

THE DEAD ENGINE INCIDENT OF LST 246

It happened while we were in convoy in the Philippine Sea on our way to the reinforcement of the Okinawa invasion. In the middle of the night I was shaken awake by our engineering officer, Lt. John Macabee. There were no lights except for a battle lantern he shown at me. Awake and while I dressed he told me we had a serious problem. The only auxiliary engine capable of running had shut down and the ship had no power of any kind. The ship was dead in the water. No help was given us from the convoy and we were left by ourselves. No escort stayed with us and we were left expended.

Being dead in the water, we were easy prey for any Japanese submarine in the area. We were fortunate that it was a dark and cloudy night with no moon. The inside of the ship was pitch black with no power of any kind. You could not see your hand in front of your face.

I was Motor Mac in charge of the auxiliary engine room but prior to the power loss, I was re-assigned to the main engine room. I do not recall who was in charge of the auxiliary engine room after I was re-assigned, but I was the one that Lt. Macabee woke up to take care of the problem.

We had three diesel generators to supply the power to run all the ship's machinery and lights. The main engines could not run because power was supplied to the air compressors which were needed to operate the reduction gear transmission units to the two main engines. Hence the main engines were down also.

We had trouble with bad lubricating oil that was eating away the bronze liners of the piston rod and main bearings of our auxiliary engines and two engines were down because they could not maintain oil pressure. Spare bearings could not be had while we were in port to repair the engines. We had only one operating auxiliary diesel to supply power when we started out on this convoy to Okinawa.

Lt. Macabee and myself got down to the auxiliary engine room and there were people there including those who were on watch when the engine quit. Nothing was being done when I got there.

Realizing the problem and that the fix would be to remove the bearings from one of the down engines to replace the ones on the engine that just quit. Since we needed light, electrician, Bob Hanley, went around the ship securing all the battle lanterns he could find and he found enough lanterns to last the time needed.

There is a deathly silence when nothing is running on the ship. Suddenly, only the two on watch, Bob Hanley and myself, were left. All the others left for topside safety. I'm sure people were in the main engine room also in the dark waiting to start up again.

Our first task was to remove the bolts that anchored down the engine we were to take the bearings from. We used the overhead chain hoist to lift the engine high enough to drop the oil pan to expose the crank shaft and all bearings. This had to be done on two engines. Fortunately, the sea was relatively calm and the swaying of the hanging engines was minimal.

The bearings were removed one at a time and transferred to the identical main and rod bearings on the other engine. These bearings were not pitted and were suitable to be used. This was slow and tedious as the bearings had to be precisely positioned, the bearing caps bolted back on, the nuts had to be tightened with a torque wrench and cotter pinned. All this by light from battle lanterns.

The oil pan gaskets were replaced and both engines were reset on their mounts, oil checked

and water lines reconnected along with the exhaust pipes. The engine was turned over by hand and all was free. Next with a prayer and fingers crossed, the start button was pushed and IT STARTED! While the engine was warming up the electrician turned the light switch on and we had lights again in the engine room and the top side bridge. Now the engine needed a minimum of fifteen minutes to properly warm up before throwing the full electrical load on. During this time, we were being harassed from the bridge to throw the power switch on for the main engine room. This we could not do. After twelve minutes of engine warmup, we were forced by threats from the bridge of court martial; so under duress, we threw the main engine room switch on. The engine almost shut down because of the sudden load to the main engine room, but picked up speed again. Short minutes later, we could hear the main engines start up and all was well again.

There is an eerie silence when nothing is running on the ship. We could hear the ship creaking and groaning as the plates twisted by the action of the sea. After the lights were on again, our faces showed the tremendous strain we were under. This was a major overhaul accomplished by two men holding battle lanterns so that I could have lighting to remove and replace these bearings. After all this work, it was still very dark outside when we got underway again.

It took the LST 246 twenty-four hours to catch up to the convoy. The 246 ran straight ahead while the convoy was zig zagging enabling us to catch up.

Since all this happened in the dark of the night with most of the crew asleep, very few people were aware of the trouble we were in and they blissfully slept through it all.

I do not recall the names of the two Motor Macs besides Bob Hanley and myself. It did not sit well with me that I was threatened with court martial for not throwing power to the main engine room without the required auxiliary diesel warmup time. Of course all this was forgotten after we got under way again. We did a very good job considering the circumstances and we never got recognized for it by the higher ups.

This auxiliary engine ran continuously to and during the Okinawa operation, then back to a staging area, over to Saipan, then to Pearl Harbor and onto San Francisco where it was finally shut down after we hooked up to shore power at the Western Pipe and Steel Company dock. We were to have ship and engine overhaul to prepare for the coming invasion of Japan. I was hired by the Western Pipe and Steel Company to oversee our engines overhaul.

Holes were cut in the decks to remove the engines from the ship to be overhauled at the company facilities. After some days of this, the A bombs were dropped on Japan. The ship was hastily put back together and put to sea.

The rest of the story is not mine to tell as I was transferred off the 246 to Treasure Island and then home for 30-day leave.

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LST 246