

TYPHOON VIPER – From the diary of SKD1 Bob Beachkovski. Typhoon Viper (June 4-6, 1945) was a massive Category 5 typhoon that veered right and then left east of Taiwan as it split in two. The first part Viper dissipated June 4, 1945. Beachkovski had the mid-watch the morning of June 5, 1945 when to the second part of Viper made contact with the US Fleet about 0130 in the morning. The muscular man worked frantically to hold the Frank Knox on course as the storm intensified. “I couldn’t hold her sometimes – a second person had to help hold the wheel. God, that was a long night. Waves towered over us! The next morning, I looked out and saw the carrier (USS Hornet VV-8) had a bent flight deck! God, were we lucky.” During that same night the heavy cruiser Pittsburgh CA-72 lost her bow forward of MT 51. Ships rolled a reported 70 degrees in some areas. Aboard another destroyer an emergency appendectomy was performed in 30 ft troughs and 50-degree rolls. By 0930 the storm was headed NE passing the fleet close enough to expose the ships to winds of extreme velocity leaving behind heavy seas and a damaged fleet, 33 ships damaged, 76 planes lost, 6 lives lost and 4 men seriously injured. Admiral Halsey, fleet commander, quickly messaged Guam addressed to Fleet Admiral Nimitz identifying delays in 11th hour, urgent warnings delayed by coding regulations. Halsey had urged formation of regular reconnaissance squadrons after Typhoon Cobra the year before which mauled his fleet in December 1944. In no uncertain terms he repeated his recommendations after Typhoon Viper. History will forever link Halsey with two of the worst typhoons and damage the US Navy ever sustained. Beachkovski closes with a defense of Halsey saying “No man could have predicted the course of that storm or the fact it split in two.” The Frank Knox sustained damage but not as serious as many ships. Beachkovski remembers that mid-watch almost minute by minute. You can read the book “Halsey’s Typhoons” but Beachkovski recollections bring the storm to life as he hung on to the ship’s wheel. Bob’s diary will be on our website ussfranknox.com for you to read soon joining Irv Eisenberg and Gerald Harms in our living history section.

IS YOUR STORY BEING TOLD?

“ When I was a boy it seemed likely to me That the logical place for the Navy was to be at sea. So, I joined a destroyer but did not enjoy her. The way that the wind and the waves did annoy her, and me.

Then somebody said “The Navy that’s grand is the Navy ashore And your artistic nature can stand is the Navy ashore.

So, after the war I went for a cruise on the land.”