Kidder Smith, USNR, designed the installation.

In acknowledging the magnificent cooperation of the Navy, which made the exhibition possible, Monroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions for the Museum, said:

"The Museum of Modern Art is proud to collaborate with Captain Steichen and the Navy Department in presenting an exhibition which attains new heights in photographic achievement. These masterful views of naval action and the men responsible for it, are almost miraculous in their power to bring the noncombatant close to the thrilling actualities of the war in the Pacific."

Most of the photographs in the exhibition have been taken by enlisted men of the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. In addition, Captain Steichen's unit of officer-photographers has contributed numerous pictures, as have many anonymous men of the services, including those in Navy planes whose automatic cameras operated while they were firing at enemy planes and bombing enemy ships and installations. As it was impossible to ascertain the names of all of the photographers who took the pictures shown, none of the pictures is credited by name to any of the photographers.

Lieutenant Bradford writes in his introduction to the exhibition:

"Here is the war in the Western seas, and here are the men who fight it. Here are the tools of the warriors' trade--

the guns, the ships, the airplanes. Here is the force that America sent into Far East waters--Midway, Saipan, Guadalcanal, the beach of bloody Tarawa, Lingayen Gulf, and Guam and Truk, and far-off gloomy Formosa. Yesterday these men were boys; today they are seasoned warriors. Yesterday the airplanes were but lines on a thousand blueprints; today they sting the air with death, and shake the earth with blastings. Yesterday the ships lay stacked in piles of shapeless metal; today they cleave the trackless sea, belching steel and brimstone against the slimy fever swamps, the mountain caves, the jungle."

Like the remarkable motion picture Fighting Lady, filmed by a staff of Navy photographers under the direction of Captain Steichen, the exhibition brings the civilian into the war with immediacy and an overwhelming sense of reality. The film, however, rushes the spectator on from action to action without a moment's pause to examine more closely a detail-packed sequence or to return to an exciting scene or a poignant face. The exhibition--which depicts an operation with the Navy in the Pacific rather than the life of a carrier, as in Fighting Lady--catches the brief moment and holds it forever.

The huge photographs, some of them 6 feet by 8 feet, take the visitor through the full circle of preparation, attack and return by men, ships and planes of our Navy in the Pacific. Certain pictures stand out: the giant battleship--an armored fortress bristling with death; fighter pilots on the run at the order: "Pilots, man your planes!"; an idyllic scene of luminous clouds and sunlit sea on which small boats seem to float gently--actually a tremendous convoy of powerful engines and materials of war, cargo ships, destroyers and transports.

Some idea of the tremendous size of an aircraft carrier is indicated by a picture below deck which shows in the foreground crews at work on planes, fusing torpedoes, and making ready these great birds of destruction, while in the background the crew off duty peacefully watches a motion picture program. There are magnificent pictures at close range, both at night and in the daytime, of the big guns being fired from battleships.

In one of the most remarkable photographic shots of this war, the spectator seems to be only a few hundred feet above the flight deck of a Jap carrier. The camouflage, painted to resemble guns and other parts of a battleship, is seen as flat shadow marks on the deck, and tremendous billows of smoke rise from the side of the ship where it has been struck by a torpedo. An enemy bomb hit on the deck of one of our own carriers seems to burst right in the lens of the camera, so close is the shot.

Another panel of pictures brings us into the crowded interior

of a submarine close beside the commander, whose eyes are glued to the periscope. Then we see a series of photographs taken through the periscope, with torpedoed and sinking Jap ships athwart the cross bars of the lens.

The war strikes home poignantly in pictures of our wounded and dead. The broken body of a Coast Guardsman hangs lifeless over the edge of his wrecked battle station. Shrouded forms lie in a row at the edge of the deck awaiting the final solemnity of burial at sea.

The sequence moves on to the living. Pilots return, some to relax, others to wait tensely for word of those who may never come back. The exhibition ends with the full circle swung and beginning again: ships made ready and pilots alerted to man their planes.

Although one series of photographs often merges into the next, the exhibition progresses from sequence to sequence somewhat as follows:

1. Personalities: Warriors and tools of war on a battleship.
2. "Alert! Pilots man planes."
3. Our fleet under attack by Japs. A series of Jap torpedo planes attacks one of our carriers.
4. Bombardment of Jap-held island by our carrier planes.
5. Our surface ships bombard Jap-held islands prior to invasion.
6. Invasion. The Coast Guard.
7. Marines take Tarawa.
8. Plasma for the wounded.
9. Our planes attack Jap fleet, sink carriers and other warships.
10. Japs attack us.
11. Submarine and periscope series.
12. Our planes return.
13. Wounded and dead. Burial at sea.
14. Another day, and preparations for a new attack.
15. "Alert! Pilots man planes."

After the exhibition closes at the Museum on March 18, it will be sent on a tour of other museums and art galleries throughout the country.

From his early 'teens, Edward Steichen, born in Michigan in 1879 and schooled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, had a way with a camera. He was also a painter, but in 1898 after his paintings had been refused exhibition in the Chicago Art Institute, all the photographs he sent to the Philadelphia Photographic Salon were accepted. That marked the beginning of public recognition of his genius with the lens, which steadily rose until he became probably the most noted photographer in the world.

At the beginning of this century Steichen brought his camera

and paint brushes to New York. The next year an exhibition of his photographs was held in London and he soon followed them abroad, travelling over Europe photographing and making friends of the great people of the day. He returned to New York and made that city his headquarters until he entered our air service in the first World War. He was in the first group of American air corps sent to France and during the second battle of the Marne was made chief of the Photographic Division. The clarity and detail demanded by aerial work gave him a new concept of photography and, in 1920, he gave up painting to devote all his time to the other art.

When the second World War broke out in 1939, Steichen had retired from the active practice of photography and was devoting his life to the development of new races of delphinium. His delphiniums were the only flower exhibition ever held (in 1936) at the Museum of Modern Art.

The attack on Pearl Harbor, however, put a stop to his peaceful pursuit of flower-breeding. Steichen had come out of the first World War an Army Colonel. He again applied for active service in the Army but was refused because of his age. Later he was invited by the Navy to head a special Naval Aviation photographic unit. He was commissioned a Lieutenant-Commander in January 1942 and later that year directed for the Museum of Modern Art the memorable Road to Victory exhibition which has since travelled throughout the world, in five duplicate versions. In December 1943 Captain Steichen was on combat service in the Pacific aboard an aircraft carrier which was torpedoed in action.

Captain Steichen selected his unit of six officer-photographers who gave up their work as top-flight photographers in various parts of the country to serve under him in making one of the most brilliant and comprehensive photographic records ever produced of the United States at war. One of these officers (sometimes irreverently called "Steichen's chickens") was in charge of the camera crew that did most of the actual filming of the Fighting Lady, the brilliant documentary released by Twentieth-Century-Fox.