

# ALL HANDS

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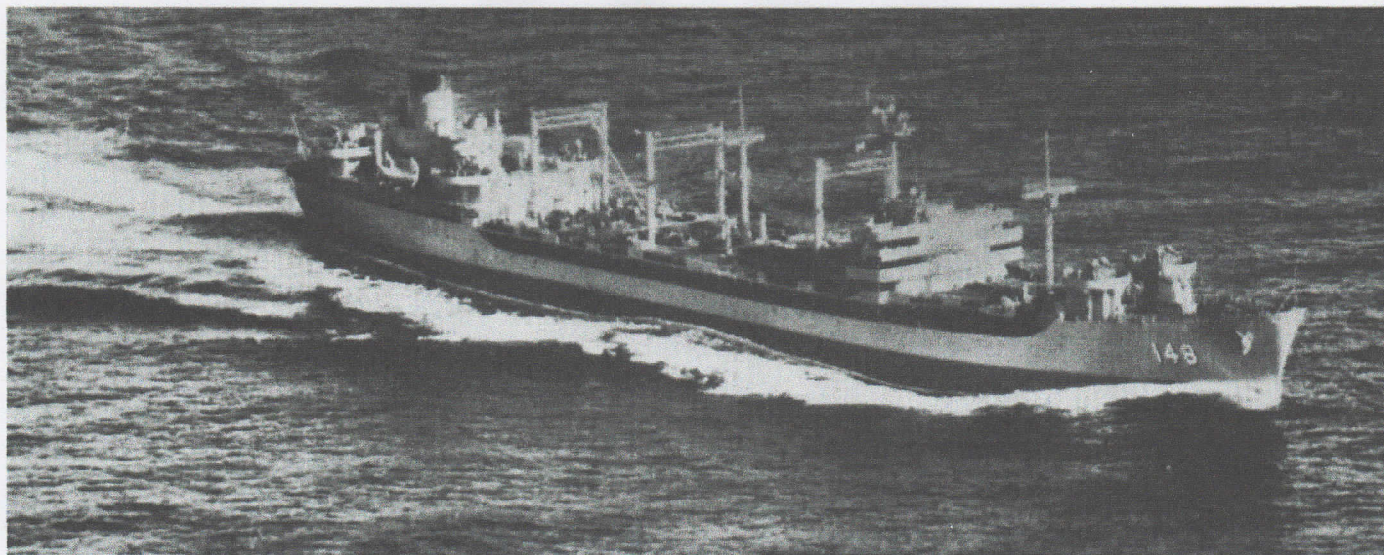
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● **FRONT COVER: WORLD-WIDE FRIENDS** is the theme of this month's issue. To illustrate our point, we couldn't resist a reprint of this Navyman and Korean friend, who first appeared in the April 1956 issue of *All Hands*.

● **AT LEFT: WORLD-WIDE FRIENDSHIP-Top:** Children of Far East find new friend. Friendly business at Port Lyautey. Greetings in Japan. **Center:** Greek and U.S. Navyman join in handshaking. Sailor toasts Bavarian friends. **Bottom:** Scotsman and Navyman have good time with bagpipes. Arab friend shows sailor how to use water pipe. French and U.S. sailors chat.

● **CREDITS:** All photographs published in *ALL HANDS* are official Department of Defense Photos unless otherwise designated.





OILER TURNED TUG — AO 148 steams to the rescue of merchantman caught between two typhoons in Pacific.

## Navy Lends Helping Hand

**A** TYPHOON TO THE RIGHT, a gale to the left. Ahead is a 7600-ton Panamanian merchant ship drifting helplessly on the rolling Pacific Ocean. Your orders are to render assistance to the merchant vessel, but you are not commanding a giant Fleet tug, not even a small one. Your ship is a heavily loaded Fleet oiler displacing about 34,000 tons.

If you were standing on the bridge how would you render assistance? Would you take off her crew to leave the ship abandoned on the wide sweep of the ocean? Or would you steam to the helpless ship and take her in tow, letting the unlimited capabilities of your crew make up for the lack of specialized equipment?

The latter course is the one steamed by CAPT W. R. Wilson, USN, former commanding officer of USS *Ponchatoula* (AO 148), after receiving orders to assist SS *Venus*. The tanker's crew responded with good seamanship and for 54 hours the Navy ship towed *Venus* across the Pacific without damage, injury or unexpected incident. Captain Wilson isn't sure, but he suspects that this tow may be the first for an AO type ship.

*Ponchatoula*, out of Long Beach, Calif., was steaming at 17.5 knots for Sasebo, Japan, when she received a message order to go to the assistance of *Venus*. The steamer was 160 miles to the southeast, rolling in rough seas after losing her propeller.

About 360 miles to the south was a gale growing rapidly to typhoon force and size and 1300 miles to the west, Typhoon Harriet was moving steadily north and eastward.

*Venus* had loaded coal at Norfolk, Va., and was en route to Yawata when the propeller casualty occurred and the Panamanian freighter had to radio for help. Language problems immediately cropped up as *Ponchatoula* turned her bow toward the crippled ship. It took two hours of constant broadcasting by the radio gang to learn that she was 450 feet long, displaced 7631 tons and was built in Chester, Pa. The crew on the merchant ship was Filipino and her "communication gang" consisted of one man who doubled in radio and on the signal bridge.

With *Ponchatoula* steaming toward the drifting ship the first lieutenant, Lieutenant Wesley H. Singletary, USN, and his assistant Chief Boatswain Ernest L. Dexter, USN, reviewed the towing bill (issued earlier that year when the oiler was commissioned) with the crew. Details of picking up the helpless ship lying in the trough of a medium to heavy sea were gone over and the towing gear laid out. Down in the engineroom everything was double-checked to insure that nothing would fail during the delicate maneuvers ahead. By the eight o'clock reports all departments reported "ready for towing" to the captain.

The deck force had fabricated a

messenger line consisting of 50 fathoms each of nine and 21-thread line, three-, five- and eight-inch line, all joined together by taper splices made up by the boatswain's mates. The small end of this messenger was led out through the stern chock where the eight-inch line was faked down, led forward and stopped off on the life line and the rest faked down free for running to starboard. The eight-inch messenger was shackled to the outboard end of the 145 fathoms of 2¼-inch tow wire. Mauls, tackle, shackles, heaving lines, line-throwing guns and stoppers were also readied.

While these preparations were being made, ocean station ship *Victor*, a Coast Guard vessel, had started steaming for the west edge of the station area to be close by if needed. USS *Yancey* (AKA 93), also in the area, was ordered to give all assistance possible, but the nearness of *Ponchatoula* made this unnecessary.

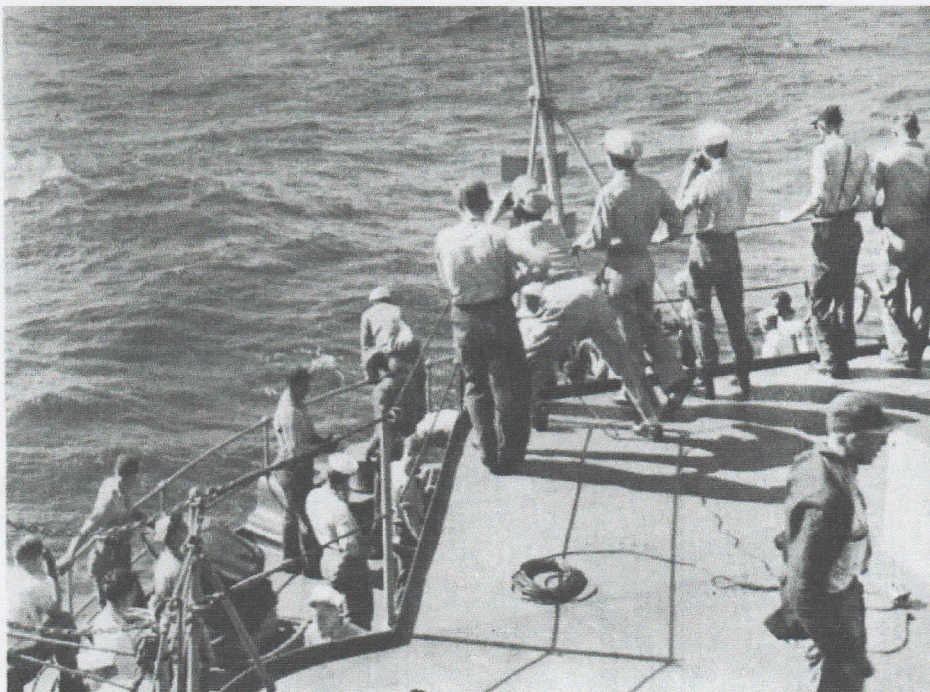
Shortly before midnight *Ponchatoula* lookouts sighted the lights of *Venus* and the ship hove to about 2500 yards astern of the merchant ship. Radio discussions revealed that the Panamanian freighter did not have any towing gear other than her anchor chain.

At 0600 the Navy tanker was ready to tow the wallowing merchant ship, but was forced to wait when it became apparent that *Venus* had not readied any of her gear. Two



hours later the merchant crew had unshackled the anchor and suspended it on the round of the bow and were ready to receive the messenger.

As soon as *Venus* was ready *Ponchatoula* began her approach from the port quarter. It was CAPT Wilson's intention to cross the *Venus* bow at a distance of about 100 yards. The quartermaster's notebook shows that at 0748 the tanker came ahead one-third (five knots) on a course of 025°. As the range decreased to 1400 yards the heading was decreased to 029° and then to 021°. At 0808 the range to the *Venus* port quarter was less than 100 yards and both engines were reversed to check the ship's forward motion. While passing about 50 to 75 yards off the port bow, the Navy



## on the High Seas

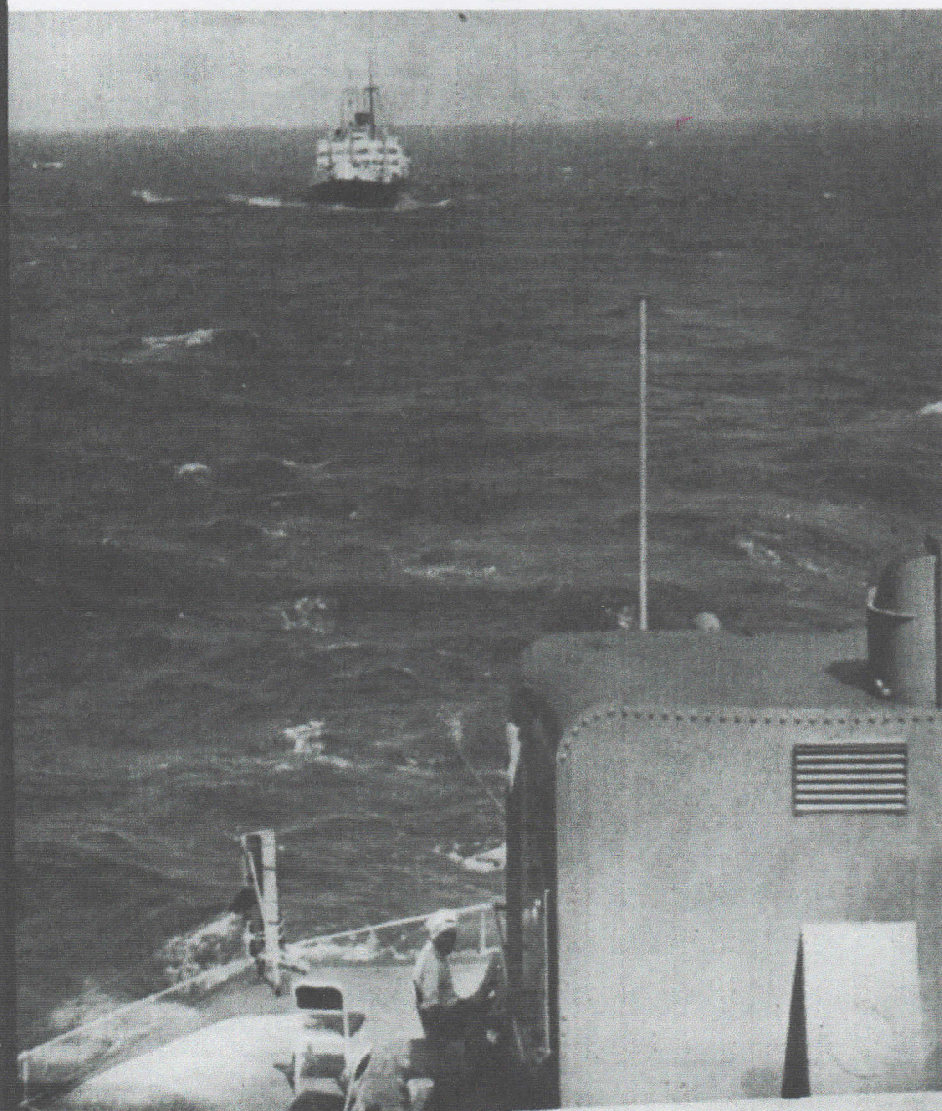
deck gang fired a gun line messenger over to *Venus* at 0811.

The nine- and 21-thread messengers were quickly drawn across to the forecable of *Venus*, followed by the three-inch line and then the crew began cutting away the stops holding the five-inch messenger. The tanker continued across the bow of the becalmed merchant ship and took up station slightly on her starboard bow. Delicate use of her engines allowed the tanker to maintain a distance of no more than 200 yards.

According to the *Ponchatoula* log, *Venus* had the five-inch messenger in hand at 0820 and the eight-inch line five minutes later. *Ponchatoula* already had payed out 60 fathoms of towing wire and when the wire reached the *Venus* hawse pipe, 145 fathoms of wire had been unreeling and passed through the stern chock.

The stern of the tanker was a busy place as the wire started its trip across to *Venus*. Owing to the limited space available it was impossible to fake down the wire on the stern. Consequently the wire was fed off the reel on the 02 level, down a ladder on the starboard side, fairled around the capstan and then out through the stern chock. At the bottom of the ladder the plow steel towing wire, weighing more than eight pounds per foot, made its turn through a shackle on the end of an eight-inch manila lizard which was tied down to nearby bits.

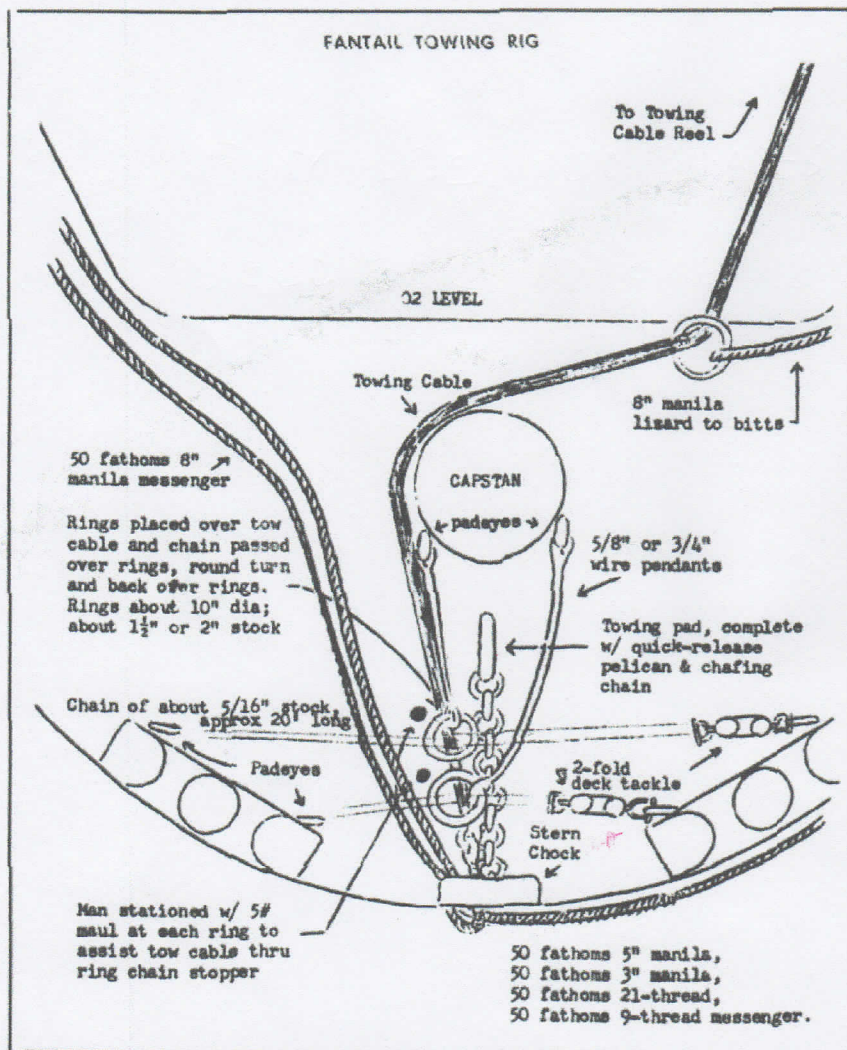
Without a controlling device, in this case ring stoppers, the heavy wire would soon be out of control



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and rush out through the stern chock like a bolt of lightning. In fabricating these "ring stoppers" the *Poncha-toula's* crew attached two wire pendants to padeyes on either side of the capstan with 10-inch rings spliced into the end of each. Two lengths of chain (5/16 inch stock) were shackled to padeyes on the portside. Each made a round turn about the towing cable, continued to a two-fold tackle where it was secured to the shackle with two round turns and then returned to the wire for another round turn before being returned to the portside padeye. Both wires pass through and over the rings in the end of the pendants. (See figure above.)

By hauling in on the tackle the light chain would tighten around the wire binding the cable in the ring. The weight of the wire would be passed to the two pendants and the movement of the cable stopped. During the passing of the wire a man was stationed at each ring

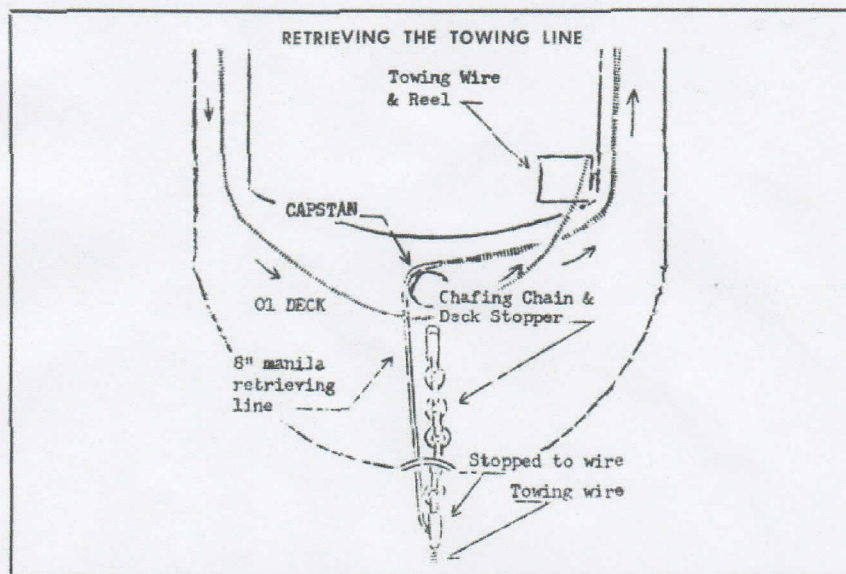
stopper with a five-pound maul to assist its passage.

The ring stoppers, which had been made up by the crew the night before, controlled the wire until the

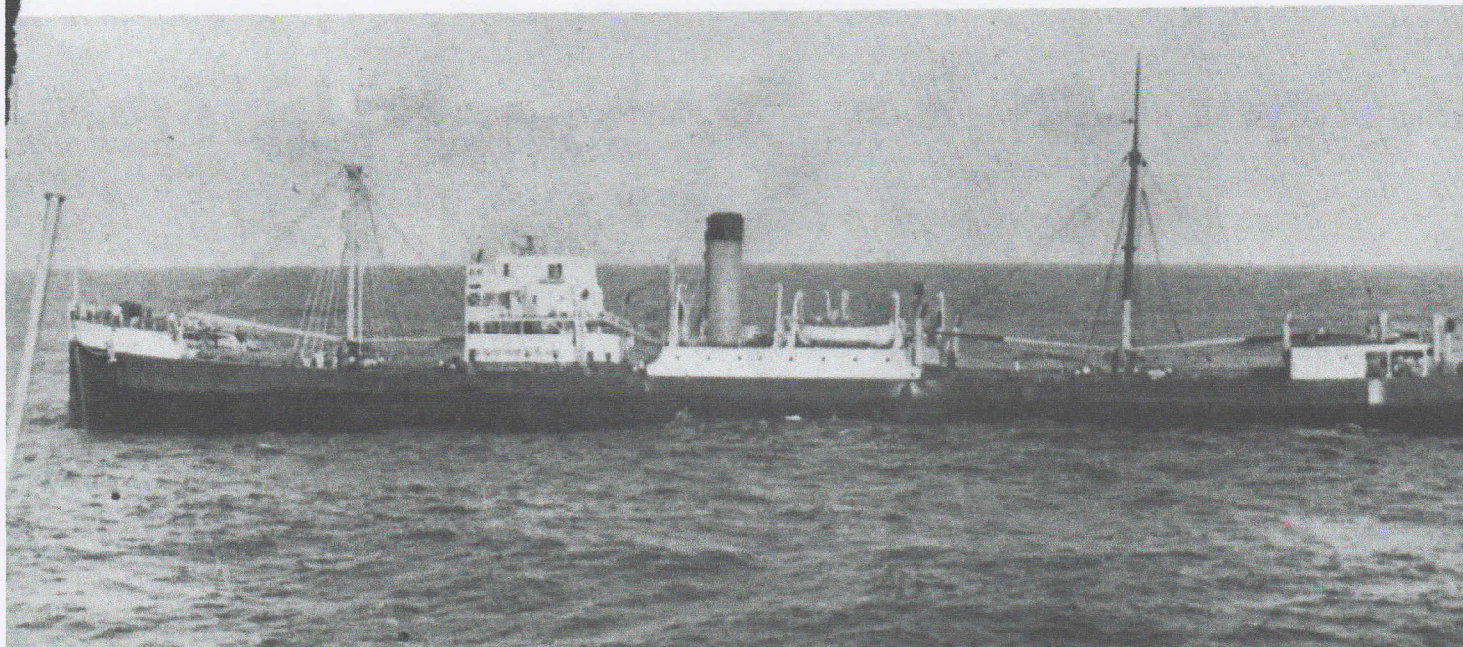
bitter end left the reel. The eight-inch lizard was then placed around the capstan (several turns) and assisted by an eight-inch retrieving line, eased the wire into position so that it could be shackled to the chafing chain attached to the towing pad. The two lines were then used to ease the tow rig into position and left in place to assist recovery.

More than an hour was lost while the *Venus* crew tried to maneuver the heavy wire through her hawse pipe already filled with the anchor chain. A visual message suggesting that they attach the wire to the anchor chain outboard of the hawse pipe brought back this message emphasizing the language problem, "ANCHOR IS NOT NO LONGER CONNECTED COS YOUR BIG MESSENGER LINE SOME STRANDS BROKEN X BEING REINFORCED TO GO THROUGH HAWSE PIPE SHACKLE TO BITTER END OF CHAIN."

At 0945 the connection had been made and 55 fathoms of anchor chain had been veered out, later to be increased to 80 fathoms. *Poncha-toula* had drifted across the bow of *Venus* and was heading about west when speed was gradually increased in small increments until the oiler was making 47 turns. This slow increase in speed was used to bring *Venus* around onto the same heading as the tanker without throwing too much strain on the tow wire. Much of this strain was absorbed by the catenary (dip in the tow line) and chain which served as a spring, taking up sudden jerks in the towline because of wind and sea action.







TOW 'TARGET'—SS *Venus* presented an unforeseen problem when it turned out her crew understood little English.

At 1534 *Ponchatoula* and her train had settled down on a southwesterly heading after making the course change in five-degree increments. At 1724 the storm lying about 350 miles to the southwest was identified as *Typhoon Ivy*. The wind had been hauling to the southward and by late afternoon was blowing at 20 knots from the southeast.

This beam wind caused the steersman on the tanker to exercise every bit of his training to keep from parting the tow as he answered orders. The wind would cause *Venus* to sheer to port. When this happened the helm was put over and *Ponchatoula's* stern swung toward *Venus* to ease the strain, but it had to be met smartly or the stern would swing past and the strain would be repeated. Once the wire was straightened the tanker would then attempt to bring *Venus* back on course.

About 1900 *Ponchatoula* began changing course to the left in five-degree increments and settled down on 160°, a heading closer to the wind and designed to reduce the sheers to port being made by *Venus*. A little later the wind hauled around to the south-southwest before backing to southeast where it remained for the rest of the night, blowing at 25 to 29 knots.

The engineroom crew had their hands full working the throttles. After the initial hookup, power had to be applied with "kid gloves" to keep from parting the tow wire. On crosswind courses they had to

be constantly on their toes for orders to increase or reduce power as the tanker maneuvered to meet the erratic movements of *Venus*. Turns for a normal seven or eight knots gave an estimated speed of advance of about 3.5 knots when heading into the wind. On a downwind course, turns for nine knots produced an SOA of about seven knots.

The navigator and his quarter-master assistants were busy throughout the night plotting the positions of the two typhoons. *Harriet* was blowing northeast along the south coast of Honshu while *Ivy* was moving northwest about 300 miles away. Wind and sea conditions in the two storm areas and their forecasted movement were sent to the tanker by Fleet Weather Center Yokosuka every three hours.

About noon, *Ponchatoula* made the slow and exacting turn to the southwest to meet the wind which had shifted to that direction, but almost as soon as the maneuver had been completed a message was received ordering *Ponchatoula* to rendezvous with *USS Reclaimer* (ARS 42) which would take over the tow. *Ponchatoula* was brought around 180° and headed back up her wake toward the approaching ATF.

The next afternoon the special sea detail was set and preparations were made for dropping the tow. The enginemen slowly backed off the throttles until *Venus* fell once again into the trough of the sea and *Ponchatoula* ended at right angles

to her, stern to bow.

On *Venus* the wildcat strained as she retrieved her anchor chain, bent on the tanker's eight-inch manila messenger for return, and disconnected the wire. The lizard and retrieving line were used to drag the chafing chain back on the tanker deck so that the wire could be disconnected before being heaved around on the capstan and fed along the 01 level forward on the starboard side.

The wire was then led across the deck in front of the bridge and then aft along the portside and then back up the ladder to the reel.

Dropping the tow was an exacting business and had to be executed smartly so that the tanker's propellers would not become fouled in the wire and so that no collision would occur. In a space of 62 minutes, the engineroom answered 31 different engine orders as the tanker was gradually brought to a halt and the stern held in position for retrieving the tow.

After the tow was dropped and the wire and all equipment safely secured, *Ponchatoula* resumed her interrupted voyage.

As she left the scene, the master of *Venus* sent the following message, "MYSELF OFFICERS AND CREW ALL FILIPINOS OF STEAMSHIP VENUS ANTICIPATE OUR SINCEREST THANK YOU ALL FOR SAVING US X WE WILL NOT FORGET THIS HEROIC EVENT STOP IF OUR COOPERATION IN MANEUVERS HAD SHORTCOMINGS PLEASE PARDON BON VOYAGE. HOPE WE MEET AGAIN."