

SHORT AND ACTION PACKED HISTORY

OF THE

L.S.T. 884 UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

*WRITTEN BY STU HABBERTY*

Left Pittsburgh October 5, 1944. Sailed down Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, Louisiana. Entered dry dock there to prepare for sea. Raised mast and changed river screws to sea going screws. Lawrence Lee Bos'n 2/C came aboard in New Orleans to replace a Bos'n 1/C, I will leave unnamed - he was a disaster waiting to happen.

Without Lee I don't think we would have gotten out of New Orleans, he and Richard Epstein Bos'n 3/C had the ship well in hand.

The Bos'n 1/C when he was told to throw the fenders over the side coming into a dock to tie up he did. The only trouble - he must have used "slip knots", they kept right on going into the water.

Had a shake down cruise off Florida. Then down Caribbean to Panama Canal. Through Canal and up West Coast to San Diego, California.

Left San Diego, December 29, 1944 for Pearl Harbor. After a couple days at Pearl started to take on Marines, Seabees and equipment, tanks and earth moving machinery. Left Pearl Harbor January 9, 1945 with one destroyer as escort. Traveled at flank speed to catch invasion force that had left January 7, 1945. We were a replacement for an L.S.T. that had ripped its bottom while practicing for invasion.

Finally caught up at Eniwetok. Laid over there for one day. Then we were off for Iwo Jima according to "Tokyo Rose". Its ironic she knew more than we did.

Hit the beach at Iwo D Day plus 19 hours, it was one hell-a-va beach head to establish.

After dropping troops and equipment, we were ordered to tie up alongside an AKA anchored off shore. We were loaded with ammo and fresh water for the men on the beach.

Also were part of a decoy convoy that sailed away from Iwo every day 1 hour before sunset and returned next day 1 hour after sunrise. On several of these cruises we were attacked by Jap planes. During one of these attacks the ship off stern was hit.

On our last trip to the beach, we took a mortar shell in our fresh water tank starboard side. Got a cargo net caught around starboard screw and lost our stern anchor. We were ordered to Saipan for repairs March 18, 1945. Shortly after, we were repaired and got new stern anchor. We started manuevers off Tinian. This was training for the invasion of Okinawa, did not know that at the time.

We sailed back to Saipan and started loading 2nd marines and equipment for the invasion. We had lost three seamen, two due to accidents aboard, the other because he was the only son left in his family. His two brothers had been killed in action. There were no coast guard seamen available so they gave us three navy seamen as replacements.

At Okinawa D Day April 1, 1945; H hour minus 1 we were hit by Japanese suicide plane. We were the first ship hit during invasion.

I was in auxiliary engine, main distribution board and manning battle phone. I heard the order, prepare to abandon ship, I alerted the 2 motor macs and waited for word to abandon ship. We did not hear the order to abandon because it was announced over the P.A. system - there aren't any in the engine rooms. When the paint started to peel off the overhead from the fire on the tank deck and the exploding combat ammunition started putting bulges in the overhead, I told Linden one of the M.M. I was going topside to get jury rig out of the damage control box. Jury rig was 3 phones hooked up in shape of a wye. One for wheel house and one for each engine room. We always had a small line attached to wheel on escape hatch to the bottom deck. Linden stood at bottom, as I got topside, Mr. Frye the engineering officer (and the only officer still aboard) was coming toward me yelling to get the other two men out and get over the side.

I yelled to Linden to tie my "Mae West" on the line and tell Bouveir to kill engines and get out fast. Linden and I always joked about getting out before Bouveir (he was short and weighed about 250 lbs). Linden and I had to stand side by side to cast a shadow. Bouveir came through hatch so fast it looked as though he had Linden on his shoulders. We all got over the side and were picked up by ships in convoy.

After the tugs got the fire somewhat under control aboard the 884 some of us went back aboard to finish putting out the fire.

We were towed into Karema Retto. While being towed we were burying Marines over the side, three at a time, in sack covers with a length of chain in each sack with the body. We did not get them all buried at sea, had to take remaining bodies to military cemetery on Karema Retta.

After pumping water out of our Port Ballast tanks so we could roll to starboard, had plates welded on where suicide plane had entered.

We were towed back to Ulithe in the Caroline island group.

A Marine demolition squad came aboard defused the 2 bombs, the officer in charge said pilot was killed before he had time to set detonators, he said they had to be set manually in suicide attacks, when dropped from altitude they were set by centrifical force automatically.

Lawrence Lee Bos'n 2/6 and Stuart Haggerty E.M. 2/C were the 2 unidentified enlisted men in a previous report.

I was not too surprised Lee and I were the only 2 within compliment that did not advance in rate after ship was hit.

I do not know about Lee, but I was still attached to 884 after we got back to Pearl. Had 13 other men, I was in charge, we raised and lowered the colors everyday which was required until ship is decommissioned.

One day while I was standing watch, C.C. Pearson, our former Skipper came alongside in a small boat with 2 enlisted men. He told me if I came aboard his new L.S.T. I would become E.M. 1/C when I dropped my seabag.

The war was over so I told him he was a little late with the promotion. I was married and had enough points, I was going home.

It was gratifying to know he thought I was good enough to be E.M. 1/C, better late than never, as they say.

On the lighter side - we had a basketball team aboard really good for a small compliment of men. Naukum and Mr. Crum were the back court, we called them the Supreme Court, Jessie Taylor and Dick Epstein were the big men, we called them Chairmen of the Boards (offensive & defensive) then there was Geary High School Hero from West Catholic High School in Philadelphia. He was so thin when he stood under the basket, the opponents thought he was the pipe supporting the basket. There were athletic supporters laying all over the court, Nakum and Mr. Crum faked the opposition right out of them. Jessie and Eppy taught the opponents that elbows were not only for bending the arm they could be used for battering rams. When the other team stripped to take a shower after the game everybody saluted - their bodies were red, white and blue.

We lost one game to an air craft carrier crew. It was such a close hard fought game that the Seabees whose court we were using invited both teams for beer and sandwiches. Dugas immediately named himself as manager of the team, he said, "as a beer connoisseur the team needs me", he named Birardi his assistant, "we will need Jack to lead us back to the ship". Lee said, "I better go along to add a little class, this is the same Lee who could start a riot at a peace rally.

We had a movie "Destry Rides Again". We asked Geary a signalman to try trading it when we were in port. He would flash, have movie, will trade. Every signal light in port went on. What is it? they flashed. When Geary flashed "Destry Rides Again", every signal went out before he could finish.

Jack Birardi said, Geary tell them it is a musical comedy. Geary said they will catch on when they see what we have. Jack said, take Armand Dugas with you; while he is charming them with his Massachusetts accent, we can get away. Geary said, how about Dugas? Birardi said, take both small boats, the other one

can pick up Dugas after they throw him over the side.

After the war, Birardi became a Syracuse, N.Y. policeman. Probably worked undercover with the "sting" operations.

Dugas became Chief of the Athol, Massachusetts Fire Department. Probably figured anybody could save his crew from "Destry Rides Again". Could certainly get enough money in the budget for the fire department.

Then there was Bob Huff of Detroit, Michigan. Probably the most photographed guy in the Pacific Theater. Even more than General McArthur. Everytime he heard a click, it could be a gun being cocked, a door opened or closed, anything I think if someone clicked their false teeth, Huff would smile just in case it was a camera.

Bill Dollman, Seaman 1/C from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, like me. He bought a dog in Tia Jauna, called it Poncho. The dog became the ships mascot. When the L.S.T. was hit, Poncho went over the side like the rest of the crew. Dollman asked me to take care of Poncho because I was one of the enlisted men that stayed aboard the 884 as we were towed to Ulithi.

I was sent over to a general class ship to draw emergency clothes, mine had been burned up by the fire on the 884. While I was gone Huff heard there was a reporter aboard. He started to give Poncho a bath. You guessed it, they took pictures of Huff and the dog. It was published in the Detroit papers. There was a grey haired lady pulling a little red wagon buying all the papers, Huff's mother. I guess I burned up because it was not me. The only one that could upstage Huff was Poncho, so he gave the dog back to me to care for when I returned.

After the war Poncho was killed by a car while following Dollman to work.

By, Stuart J. R. M. Haggerty

E.M. 2/C

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