

countries. All of us, Army and Navy could not know what combat or killing would be like, or if we could even do it!

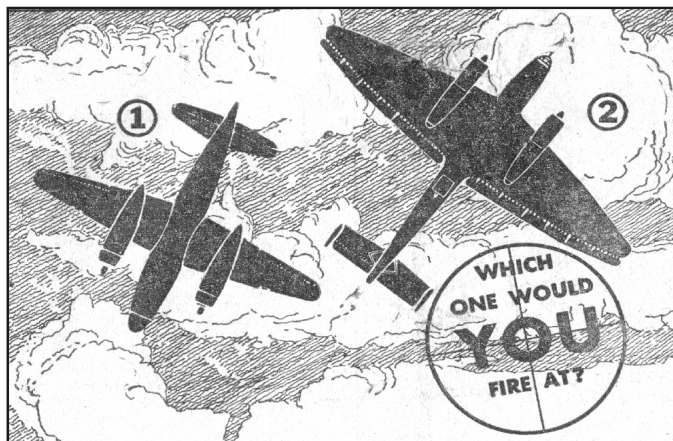
Training continued for a full two weeks, loading, beaching and teaching the army what to do and when. Through storms, night sessions, etc. we finally felt that as a crew, we were in command of our ship.

A Sad Awakening

On one occasion, many of us came to a very sad awakening. We were on a combined operation-training mission, the same as many before--only this was a nighttime foray--fully loaded with half-tracks, towed field guns, and approximately 70 GI's per LCT. All 10 LCT's were in this operation. As we proceeded into the exercise, the sea grew rougher, winds became gale force, with lightening and thunder, and the ship even fully loaded started rolling and pitching, reacting to the sea conditions. Many GI's became sea sick--this was more than we all had bargained for.

The storms grew more violent, and now even our skipper and crew were reacting to the situation. The storm came across the Gulf from the southwest, hitting us stern first, actually pushing us forward and causing all LCT's to break formation. It wasn't quite havoc, but damn close. Orders came from the force commander to proceed with all haste for shore--to beach and land all troops. The storm was still in a rage--we could not see in the utter darkness, forcing us to steer by compass.

We headed to shore--our main concern to beach and unload our troops--the waves now 15-20 feet high, wind still howling, rain so intense. We had trouble seeing and could not imagine how the troops felt out on that open deck. Finally, we hit the beach, lowered our ramp, and disembarked our troops, the storm still raging. We backed off the beach and made our way back to our anchorage area to wait out the storm.



Graphic appearing in the camps weekly newspaper, the "Amphibian". As for the answer to the question: Not at No.1--it's the U.S. Martin B-26. Fire at No.2--it's the German Junkers Ju86K.

The following morning the storm had abated, skies were clear and deep blue, although the seas still running quite ugly. It was mid-morning when we learned that we had failed in landing our troops safely. The beach we had landed on was St. George's island--we had landed high on the island because of the high seas, caused by the storm.

What we assumed was the mainland beach, was instead the highest point of the island beach. We had missed the mainland. As we beached, our ramp was lowered immediately and the troops disembarked in good order, considering the pounding and bouncing we were taking.

The soldiers charged ahead to what they thought was higher land, away from the waves. 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 their equipment lost.

A lot of Army and Navy men, deeply saddened by this event had learned a lesson--all be it not a pleasant one--maybe a preview of what was to come. The storm we later learned was classified as a Force 2 hurricane.

After several more weeks of extensive and uneventful training we were given our overseas orders. The 4th Division and our flotilla were headed for war. We would meet again, joining together for the amphibious operations throughout the Mediterranean Sea, with invasions of Sicily and Italy.

A Chance Meeting

In August of 1943, after the invasion of Sicily, we were stationed with the other LCTs at Red Beach, Gela, Sicily. One day our LCT-534 was on the beach--our ramp down, resting on more or less dry sand. I had the 3-6 watch duty. A few of the crew were on the beach roaming about, some were writing letters; others doing laundry--the skipper was in his quarters. It was a nice "quiet" day.

Earlier in the day the skipper declared the "uniform of the day" orders, "anything decent," not that we had many choices. I chose my blue wool Navy bathing suit, my Army shoes and, of course, white hat, all the crew seemed comfortable.

The tide is at low ebb, the beach reminds me of the Cape Hatteras area (North Carolina). It is now 1500 hrs. I'm on the watch, standing halfway down the ramp, scanning the beach area. (You must stay onboard while on watch.) As I scan the beach to the port, I see a vehicle coming toward us down the beach, all other pieces of equipment there are damaged or disabled.

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