

continued from page 7 . . .

entry I wrote that “Last night we had a party on the 869, of creamed turkey on toast, ice cream and beer. Ferguson of the 869, Train of 686, Bassett of 870, Green of 897, Crew of 743, Shade of 788 and Brown of 868 for skippers were there and Van Huffel, Thomas, Strickland, Rogers and a couple more.”

Generally I find notes like this: “It’s raining like the dickens and lightning in big sheets. The surf is bad and the cats couldn’t hold me on the beach so I retracted, fortunately getting my anchor clear and not hitting anybody. It’s 2205 now and I expect to beach at midnight if 868 and 686 have straightened out their mess by then.” Then, “Beached at midnight. LCM broached beside us. Waited an hour to rewind his ramp and tried to pull him off with a wire cable. Broke cable and we retracted and anchored. Very rough today. Bent our stern section in some more.”

From Sansapor, ten of us, the 870, 896, 868, 743, 686, 741, 1056, 826, 869 and 685 went in convoy with a PC to Noemfor where the 685, 686, 869, 870 and the 743 stayed. We generally sailed blacked-out in our convoys which made it fun trying to keep on station. The others went back to Mios Woendi. We loaded Aussie equipment and formed up in convoy with two Mark 5 LCTs from Flotilla 8 (the 298 and the 396) and shoved off for Biak. I noted, “Have 10 Aussies on board to feed. Very pleasant. Quite an accent.” Discharged our Aussie friends and equipment in Biak.

I see we “went up to the Port Director and got sailing directions for northern New Guinea, 36 clamps for fenders and a seawater pump for (a) Gray Marine.” I also note that “Nicks traded 3 cases of beer to the 298 for a Wisconsin 1 cyl. gas engine to drive our dinghy.” Nicks was from Florida and really knew small boats and eventually our dinghy became an inboard. Beer was good trading stock. Also noted “Saw three (3) army nurses, darn good looking, the first white women close up I’ve seen since August.” (This was late January) Then back to Woendi and spent more time than we liked completely re-painting the ship in different colors.

My entry for Sunday January 28 starts out “Quite a day. Hindman (watch) called me at 0315. Blowing a bit and raining. Got out to see a destroyer going by. Turned out we were going by him! 686, 685 and 896 were all moored together on 686’s anchor. We were way out in the bay. Everyone cast off and went back singly. I was all ahead 1800, pitch dark and shined the blinker ahead just to make sure nothing was there. A big round metal buoy was directly ahead and we missed it by a hair.”

“Spent February (up) to the 17th loading LCM, LCVP and 95 drums of oil at Biak. Inspected by Commander Carmody who said on 3 occasions we had cleanest ship in flotilla. Nice of him. Had a good fight with Lt. Allen, our

group commander but lost it. He wanted my big charlie noble and got it. Our galley is a mess now. Wind coming down small charlie noble blew out the stove. Soot everywhere.” Had standpipes welded on our outer voids and filled them with diesel oil for the trip.

“On Feb. 18 at 0530 got underway with 48 LCTs, several APCs, (7 and 9) LCIs, LCSs, LST repair and DE for Leyte, Philippines. Went OK till dark. About 5 LCTs towed already. Only one Mark 5. Several Mk. 5s with us. (Flot. 7, I think, 373, 175, 132, 127. All of Flot. 24 and part of Flot. 31)” Mike had the conn and woke me up at 2230. It was becoming quite a storm. Pitch dark, pouring, no visibility. No running lights of course. “Almost hit LCI and tow and almost got hit by several ships. Got soaked and frozen. Got it (the 685) straightened out on (proper) course 374T and in the morning ended up in A-1 position! Really lucky. Had no otherships in our line in proper position.”

When things got really bad we had radio communication to turn on our running lights to avoid collision. It turned out a T had rammed our guide. We found we were scattered all over the ocean and half the ships, or so it seemed from their lights, were going the wrong way. Thought we would lose one of the old Mark 5s who had taken a hit through the hull awhile back and had been welded up. I was told they took off the crew but I don’t think they saved the T. It was rough. And so on for days until we got to Leyte.

Our LCTs eventually received commendations for successfully making a trip so far beyond the normal range of LCTs and in such adverse conditions. I will never forget standing on the bridge and looking forward as the ship hit a wave. The deck undulated and the whole ship vibrated until you couldn’t see how it held together. Extra clamps had been welded to the ramp and bulkheads to keep the ramp from getting torn off.

We had a short stay in Leyte and visited Tacloban. We inherited an outrigger canoe somehow but had to leave it. We then moved up through the islands to Subic Bay, Luzon. Thought a lot about the LST 577. Had been told that about a month after dropping us off in the Admiralty Islands they had taken a Kamikaze at Mindoro, the ship had been sunk and only one officer and about 7 men saved. Never did learn how much of it was true.

After Subic Bay, the LCT-685 was assigned to Okinawa and on 11 December, John received his orders for home. On Christmas Day 1945, he crossed the Intl. Date Line on a troop ship bound for Seattle. Today he resides in Utica, New York. His entire story, “[LCT I Love You](#)”, can be viewed at our website at www2LCT.ORG.

