



Photographer of *The Fighting Lady*, 66-year-old Captain Eduard Steichen, is making an unforgettable picture record of the U.S. Navy in this war

Wing Talk

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THE world of art and photography honors Steichen. So do people who grow delphiniums. For Steichen is pre-eminent in both. Yet of all the monuments that may be erected to him, none can be more lasting than the one he is building now: a photographic record of naval aviation at war.

At sixty-six, he is a fine specimen: six feet, ramrod carriage, 'white-topped and healthy. Years ago he was plagued with ulcers, but he whipped them; not, however, without compromising for a mild case of gout which he maintains very satisfactorily.

Steichen has found a new life, and it is dedicated to the kids who fly off the flat-tops, who work on the flight deck, who keep the mighty aircraft carrier in action, all the way down to the black gang.

And so the people ashore are at last beginning to know about naval air warfare in the most exciting manner—in the Steichen manner. First evidence of what he has been doing for the past three years, and an indication of what is yet to come, is in the motion picture, *The Fighting Lady*, the story of an aircraft carrier. It was made under his direction by naval photographers, and every inch of it is real. Naval airmen say there will never be anything to equal this. Steichen accepts the tribute with a grateful smile, all the while fully aware of the unlimited capabilities of his camera.

Eduard J. Steichen, born in Luxembourg, here since the age of three, and educated in Hancock, Michigan, and Milwaukee, joined the Navy shortly after Pearl Harbor. He is now a captain and heads the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit. When he went to war, he took the natural course—applied to the Army, though he was then sixty-two. In the other war, he had served overseas for sixteen months as commanding officer of the Photographic Division of the A.E.F., combat aerial photographic reconnaissance. He came out of the war a lieutenant colonel—with a citation by General Pershing—and a chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

He remained in the service for six months after the Armistice and feels that he left some sort of a mark by persuading two brilliant young officers to remain in the Army—Albert W. Stevens and George Goddard, who are now recognized as the Army's great aerial photography experts—and by being instrumental in helping Sherman Fairchild obtain his first military contract from which his company grew to the largest aerial camera manufacturer in the world.

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But when he plowed under his delphiniums on his Ridgefield, Connecticut, estate and reported for duty to the Army, the world's highest paid photographer, friend of Rodin and Paderewski, got no further with the examining officer than the question, "How old are you?"

Samuel W. Meek, vice-president of the J. Walter Thompson Company, and a twice-wounded fighting Marine from the last war, had taken on the side job of aviation consultant to the Navy Department and heard about Steichen's crushing disappointment. Meek went into action. Then Steichen received a telephone call from Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford in Washington, inquiring if he'd like to join up with the Navy.

"I all but crawled right through the phone," Captain Steichen recalls, "and was in Washington the next morning. But when I entered Admiral Radford's office, I saw his jaw fall. At that moment, the ringing telephone saved us both. While he was talking, I was thinking about how to get around my age."

ALTHOUGH he was crowding the retirement limit of sixty-four at that moment, Admiral Radford knew this volunteer was needed badly for a visual training program for naval aviation then being considered. He jumped on Steichen's band wagon and took him into Assistant Secretary for Air, Artemus L. (Di) Gates. Di Gates had the same immediate reaction, but yielded. So did the now Secretary of the Navy, James V. Forrestal. There was some fast paper work to get Steichen in, and on January 31, 1942, he put on the uniform of a lieutenant commander and began to form his photographic unit with the blessing and support of these three friends to whom he gives all credit for anything good that may come out of his naval service.

Without knowing them personally, but solely on the basis of their photographic accomplishments, Steichen recruited a half dozen photographers from newspapers and magazines and commissioned them naval officers. This was unprecedented, but Steichen wanted them clothed with sufficient rank to enable them to go freely anywhere and get pictures. It's still shocking to some old regulars to see an officer going about lugging camera bags, flash bulbs and tripods.

For the visual training program, he photographed everything about an airplane and a carrier from birth to battle, and these pictures sped up the training of lads who had never seen either. Then he went to work on the new carrier Lexington along in late 1943.

The executive officer of the "Lex" was Bennett W. Wright, now captain and aide to Assistant Secretary Gates. It was Wright's job to receive him and establish him aboard, since Steichen had come armed with letters from the Washington Navy High Command that he was to have the run of the ship. Although he had heard of Steichen for years, Captain Wright had never met him; and while Steichen didn't and still doesn't look his age, he was substantially older than anyone on board a carrier, which is a young man's ship.

"So I tried to see to it that he wouldn't get hurt," Captain Wright recalls, "and I pointed out all the danger spots to stay away from while he was absorbed in his photography. He wanted to make take-offs and landings on the deck but we wouldn't let him. So, with two cameras hung around his neck,

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extreme of sinking the ship for him," Captain Wright recalls.

That was the night when the Lexington was under Jap air attack for five hours and she finally took a fish in her stern. All this while, Steichen was up on the bridge, occasionally dropping into the captain's sea cabin to sip coffee. The ship's steering gear was temporarily disabled and for a while the Lex went around in circles. When that was adjusted, she steamed back to Pearl and to the West Coast with Steichen aboard. For that engagement and one other he was in, he wears the Pacific campaign ribbon with two stars, alongside his Victory ribbon from the last war and the Legion of Honor—two identifications that helped mark him as no tender-foot to this conflict.

CARRIER pilots will admit they'd rather make a landing on the deck than watch one, either from the island or the gun galleries. After seeing hundreds of landings, Captain Steichen says he still doesn't believe it.

"It just can't be done," he declares bewilderedly. There were times when he'd watch plane after plane come in safely. Then, unable to take it any longer, he'd go below, for to him, every approach looked like a potential crash.

Before *The Fighting Lady* was released for general showing for the benefit of Navy Relief Fund, it was exhibited to naval workers in Washington. On each of these occasions, Captain Steichen appeared and introduced the picture. He brushed aside all credit for the actual photography, tossing it instead to that little group now respectfully known throughout the Navy as "Steichen's Boys." He classed the gun-camera color pictures of air combat as "one of the greatest miracles of photography" and the disintegration of a Hellcat on the deck, whose pilot calmly and smilingly steps out of what is left of the plane—the cockpit and engine—as the "most dramatic crack-up you will ever see."

