

Crossing the Equator



THE *USS Colahan* crossed the equator at 0715 on 1 September 1944. It happened at 155° east longitude on the northern fringes of Melanesia. The occasion had to be celebrated. She was carrying a load of Pollywogs, about 300 of them, and boisterous festivities were held the next day, on 2 September, aboard the underway warship. King Neptune's Court was set up on the fantail. "Davey Jones" and "Neptunus Rex," with assistance from no more than 30 costumed Shellback veterans who had crossed the equator at some time in the past, summoned the *Colahan's* Pollywogs. It was noted that the ship carried an especially "large and loathsome cargo" of landlubbers, beachcombers, sea lawyers, lounge lizards, plow deserters, parkbench warmers, chicken chasers, hay tossers, fourflushers, crossword puzzle bugs, dancehall shieks, drugstore cowboys and asphalt arabs. And each of these "low scum" speci-

mens, these creatures of despicable land, was expected to "accept most heartily and with good grace the pains and penalties of the awful tortures that will be inflicted to determine your fitness to be one of our Trusty Shellbacks." The meek Pollywogs were dunked into water-filled rubber rafts and whacked with shillelaghs that had been

fashioned for the occasion. Even officers were not exempt from the hazing. Below, Graham Stephenson calmly and stoically strolls through the gauntlet and takes his licks. A few months later, LTJG Stephenson would be awarded a Bronze Star medal for his actions when the *Colahan* went to rescue of the kamikaze-smashed *USS Hazelwood*.



Excerpted from *The Original Tomcat* by Jackson Sellers. Photos courtesy of Bob McDonald.