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THE HISTORY OF THE U.S.S. RUSHMORE (LSD-14)

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The U.S.S. RUSHMORE (LSD-14), named for the Mount Rushmore Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota which honors former presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Teddy Roosevelt, started her naval career at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia, on July 3, 1944, when she was accepted by the Navy and put into commission with Lieutenant Commander E. A. Jansen, DM, U. S. Naval Reserve, as Commanding Officer. Miss Eleanor Blewett of Newport News, Virginia, who had sponsored the ship at the launching ceremonies two months before was guest of honor at the commissioning and presented the RUSHMORE with a mascot in the shape of a brown and black puppy - part Spitz, the rest just plain dog - who had reached the ripe old age of six weeks. The mascot was named after the ship, but since he was very young and only able to understand words of one syllable, his name was shortened to "Rush".

This Landing Ship Dock, or "Amphibious Battleship" as one Jap radio news-commentator was heard to call the type, is 457 feet 9 inches in length, with a beam of 72 feet, and a light service displacement of 5,000 tons. The well deck in which she carries her main cargo is 365 feet long. Her cruising range is 5,000 miles; twin screws enable her to travel at a speed of a little better than 15 knots. The LSD's operational use is to transport loaded landing craft and crews to the landing area. Its advantage over other amphibious landing craft carriers is that the LSD arrives at the landing area with its boats waterborne and loaded for a quick strike at an enemy beach. No time need be wasted in the lowering of boats or in their loading after they are in the water.

The RUSHMORE left Norfolk, Virginia, with a cargo of 28 LCM's and 52 LCVP's on August 5, 1944, after completing her "shakedown" cruise in Chesapeake Bay, passed through the Panama Canal, and arrived in San Diego, California, on August 19, 1944. She left San Diego on August 24, destined for Pearl Harbor and a tour of ten months duty in the Pacific before returning to the United States. During this time she participated in four amphibious landings and transported a wide variety of cargo ranging from small landing craft to huge pile drivers.

Upon arrival at Pearl Harbor on August 30, 1944, her cargo was discharged and a boat group of seven officers, one hundred and five men and twenty LCM's was received on board for duty, September 1, 1944. The next day the boat group combat-loaded their landing craft with Sherman tanks and personnel of Tank Company "B", 96th Division. A week of maneuvers off Maui Island in the Hawaiians followed, and the ship returned to Pearl Harbor on September 7, to make final preparations for her first invasion, which, at the time, was intended to be Yap Island in the Caroline Group.

On September 15, in convoy with transports, cargo ships, and protective escort, the RUSHMORT departed from Pearl Harbor headed for Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshalls, which was to be the final staging area for the attack. Enroute, daily tactical drills were held, and gun crews sharpened their eyes on target sleeves towed by planes from nearby islands or accompanying carriers. During this trip a strange thing happened! On the evening of September 19, all hands turned into their bunks at taps and did not get out again until reveille the morning of September 21! Had they slept for 32 hours? No! the International Date Line had been crossed during the night, and September 20, never existed in the lives of the RUSHMORT crew.

Upon reaching Eniwetok, it was learned that the Yap Operation had been cancelled and Leyte was to be the objective. The Task Force was to continue on to Manus in the Admiralty Islands where it would be augmented by additional transports and combat ships. After breakfast on the morning of October 1, while on the way to Manus, King Neptune and his Royal Court came aboard to initiate all lowly pollywogs in the solemn mysteries of the Ancient Order Of The Deep. No one who had not previously crossed the equator escaped the Royal Devils and their fiendish pranks. By noon all



hands had become salty shellbacks and proudly bore the scars of their initiation.

Manus was reached on October 3, and full advantage was taken by all personnel of the better-than-average recreational facilities provided by the naval base there. Shortly after the ship made port catastrophe befell "Rush" - he broke his left hind leg in jumping to the deck from the lap of a crew member. The ship's doctor put the leg in a cast, and "Rush" hobbled around on three legs for two weeks, at the end of which time the cast was removed, the leg found as good as new, and the pup once more ready for action. After an eleven day visit the Task Force set out to accomplish its purpose, the invasion and liberation of Leyte Island in the Philippines.

Several air, surface, and underwater contacts were made by the escorting vessels, but they disappeared or else proved to be friendly. While these contacts broke the monotony of the trip, the biggest thrill occurred when a destroyer came alongside each ship and delivered late mail from the States. The Task Force entered Leyte Gulf early in the morning of October 20, and all hands manned battle stations at 0415, after an early breakfast. Unlike in the movies, no one was heard to say, "This is it."

Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers started their pre-invasion bombardment of the beaches at dawn. This bombardment increased in intensity as "H" hour approached. By the time the first waves headed toward the beach, it sounded as if all the boiler factories in creation had set up shop on the Leyte shores. The RUSHMORE ballasted down on the way to her assigned station and discharged her landing craft according to schedule. The LCM's were in the first wave of boats, after the amphibious tanks and alligators, to hit the Yellow Beach near Dulag. Although a few, scattered mortar shells fell on the beach, no serious opposition was met during these initial landings. The boats returned to the RUSHMORE to complete the job of unloading, and when that was done, ten boats were transferred to the boat pool, the rest being assigned to various cargo ships to take supplies ashore. While her boats were busy working for other ships, the RUSHMORE acted as repair ship for damaged landing craft. The repair work was carried out speedily and efficiently, despite the fact that it was interrupted by air raids and hampered by thick smoke screens and the inability to show lights at night. The ship made repairs on 1 LCI, 6 pontoon barges, 8 LCVP's, and 91 LCM's before leaving Leyte on the afternoon of October 24, a few hours before the beginning of the Second Battle of the Philippines.



Arriving at Hollandia, New Guinea, on the 29 of October, a brief rest was taken, and then the RUSHMORE made a run to Alexishaven, New Guinea, to pick up a cargo of boats for the Boat Pool at Hollandia. On November 22, anchor was weighed, and the RUSHMORE set out for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides Islands, where she was to be drydocked for work on her shafts. Stops at Manus and Finschaven in New Guinea were made on the way. On November 30, after a noonday meal of turkey with all the trimmings, a Thanksgiving Smoker was held in the well, which, for the occasion, resembled a miniature Madison Square Garden. Fort was made a few days later, the ship was docked in a floating drydock, and the work of chipping, painting, and repairing the shafts began.

"Rush" was taken ashore there for the first time since reporting aboard for duty and, as a reward for his faithful services as "morale builder-upper", was introduced to his first tree, a stately coconut palm. RUSHMORE men were unable to take advantage of the Christmas church services at the Naval Base, for their ship sailed on December 24, for Hollandia, stopping off at Munda, New Georgia Island, in the Solomons for a cargo of landing craft. At Hollandia, the ten remaining LCM's attached to the ship were transferred to the Boat Pool, thus

making her entire well deck available for other cargo. From January 2, to February 6, 1945, shuttle runs were made from Hollandia, Manus, and Biak in New Guinea, to Leyte with boats for the Boat Pool at Tacloban.

Upon returning to Leyte on this last trip, after discharging her own load, the RUSHMORE received the equipment and personnel of the 1060 Engineers, 3170 Battalion, and the 533 Bt. and Sh. Engineers from the U.S.S. SHADWELL (LSD-15) which had been torpedoed while enroute to Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, P.I. After delivering this cargo, the RUSHMORE remained at Lingayen for one week repairing small craft. The ship left for Subic Bay on February 18, picked up a cargo of Army LCM's, and then proceeded to Mindoro, where she was to stage for her next operation, the invasion of Palawan in the southern Philippines.

Four days of preparation followed, and on February 26, the Task Force set out for Puerta Princesa, the main town on Palawan. The RUSHMORE carried Army-manned LCM's and DUKW's loaded with the personnel and equipment of the 167th Field Artillery of the United States EIGHTH Army. The landings were made on the morning of February 28, with negligible opposition. The return trip to Mindoro was started the afternoon of the same day.

Once more at Mindoro, the RUSHMORE made ready for her third operation, the objective this time being Zamboanga, on the Island of Mindanao, also in the southern Philippines. Two naval beach parties and various small units of the EIGHTH Army with tanks and bulldozers were loaded in LCT's, DUKW's, and LCM's. Although an LSD is built to accommodate only 492 men, for this landing there was a record load of 867 aboard, including three British Naval observers and two "Yank" correspondents. At dawn on March 10, a heavy bombardment by accompanying men-of-war and planes from Philippine bases began. The landings were made a couple of hours later on a beach north of the city of Zamboanga, and were met by a fairly heavy concentration of Jap mortar fire. During the course of the day several casualties were taken aboard the RUSHMORE for treatment.

Upon completion of her assignment at Zamboanga on March 11, the RUSHMORE sailed for Leyte, where she picked up the 1052 Engineers Port Construction and Repair Headquarters Company with over 1200 tons of equipment including small craft, pontoon barges, and a pile driver for transportation to Manila.

As the ship passed Corregidor on the way into Manila Harbor on the morning of March 18, parachutes, used in the invasion of that rocky fortress only a short time before, could still be seen strewn over the sides of the island. Each man aboard had seen land laid to waste by sea and air bombardment, but this was the first glimpse of a wrecked and smoldering modern city. Fighting was still in progress on the outskirts of the city, and shell bursts were plainly visible from where the RUSHMORE lay at anchor.

The next day a short run to Lingayen was made, and the ship welcomed back on board the 1060 Engineer Port Construction and Repair Group for transportation to Manila. She left Manila on March 22, for Hollandia, whence she continued on to Manus for a brief drydocking period so that a routine inspection could be made. The condition of the ship having been found satisfactory, the first echelon of Navy Boat Pool 15-1 came aboard and was delivered to Manila on April 16.

The 22 of April found the RUSHMORE at Morotai Island, in the Netherlands Indies, making preparations for the invasion of Tarakan Island, off the coast of Borneo. United States Army-manned LCM's loaded with Australian troops and light tanks were taken into the well. These Aussies were a part of the famed "Rats of Tobruk" Battalion, which had helped chase Rommel from Africa.



Before leaving Morotai, General Sir Thomas Blamey, Commanding General of Australian Forces, and Rear Admiral Forrest B. Royal, with their respective staffs, came aboard for an inspection of the ship and the troops.

Tarakan was reached at approximately 0400, May 1. A flaming oil storage tank on the beach, bombed the previous day, made an excellent beacon and served as a guide while the ships of the Task Force maneuvered to their assigned stations. The RUSHMORE was at anchor and ballasting down at the break of day when LST 562, about 600 yards off the port bow, radioed that a torpedo had just passed by. At the same instant, the wake was seen headed for this ship at high speed, twenty degrees off the port bow, and about 300 yards away. The lookouts barely had time to pass the word before the torpedo struck. The RUSHMORE proved to be as rugged as the mountain for which she is named ---- the Jap tin-fish glanced off her hull without exploding or causing damage!!!! While the great majority of her crew was unaware of the torpedo's approach, it didn't take long for the word of the ship's lucky escape to get around, and all hands from bilge to bridge said a prayer of thanks.

A heavy sea-and-air bombardment started shortly thereafter to soften up the beach for the landing forces. Not all the Jap gun emplacements were neutralized, for the incoming waves of landing craft were greeted with quite a bit of shell and mortar fire. Later in the morning, just as the RUSHMORE was shifting berth, a Jap battery began to get her range, and several shells exploded in the water from seventy-five to one hundred yards away, one of them passing directly over her bow. This hectic visit ended on May 2, when the RUSHMORE, in company with a portion of the Task Force departed for Morotai.

Upon making port, orders were received to proceed to Leyte, and the ship arrived there on May 9. The same day, the RUSHMORE moved to nearby Samar, and on May 11, a Jap cargo-transport submarine, 137 feet in length, was taken into the well for transportation to Pearl Harbor.

During the long trip to Oahu, with only one stop - Ulithi Atoll in the Carolines - an interdivisional basketball tournament was held. Shipboard basketball may sound like a figment of the imagination, but it is a well established fact on the LSD-14. In addition to a near-regulation-size basketball court, courts for volleyball and badminton are also laid out on the well deck. Even with these playing courts, enough room remains in the forward part of the well to set up a boxing ring, punching bags, and a ping-pong table. While the ship is ballasted down and awaiting cargo, the well is also used as a safe, shark-free swimming pool. When she travels sans cargo, the RUSHMORE is a veritable floating gymnasium. RUSHMORE athletic teams have compiled an excellent record. The softball team, although having very little opportunity to play, has a record of 8 wins and 1 loss. The basketball team is undefeated in fleet competition, averaging 41 points to its opponents 19, in 24 victories over other ships' teams.

Pearl Harbor was reached at 0900, on May 27, and shortly thereafter all hands received the best news they had heard in almost ten months - the RUSHMORE was to continue on to San Francisco where the sub was to be used in a forthcoming war bond drive. Replenishment of food and fuel supplies was completed in record time, and the ship left Pearl Harbor at 1700 the same day, gaily flying a homeward bound pennant, consisting of one foot of red and white bunting for each enlisted man aboard and one white star in a blue field for each officer. CincPac's visual despatch 272007 of May, rendering congratulations upon "able support of recent operations", sent us merrily on our way to America the Beautiful!

The Golden Gate was sighted on June 2, its towers shrouded in the perpetual fog that hangs over the San Francisco Bay area, but cloudy as it was, the sun shone on the RUSHMORE. A total of three weeks was spent there with each member of the crew receiving a seven day leave; major repairs, installation of new machinery, and pending operations did not permit longer leave periods.

On 27 June, the RUSHMORE put into San Diego for a cargo of boats and on the next day once more left the shores of the United States, this time for Eniwetok to deliver the landing craft to the Boat Pool there. This proved to be the longest single trip the RUSHMORE has made to date - 4,472 miles non-stop.

From July 13 to July 24, trips to Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands and Kwajalein in the Marshalls were made to bring boats from these bases to the Boat Pool in Eniwetok. This duty completed the RUSHMORE sailed for Pearl Harbor, arriving on July 30.

Three weeks were spent at Pearl, during which the ship underwent voyage repairs, Captain Jansen was detached, and Lieutenant Commander C. O. Tobey came aboard as the new Commanding Officer; and last, but not least, the crew went wild with joy when the news of Japan's surrender was announced on the night of August 14. The evening movies had just begun when the news of the surrender came - flares and rockets soared skyward, ships' whistles and sirens bellowed, and every sailor on every ship in the harbor shouted himself hoarse. This spontaneous outburst lasted for over an hour before normalcy returned. One RUSHMORE man summed up the situation with these words, "We were where it began when it ended."

Though the war had ended, there was still much work to be done. The ship left Pearl Harbor with more boats for Eniwetok. She arrived there on August 29, and left the next day for Guam in the Marianas, and then to Saipan for more boats, leaving the latter port on September 5.



We were once more underway, this time Okinawa-bound; the Pacific became very unpacific. The outer edge of a typhoon was encountered, and heavy seas made the trip very uncomfortable, at one time causing the ship to take a forty-seven degree roll. The boats were transferred to the Boat Pool upon arrival, and the following day the RUSHMORE departed for Lingayen to load the 1059 Port Construction and Repair Group.

This unit with barges, small boats, and one pile driver, was destined for Wakayama on southern Honshu in Japan as a part of the Occupation Forces for that area. The landings on that particular portion of the Land of the Rising Sun were carried out in invasion style but lacked the noise of pre-invasion bombardment. Leaving the next day, the RUSHMORE travelled to Manila. The better part of October was spent making a second trip from Manila to Wakayama and back to Manila. At present writing, November 3, 1945, the ship is four days out of Manila, bound for Nagoya with two large barges and troops just out of the United States to replace high point men in the Occupation Forces.

The RUSHMORE has been the recipient of two letters of commendation from the late Rear Admiral Forrest B. Royal - the first, for her part in the assault and subsequent repair of landing craft at Leyte; the second, for her repair work at Lingayen in February, 1945. To date she has travelled over 68,000 nautical miles, has crossed the Equator ten times and the International Date Line five times.

The crew, ninety-five percent of which is naval reserve, is eagerly looking forward to the sixth crossing of the Date Line and a return to civilian life. "Rush", like a true Navy man, does not bother with such trivia as points; he seems content to pound a steel deck and drink coffee for the rest of his life.