

## Hello Net Tender Shipmates

How would you feel, if you were onboard a small ship, a Net Tender, and had lost all propulsion power, and you are alone (solo), no other ships present to take you in tow, you are about four days out (I think) on your voyage, in the middle of the ocean, you make the damage assessment of the problem and realize this is **no quick fix**, and you are **dead in the water**, bouncing around in the Pacific ocean, drifting wherever the wind and water currents take you, and you're still a long way from home port?

This happened to the net tender, The USS Chinquapin AN 17 on her voyage across the Pacific ocean, as she headed home from the war, after surviving all the hostilities, and that raging typhoon **Louise** at the end of the war, in Okinawa in WW II. She was finally overcome by the wounds she sustained in that typhoon.

### Preface:

Some time ago I did a little write on how my ship, The USS Chinquapin AN-17 survived typhoon Louise at Okinawa, at the end of WW-II. We suddenly found ourselves hemmed in the harbor with a bunch of runaway ships in the middle of a Typhoon which has the distinction of inflicting the greatest single loss in our Navy's history.

What was happening to us just didn't seem real, it was so sudden, so hellish, so fierce, it may even seem like a," tale that is told," or something out of a, Joules Verne novel, this little net tender was suddenly caught up in a whirlwind so strong Buckner Bay became a hugh churning pot with ships great and small floundering around helplessly, with some of the large ships ending up great distances from the shore line. We were rammed by two other ships, (1) our sister ship the USS Snowbell AN-52, (2) and an LST which ripped a hole in our port bow, we broke off three anchors during the

typhoon which wiped out our radio and radar when the Snowbell rammed us, (she later got hung up on a reef and was beaten to death by the typhoon) but it did something else, it **ruptured** Chinquapin's **stern tube**, sea water was gushing in the main propulsion drive motor room compartment, and presented another major problem to deal with during this typhoon,

So now we have no anchors, no radar, no radio, sea water is gushing in the ruptured stern tube, and we headed out to sea in the dark of night to escape the ravages of these runaway ships and this raging typhoon.

Why ? Because it was the only option left to us, and it was a hellish nightmare, (I won't go into any more of that here) before the storm finally abated, then we were lost for three days, we didn't know where we were, and the Navy listed us as missing.



*The above photo was taken from the bridge of the Chinquapin, on 10 October 1945, the next day after typhoon Louise hit Okinawa and even though the storm had abated somewhat, it still packed a powerful walloping lethal force,*

There was two things which **must not** happen if we are to survive this Typhoon; (1) we must **not** loose power.

(which includes our propulsion motors)

(2) we must **not** loose steering

And that's as plain as it gets , if either happens, the typhoon wins.

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*photo shows part of the damage sustained by the Chinquapin to her superstructure on the starboard side aft, as a result of being rammed by ships which were out of control during typhoon Louise at Okinawa, we lost one maybe two 20 mm AA gun mounts*

But now, (fast forward) low and behold she has lost her propulsion power, she has succumbed to an old and agonizing wound, but thank God, we are **not** in a typhoon, she was spent, and tired, with many injuries and with her last bit of sinew she went as far as she could. Bringing us home.



*The Chinquapin left flying that coveted pennant today, it always garners Attention, for it makes a statement, she is headed home and wants everybody to know it.*

We had returned to Buckner Bay after the typhoon and spent our next two weeks preparing our ship for the long voyage home working hard and long hours and we were well aware of the status of our ship, we knew our ship was spent, and we knew she was

beaten up badly by the typhoon, and we did not minimize or disregard the seriousness of the ruptured **stern tube**, not for a moment, for this was a 24/7 concern for us, so we headed out for home, with our bilge pumps working overtime.

On 30 October 1945 the Chinquapin sailed out from Buckner Bay in Okinawa and set her course homeward, we were sailing alone not in a convoy, not in the company of other ships. She was showing signs fatigue, and strain from the hard work and many injuries she had sustained most of which remained unattended but she was going home now, and soon it would be over.

To properly repair the **stern tube** the Chinquapin would have to be put into a dry dock, and that was just not an option, in fact, later when she was decommissioned and abandoned at Astoria, Oregon we hooked her up to, “ship to shore”, power, to keep the pumps running so she wouldn’t sink.

### **What’s a stern tube**

The **stern tube** is the main sealing tube through which the main propulsion drive shaft exits the ship to turn the ship’s propeller. When we were first rammed the water was coming in so fast we could not be sure whether it would stabilize or would get worse at the time, we had to consider the latter a possibility from the beating the Chinquapin was taking in this typhoon, we just didn’t know. But the bilge pumps were keeping up for now, and have continued non stop since.

We knew we must not let salt water get up into the main propulsion drive motors, for salt water is an electrical conductor and they are Electrical DC motors, this was a major concern for us throughout the typhoon ordeal.

But now our greatest fears are confirmed with reality, these huge electric motors were flooded, running in salt water, and the rotation of the armatures were slinging water every where, over head, splattering the bulkheads, blasting the field coils, the armatures, and the buss bars, insulation was all saturated with salt water. Sea water had ushered in during the night and flooding out the propulsion drive motor room, we discovered it in the morning hours, a rude awakening indeed.

When we finally got the water down and began to investigate what we were dealing with, we took a megohm reading to ground (this was with one of the older model meggers, with a hand crank) it showed a dead short, not good. We knew our work was cut out for us and this would definitely **not** be a **quick fix**, for we must somehow get the resistance to ground much higher before we proceed any further, for these motors could **blow up** in this condition, they had been hot and the salt water had vaporized leaving a white film deposit of salt on all the copper components, and saturating the insulation on the field coils and armatures.



*photo shows one of the main electric drive motors which was contaminated with saltwater. the Chinquapin's propulsion system employed two of these motors driving a common gear box which turned the propeller shaft.*

The field coils we could see on the out side for the most part, but the armature windings have captive pockets which we could not see we had to deal with that. What happens a salt film of this kind will start with a small tracking burn through the salt over the insulation then carbonizing, it can become a solid carbon conductor, and with time can progressively increase, even in one of the captive pocket areas inside the armature winding, much like an arc welder, (or anywhere in the system for that matter) and can blow out a hole in that armature winding, when this happens there will be a ring of fire around the commutator at the brushes, then as the country song goes, "It's a little too late to do the right thing now", or what should have been done at the beginning.

Both the electric propulsion drive motors and all the insulators were contaminated with salt, and these were open type motors so there were thousands of places where potential grounds could occur, so our job was to eliminate them as best we could. And we spent the next **two days** doing just that.

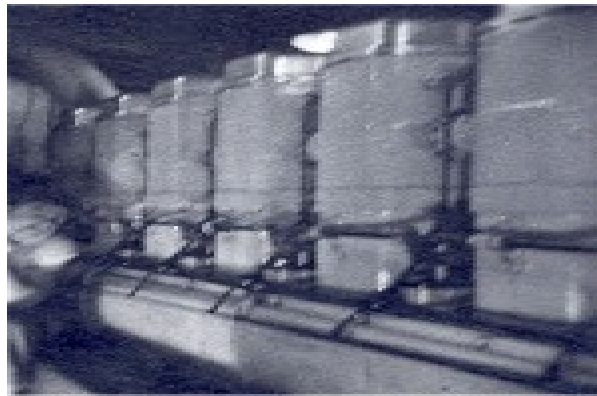
First we blew out the motors as best we could with compressed air, then wiped off all the dried salt film and water we could reach with rags, cleaning the buss bars and insulators, and wiped the field coils and as dry as we could, and jacked out all the carbon brushes from the armature commutator of both motors, being very thorough and methodic for we wanted our ship to come home under its own power.

In our next procedure we rigged up pressure hose to wash out the motor windings with fresh water, a process that took a lot of time for we had to be very thorough in every nook and cranny, squirting the water in with enough force to dislodge and dissolve the salt residue and not be wasteful with the fresh water.

The next procedure was to use compressed air again to drive out all the residual water that was trapped in the field coils and pockets in

the armature windings, then we took another megohm reading, and it was better but still not good enough.

We next washed out both motors with carbon tetrachloride, 20 gallons of it, (all we had) using it in a similar way that we had used the fresh water, carefully squirting it in areas it needed to go, and we had rigged up all the additional exhaust blowers for ventilation we could and still it wasn't enough, for some of us almost passed out, (using carbon tet should be with much caution, in a super ventilated place, and not then on anything hot), we then wiped the commutators thoroughly clean and installed all the carbon brushes, held our breath, and took another Megohm reading, it had improved considerably, not what we had hoped for but good enough to try.



*Photo is of one of Chinquapin's two big Enterprise Diesel engines  
Which drive DC Generators providing electrical power for our  
main propulsion drive motors*

We fired up the big Enterprise diesel engines and engaged the propulsion motors at low speed, the brushes did fry a little at first, but they settled down, and we continued low speed until the motors began to warm up, then increased speed in increments, so they could thoroughly **dry out** with minimal stress before they were called upon for full speed. After we had been underway for about two hours I guess, we stopped our ship and took another megohm reading.

Oh Yeah!!!, we're looking much better, then we celebrated, we're taking the Chinquapin **home** now, and how sweet those motors sounded, I really hadn't noticed that before. We had been hung up there for about two days but we were happy campers now, I even heard some suggestion that a hotshot Jap sub who possibly hadn't got the **word** yet may hotdog us while we were dead in the water, but we were much too busy to give that much thought.

When the Navy sent me out to rendezvous with the Chinquapin in the Pacific, she was already out there taking care of business at Kwajalein, in the Marshalls, and to be honest she was not what I wanted at all, she was small, slow, and what were those unseemly horns sticking out her bow?

I wanted a ship with an offensive posture, a ship that could put some hurt on our enemy, a ship that could take it to them, but I was in for a very big attitude adjustment, a tough lesson for a 20 year old, I discovered it wasn't a question of whether I approved of her but a question of whether she approved of me. But in time I realized this is exactly where I was meant to be, to serve my country, and dedicated to my ship assignment and her mission. patriotism is a powerful motivator.

I was always impressed with the Quality of personnel onboard the Chinquapin, the level of skill and dedication, they were bright, articulate, and conscientious, and had a spontaneous camaraderie, when I came onboard at Kwajalein, but there was a powerful element here, an unspoken force, which is, we all drew **energy** from each other, both **intellect and heart** which made us a more formidable force to take care of whatever issues that confronted us, someone would always step up to the gap. It was the personal responsibility taken by my shipmates that impressed me, ... to this day.



This was the final anxious episode we had with the Chinquapin, we had been through a lot together, with endless hours of hard work helping secure harbors of several Island invasion forces throughout the pacific, on two tours of duty, with endless hours of hard work, from the break of day til many times after dark, she had served her purpose and had served it well, and deserves a hardy, **well done**.

I remember being on duty in the engine room switchboard, and the bridge would call down for power to get under way after a long day, and I would start up the second diesel generator and switch power from the deck winches to the main propulsion drive, I knew we were headed for the barn, and one more days hard work was behind us.



*The above photo is of a part of the main electrical switchboard where this writer stood duty watch in the engine room both at sea and in port 4 on 4 off 24/7*

In the first weeks at Okinawa, Kamikaze raids were fairly frequent but we would have from 12 to 15 minutes advance warning time from our pickets at sea, and sometimes at night, they would even turn their running lights on and fly over us, but we had orders not to open fire and expose our cover of darkness, and in mornings if it was raining with poor visibility a raid was most likely to come, and sometimes we would be already at General Quarters when they did

come in. I mention this to note that these are some of the activities the Chinquapin had to endure, which was a distraction to be sure, as she pushed forward on her main assignment there, and continued taking care of business, and concentrating on the work she was sent there to do.

But now she is tired, and has had her guts run out, been beaten up, and banged around with so many injuries, most of which have not been attended, both inside and out, and has suffered the violence of nature's fury, this little ship has proved her metal, in many ways, but now she needs to rest, her work is finished, and like us, she's going home, and must now take her place among the legions of the past, among the relics of the forgotten, though appearing briefly for a shining moment in time, ( as it were she's only 4 yrs. old) but she has forged an inextricable bond with at least fifty plus, of the human kind.

I count it a privilege to have served on one of these special, little ships not designed for praise nor glory, but honorable service, and hard work, she did much of the Navies heavy lifting and had a crew with a, "**roger can do**" attitude. She will now take that final voyage into history. And, Oh Yes !! She left a legacy as did other Net Tenders,.....Let us hear from you.

On her first Pacific tour the Chinquapin tended nets and laid moorings at; Majuro, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok, from 15 February 1944, to 27 July.

She then supported the Marianas occupation, installing security nets and channel markers, and whatever comes next, in the operations at; Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, until 28 October. She then returned to Pearl Harbor, and San Francisco as a convoy escort.

On my first tour of duty with the Chinquapin my, “General Quarters station,” was to man the engine room switchboard, and when there was activity topside it would just drive me nuts, guns firing away and not knowing what was going on, until, Gunners Mate, 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Hanson, gave me a position on the 40 mm, aa, gun, as a pointer, the gun mount had a six man crew.

On our return trip in the second Pacific tour of duty we had spent some time at Pearl and in our preparation for Okinawa, campaign we went out to sea and engaged in aircraft target practice, a light air plane would let out a drogue chute on a tether line towing a target so we could get some firing practice, but the pilot must have been an ill tempered sort, for some reason he got very nasty with us, used foul language, I don't think he liked it very much when we cut the tether line, .....so close to his air plane.



YNg Gate Tender

Chinquapin was overhauled and on, 3 February 1945 she sailed right back via Pearl Harbor, and Ulithi, for assault and occupation of Okinawa, arriving 1 May, with a barge load of Sona Gear, we also towed a YNg Gate Tender (which is not self propelled) to Okinawa to perform gate service for the harbor net security system. Chinquapin remained there in net, mooring, and transport operations until 30 October 1945,

Chinquapin received three (3) battle stars for WW II service

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