

SINKING OF DESTROYER DESCRIBED

Howard Dodd, Jr. of Tyler Swims in Shark-Infested Waters, But Rescued

An interesting resume of the hectic experience he had when the destroyer Vincennes was sent to the bottom of the Pacific off Tulagi harbor in the Solomon Islands by the Japs, along with two other cruisers on Aug. 9, is set out in a letter which Ens. Howard Dodd, Jr., has written his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Dodd of Tyler.

Howard, Jr. is a grandson of Mrs. Jennie Dodd of Beat Five in Lee County.

Ensign Dodd was in the shark-infested waters of the Pacific eight hours before he was rescued.

Sinking of the Vincennes was announced by the Navy Department two weeks ago.

His letter in full is as follows:

October 12, 1942

"Dear Folks:

"I see by the papers that they have finally announced our loss, so I can tell you a few details of the affair.

"I was on watch in the forward engine room when general quarters sounded, and it didn't take me long to get to my battle station in the machine shop passageway, where I was in charge of a damage control and ammunition supply party. Early in the action No. 4 fire-room, whose escape hatch was right by us, took a torpedo which injured only one man; the rest of them came up in our passageway. We were really pouring the ammunition through there when we were able, but by the time we had taken our first two hits in the passageway, our light had gone out and we had so many dead and injured; we couldn't do much more. Besides, the ammunition hoist was on fire, so we couldn't send any more up. When we saw that we couldn't do any more there, we went up on deck with our wounded. Things were going pretty badly up there; we were getting hit everywhere. Eventually the Japs stopped firing at us, and we could size up the situation. By the time I got on deck a good many people had already abandoned ship, so a few of us in my party were going around putting life jackets on the wounded and throwing them over. We were listing pretty heavily to port by this time, so I went on back to the fantail where my abandon ship station

and raft were. All the rafts but one were gone by this time, so a seaman and I started up to the boat deck to cut it loose, when suddenly we took a heavier list than ever. We decided that if we were ever going to leave that ship, we'd better do it pretty quickly. So we went over the starboard side.

"I started swimming away as fast as I could, because I'd always heard about the suction that a ship creates in going down, but I didn't feel the suction. Floated around a while, it was pretty dark, couldn't see anything, but there were a lot of people screaming all around, which sounded pretty bad, particularly since I couldn't do anything for them. It wasn't long before a kid came swimming along without a life jacket. I had him hold onto mine, and we picked up various pieces of wood later on, also an ammunition tin. We were in the water about eight hours before a destroyer came along to pick us up. Incidentally, we were among the last to be picked up.

"It was a bad experience to go through, I'll guarantee. The whole time out there in the water, I kept thinking 'Now this isn't supposed to be happening to me; it happens to people you read about in the papers and in Time and Life. It just can't be happening to me.' This kid with me, I never did find out his name, and I talked about our chances very calmly and we sang, 'One Dozen Roses' and 'Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree,' most of all. It's a funny thing, but you get just so scared that you get to a point where you get pretty calm and pretty brave. By the time I came up on deck I had gotten to the point where I didn't think I had a chance in the world to get out alive and realizing that no matter what I did I was a goner anyway. I could walk around and help those people with legs and arms gone and cut all open without it bothering me a bit. The night at dinner on another ship, I did some funny things. Of course, I had been drinking coffee and smoking furiously ever since being picked up, but at dinner I sprinkled sugar all over my plate and put salt and pepper in my iced tea, and then several times I put the match in my mouth and tried to strike the cigarette on the box. It took a few days to get back to normal, even though I wasn't hurt. My only injuries were getting my eyebrows and hair slightly singed and got a few small pieces of shrapnel in my face. None of them even made a scar.

"There were six of us who lived in the bunkroom, and two of them didn't make it off. I lost a good many of my men, but the engineers usually lose more than the deck forces. One of those two of my roommates was one of the boys from the Prairie state.

"I did save some money; I had my wallet in my pocket. The first day of the battle one of my boys showed me where he had his money hidden in a money belt around his waist; commented that it was his beer money in Sydney. So the next time I was in my room I took my money out of the safe and luckily carried it all the way through.

"Maybe this account is filled with too much 'I saw' and 'I did' so don't get the idea that I was any kind of a hero about it. I was scared to death and am not ashamed to admit it. Please keep this and show it around to those who are interested. It's too hard to think over the whole thing to write to every-