



LCTs 431-534-332

TRAINING AND A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

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What they didn't know was that they were on the opposite and downward side of the island headed into a channel with water over 20 feet deep. . . over forty G.I.s were drowned, and all equipment lost.

Camp Carabelle, Florida

Carrabelle, FL, the nearest so-called "town", out in the middle of nowhere, on the Gulf Coast, the entire area was scrub pine and oak with ungodly amounts of sand fleas and flies. Wild enough to have wild boars and snakes. Our training area included the beach to the west of Carrabelle, and St. George's and Dog islands. It had to be one of the most remote areas in Florida.

Crew training, as we soon realized, was sorely needed since we had no amphibious training at the Solomon's base. All "work" there was war related, "how to", and "what to do" in any given situation. Classroom learning is nothing like the real thing.

Tallahassee

Our soon-to-be crew had arrived in Tallahassee in dribs and drabs from many numerous schools, training sites and stations throughout the nation, a bunch of 17,18 and 19 year olds. We were bussed from the train station to the camp--home for the next couple of weeks. There we were assigned to our new floating homes--with sea bags on our shoulders, we took to the navy pier to find and board our LCT's. Once on board we introduced ourselves, met our skipper, and proceeded to become an operating navy crew.

The navy gave us 2 weeks to learn our ship, which we did, under various exercises and routines, learning also how our varied talents blended in, in regards to

ship operations. The machinist mates ran the engines, learned them inside out. As an electricians mate, I worked with them and did my own thing on the electrical systems. Quartermasters, coxswains, seaman and gunners mates studied navigation, line handling and course plotting while the gunners mates did their thing. Even our cook seemed to get better!

We trained in all kinds of conditions: night, underway, storms, gales etc., 24-hour no sleep, beaching and returning--even timing our beaching and the returns to sea. Our training time passed quickly and finally we were in a so called "operational mode"--ready or not!

On a rainy Monday morning, it happened. We had "turned-to", chow completed, when we were alerted to some army units marching out on to the pier to our ships (10 in all). Our combined operational training was about to begin. It would be well to remember here, that many, if not all of us saw machines, equipment, and armaments we knew nothing about--and had never even seen before. The seriousness of it all was about to be realized.

On the other side, the Army also had to go through the learning process, as we did. The same young men, from all over the country, from all walks of life, had their own problems to solve. We as a people were not accustomed to war such as many European



LCTs on training exercises off Florida coast at Camp Carabelle. Photo credit Doug Swanson Spring 1943.