

Series C (Part IV)

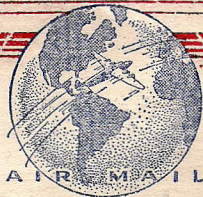
"Me and Tona"

(continued)

When the LST 558 moved to Kerama Retto, tragedy hovered - a frightful tragedy. Only by an unusual stroke of luck did she escape a terrible fate. Another ship, did not escape.

On the evening of April 9, about 40 LST's, transports, and destroyers moved around Kerama Retto, then turned North toward Yonabaru. Our destination was a tiny island called Tsuken Shima. You will not find it on any maps. I have shown you on one of my sketches in a few letters back, exactly where Tsuken Shima lies.

Tsuken Shima blocks the entrance to



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the harbor of Yonabaru. The harbor used to be called Nakagasaki Wan. It has since been renamed Buckner Bay (named after General Buckner who was killed at Okinawa. Buckner led the 10th Army)

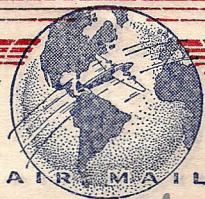
On that small island ^{were} ~~there~~ a few hundred Japs who had some 6 and 8 inch guns. Once Okinawa was taken, that island would cause trouble to ships who wanted to enter Buckner Bay.

The object of this invasion was worded simply:

"Land on Tsuten Shima and kill all Japs and wreck all guns. And do it in 24 hours"

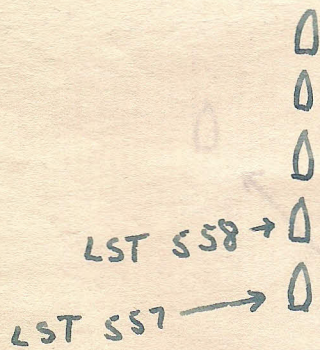
We were to arrive there on April 10.

As we moved along in the pitch dark

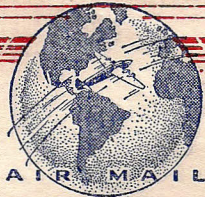


on the evening of the 9th, we could see the sky full of tracers back at Hageshi Harbor at Okinawa. The Japs were bombing again. This time, Yontan and Katana air strips were getting it - hard, too.

We were the fourth ship in a column of five ships. Our column looked something like this:

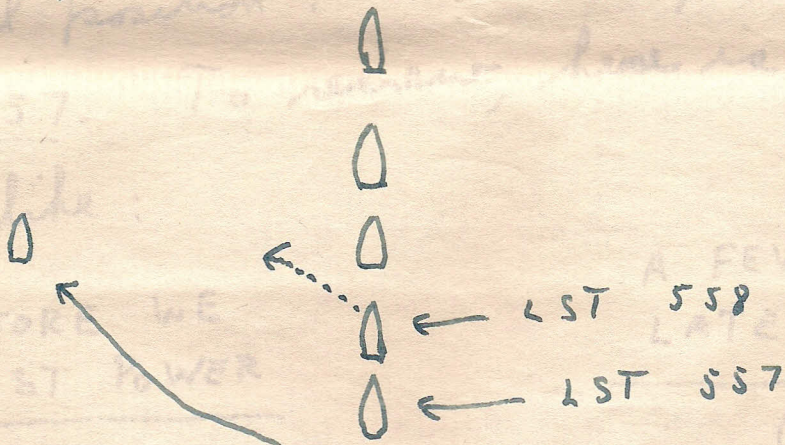


Suddenly, and without any warning whatever, our engines went dead. There was a power failure. We were slowing down, and the LST 557



only 400 yards behind us, was beginning to get closer.

To avoid a possible collision, we turned to the left, so that we would shear out of column and get out of the way of the LST 557. It looked something like this



LST 558 TURNS LEFT TO GET OUT OF THE WAY OF LST 557.

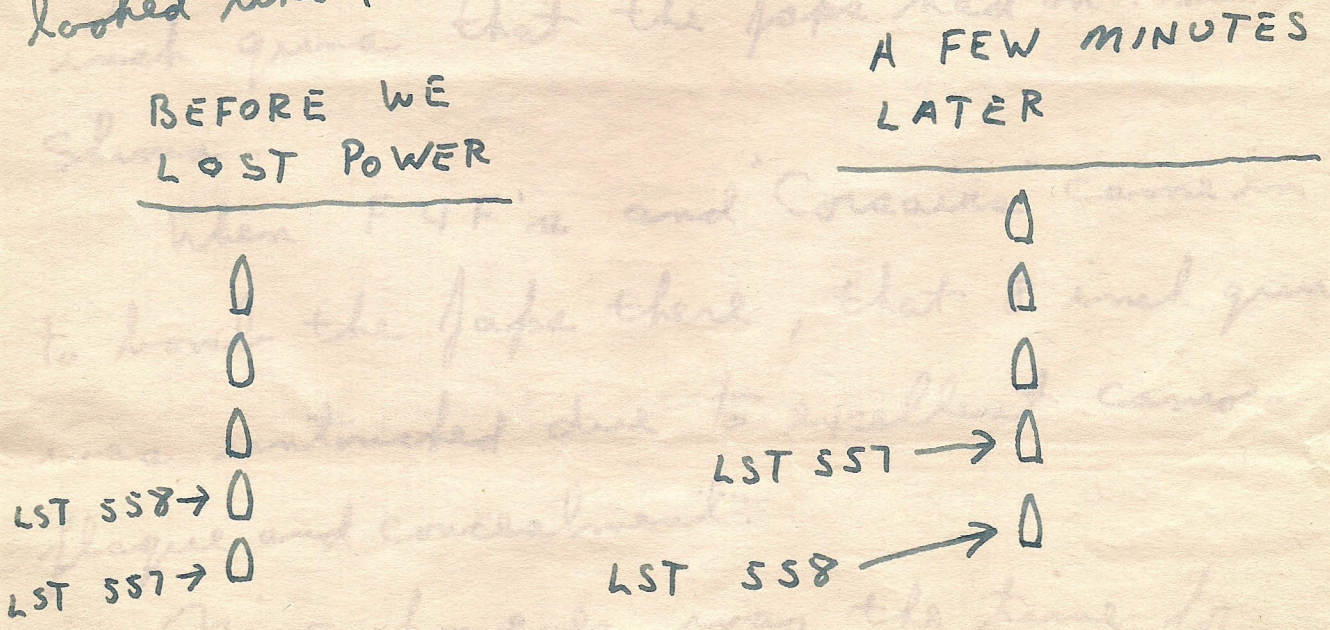
LST 558 ENDED UP IN THIS POSITION

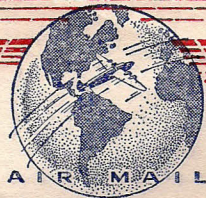


One minute after we turned to get out of the way, we regained power, and our engines were alright again.

Those 60 seconds, during which we had no power, proved to be God's own blessing. You shall soon see why.

The LST 557 moved up and took our original position. We then got behind the LST 557. To review, here is what it looked like:





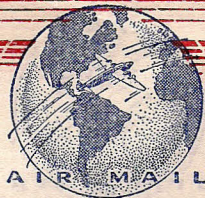
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The next morning, when we got to Tsukun Shima, the number 4 ship (which was now LST 557) was required to stand-by at a designated spot 5,000 yards off the coast of Tsukun Shima, and wait for further orders.

It so happens that intelligence reports had failed to uncover information concerning the precise location of one of the 8 inch guns that the Japs had on Tsukun Shima.

When F4F's and "Corsairs" came in to bomb the Japs there, that 8 inch gun was untouched due to excellent camouflage and concealment.

Now, however, was the time for

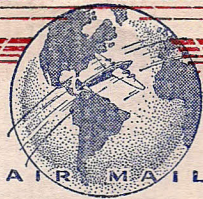


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the fake to use that gun, if they ever intended to do so.

And there was no question about it - they were going to use it - on the number 4 ship, the LST 557.

The first shot fired by the 8 inch gun was over that ship. The next shot fell short. Five more quick shots followed in rapid succession. The shots were still not accurate. The LST 557 was now trying to get away as quickly as possible. But I could see that they'd never make it. The shells were getting closer and more accurate each time. Only one thing could save the 557 - if a plane could get over there in time



LP

to bomb that gun position, then it ...

It was too late now.

The Japs found the range and hit the
557. Several more followed ^{and} ~~at~~ the LST
557 was hit again - and again.

Many were killed and wounded. I
went aboard the 557 later, and saw
how bloody it was. On the very spot
where I ordinarily stand, two men had
been killed instantly.

The 557 had moved into the number
4 position the night before.

We had never had trouble with our
engines before. We have not had trouble
since then. But our engines had gone
dead for 60 seconds on the evening of April 9, 1945
Beng.