



LCT(6) 685

CHRISTMAS AT SANSAPOR, NEW GUINEA

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Seventeen months on an LCT. No glamour. No real danger from the enemy. A good deal of danger from the elements. We learned a lot about ourselves and we grew up in a hurry. . .

Quoting directly from my diary, "At 01:52 the morning of December 23 our anchor cable snapped while we were on the beach and we broached, dragging one of the cats into the water with us. Very rough. Ferguson on the 869 came in to try and pull us off. Shot lines to him and led heaving lines and cables and eight inch hawsers over but the 7/8" cables snapped and the hawsers pulled off the bitts. Then the 869 broached beside us. The 741 came in to pull the 869 off and a wave tore her stern [bulkheads] completely out and ruined the rudder bar. Andrews got three out of five lines across from the line throwing gun. About daybreak 869 got off (high tide) with her anchor cable. 743 came in to try and pull us off. Andrews waded thru the surf with a heaving line to the 743 but they couldn't get a cable across. We were badly beaten up, flooded my quarters and a void and lost all paint, (I can't remember what I meant here) smashed life raft etc. (We were actively evacuating the army at this point and it couldn't wait.)

Army personnel crowded on every LCT around (500 on each) and the 743 had to unload army and then try and get a line to us on the beach. They swung around while their ramp was down and put a hole in our port generator room just at the bottom. Flooded the compartment in a few seconds, but Aycock used his head and had Allen dog down the w.t. (water tight) door so the grays (gray marine diesels-the ship's power) weren't flooded.

We were choked up with sand (the sea chests for circulating water through the engines) so no engines could be run, port Hercules Diesel (generator) in five feet of water and a 10 degree list to the ship. Water in port generator room to within two inches of I beams on ceiling. Nicks (coxswain) and the whole crew and I worked on a new anchor, taking off the less than 50 feet of old cable and reeling 900 feet of new cable on the anchor drum. Quite a job. Led the Eye thru the fairleader and around to the spare anchor on the port side, next to the beach. Finally had a bulldozer pull the anchor off the ship and onto the beach, then down the beach 100 yards.

The 743 beached and we (Hindman, Titus and I) put a 4" line on the anchor and to 743's port bow bitts. She retracted and hauled out our anchor for about 600 feet. Finally at 1315 we pulled ourselves off using our own anchor and got free enough to clean out the sand traps. Got Grays and one generator and radio repaired and moved out to anchorage. No lights, fans, stove, etc. while on beach and no sleep for us since we were up all evening and didn't beach till 2230 and I never did get to sleep.

Counter flooded to an even keel and could run again. For the five days previous both generators were out and no lights, power, food (hot) or fans. A bit rough. Hung a battle lamp in the rigging and worked anyway. Hard mooring alongside "Big Boys" (liberty ships) without lights after dark. At 1800 that same day still with no sleep beached at Red beach and took on a load. Then worked until 0130 the 24th and slept till 0700. Worked all day the 24th and carried beer for one load. Got 43 cases in spite of 2 MPs. At 1715, I plugged the hole in port generator room with 4" round plug, rags and wedges broken up. Big hole. Fun, swinging a sledge in five feet of water, holding your breath, and knocking in a (wooden) plug that comes to the surface if it has a chance. Got the void pumped out and (the crew) worked all night loosening bolts to take out the (deck) plate and pull the engine and generator. Christmas eve Marsh, Mike and I were singing Christmas carols up on the conn, roaring (at 6 knots) up and down the bay, beaching and retracting and generally celebrating a mighty strange Christmas Eve.

Christmas 1944

On Christmas day we hauled army troops out to transports for the invasion. Hauled thousands of them, about 300 at a trip. (The troops wore helmets and were all standing squeezed together on the tank deck. Looking down on them it looked like a cobblestone street.) Worked all night the 25th and 26th. Had fresh turkey Christmas and New Years but food generally gets awfully monotonous." I am surprised I had time to write all that but I did..