

*Editor's Note: LCT-380 took part in the allied invasion of the Bismarcks in late 1943. After the Solomons, the Navy won a decisive victory at the **Battle of Bismarck Sea**. During the summer, U.S. amphibians landed in the Troiband Group (see map on page 12) and on Papua New Guinea. By October, there were landings at Bouganville, Green Island and the Treasury Islands.*

In December, attention was directed to New Britain, but the heavily defended port of Rabaul was bypassed in favor of landing at Arawe Harbor. D-Day here was set for 15 Decem-ber 1943, with 5 LCTs landing with supplies on a very congested beach. The LCTs managed to evade several air attacks that day but four of them fell victim the following day in more vigorous bombings that left 42 men killed or seriously wounded including some of the LCT crews. A third attack on 26-27 December was repelled by the LCTs and their escorts who together shot down four enemy planes. Author S.E. Morison recounts the weather:

"The LCT echelons which shuttled back and forth from New Guinea were more troubled by high wind and sea than by enemy aircraft. Foul weather played the devil with the LCTs and from 1/2 to 3/4 of them needed repairs after every trip. Yet they brought up 6,287 tons of supplies and 451 guns and vehicles in just three weeks. It was a fine record that these beaching craft and their escorts made."

This is the actual report filed by the skipper of the 380 with only minor spelling and grammatical corrections:

Commander LCT (5) Flotilla Seven
Seventh Amphibious Force
c/o Fleet Post Office
San Francisco, California.

CONFIDENTIAL.

26 December 1943.

From: Commanding Officer, LCT(5) 380.
To: Commander SEVENTH Amphibious Force.
Via: Commander, Flotilla 7 LCT(5).
Subject: Operations of LCT 380, December 16th, 17th and 18th at Arawe, New Britain -- Report on.

1. LCT 380 departed from Cape Cretin, New Guinea at 1830 on December 16, in company with LCT Task Unit, consisting of LCT's 88, 382, 384, 386, 387 and 378. The escort task force consisted of Apc 21, YMS 50 and SC 743.

2. LCT 380 carried men and equipment of the 112th Cavalry outfit, three 40 MM guns of our anti-aircraft unit, and men and equipment of the 13th Portable Surgical Unit. All troops on board were under the command of Major Hunter, M.C., U.S. Army.

3. The task force arrived at Arawe Harbor at approximately 1630, December 17. LCT 380 went to battle stations at 1530. All ship's guns and Army guns on board were manned at that time.

4. Shortly after arriving in Arawe Harbor, LCT 380 was ordered to stand by for unloading. The craft was in communication with the Beachmaster by walkie talkie.

5. At 1700, while standing by in Arawe Harbor, the task force was attacked by enemy planes. Army headquarters on the beach later reported that there were from 15 to 20 planes in this attack---dive bombers and strafing fighters. Approximately 10 enemy planes attacked the SC 743 and LCT 380. The planes came in from the stern of LCT 380, out of the sun, and were not spotted until the bombs began to drop.

Three bombs dropped about 10 yards astern of LCT 380, two or more hit between LCT 380 and SC 743, which was approximately 75 yards to the starboard of LCT 380, two bombs dropped off the port bow of LCT 380, approximately 15 yards distant. All guns on board opened fire as soon as we were aware of the attack. The planes, after completing the dive-bombing and strafing attack, pulled out off our port and starboard bows.

The port Bofor knocked one plane down off the port bow. The starboard Bofor, 20mm, and 50 Caliber knocked one down off the starboard bow. The pilot of this plane was seen bailing out. One other plane was hit by the starboard 20 mm and was last seen going down in smoke over the mainland near Amalut plantation. The SC 743 also reportedly hit this plane.

Confirmation on these planes shot down was given LCT 380 by the anti-aircraft officers on the beach the next day. Summary---two planes definitely shot down by LCT 380, and one probable or an assist. Casualties from this attack---five army personnel suffered bullet and shrapnel wounds. Ensign R. M. Karn, Executive Officer of LCT 380, was hit with a bullet in the left thigh while manning the starboard 50 caliber machine gun.