

The Voyage of the LST 23

LST 23 was laid down at Neville Island, Corapolis, PA located in the Ohio River near Pittsburgh. She was built by the Dravo Corp. and launched on March 13, 1943 being sponsored by Mrs. Mary Miller whose husband, an employee of Dravo, helped in her construction.

The original crew was assembled at the Curtis Bay Coast Guard Station near Baltimore, Maryland and came aboard the "23" at Neville Island on May 11, 1943.

The new ship with her new crew started down the Ohio River on May 14, then into the Mississippi River and on to New Orleans.

At the Todd Johnson Ship Yard, across the river from New Orleans in Algiers, Louisiana the ship was commissioned on May 22, 1943. Also at this shipyard, the ship's mast, which had been lashed to the main deck while coming down the river, was raised and welded in place. The ship was then repainted from the original grey to a camouflage green for her first ocean voyage across the Caribbean to the Panama Canal.

Continuing through the canal and north in the Pacific to San Francisco the crew was outfitted with winter clothing and the ship repainted back to the original grey. Also an LCT (with a Navy crew of six) was loaded on the main deck at the Mare Island Navy Yard for the trip north to the Aleutian Islands.

Loaded with Army amphibs along with other landing craft, the "23" headed for Alaska. The "23" left for Kodiak Island July 17, 1943 and arrived at Kodiak on July 25. She departed Kodiak for Adak Island with the Destroyer USS Hutchins escorting and six LSTs, arriving August 2, 1943. The LCT was launched and practice landings on Great Sitkin Island were made. Then the "23" went on to Kiska Island on August 15, 1943 for the invasion.

Kermit Gullstad: *The Japanese had left Kiska the midnight before the invasion, leaving everything behind except their rifles. Even rice in woks was also left. The "23" crew had a great time going through all the stores left behind; officers' fur lined below the knee coats, fur lined boots, etc.*

The "23" then sailed back to San Francisco and Port Hueneme where the "23" was loaded with Seabees on September 21, 1943. On October 4, 1943 the "23" arrived at Pearl Harbor and unloaded the Seabees.

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On October 6, 1943 the "23" left Pearl Harbor with a load of Army troops and took them to Nuku Fetau Atoll. Arriving on October 23, the troops were unloaded. The "23" left Nuku Fetau November 11, 1943.

Tom Robson: *We were at Nuku Fetau, Ellice Islands, November 9, 1943 getting ready for our fist invasion, Tarawa. I was the engineer on the "23"s LCVP that was going ashore for supplies. While ashore, as our supply officer was trying to procure a washing machine, we noticed a long line of swabs. Asking what it was for, they said "beer". An invoice was needed from an officer. We found a cooperative one and got in line. We lugged twenty cases of beer to the LCVP and hid them in the bilge under the floor deck. Our plan was to unload at night when the boat would be hoisted to the "23"s boat deck. Zak, a store keeper, would open the refrigerator for storage, and we would have our own private stock. As we were unloading, the executive officer appeared on the scene and wanted to know what was going on. We said "Unloading small stores, Sir". He wasn't convinced as he recognized the word "beer" on the cases. He allowed us to keep the beer but said we would have to share it with the whole crew. We didn't like to share, but we did.*

On November 11, 1943 the "23" arrived at Funi Futi, Ellice Islands and loaded the 22nd Marines in preparation for the invasion of the Gilbert Islands. On November 13, 1943 the "23" experienced her first bombing attack, without damage. On November 17, 1943 she left Funi Futi for Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. On November 20, 1943, while at sea, a destroyer dropped three depth charges off our stern and just about blew us out of the water.

Don Davidson: *November 13, 1943. I had just come aboard the "23" in October as a Radioman fresh out of radio school. We were in the harbor at Funi Futi in the Ellice Islands en route to Tarawa and I was in the radio shack copying messages sent by Radio Honolulu to all ships in the Pacific fleet. Our communications officer, Lt. Littlejohn, came in and asked if anything important had been received. I scanned back and said "Only one - condition red at Funi Futi." He said, "You dumb ---, that means we're under air attack!" I had no idea what "condition red" was.*

The "23" arrived at Tarawa on November 21, 1943. The beach was very hot and Marine losses were heavy. There was a lot of tracer fire and bombs were being dropped on the island. Around 1000 the crew could see cruisers and battlewagons shelling the island.

November 23, 1943, still on the beach. Fighting still very heavy. The Marines lost a couple thousand men during the first couple of days.

The "23" beached on the island next to Tarawa awaiting orders. On November 22, 1943, the Japs flew over and bombed their own island. On November 25, 1943, the "23" pulled off the beach and tied up to a transport and loaded 100 octane gas in 55 gallon drums. This was Thanksgiving day and the crew enjoyed Thanksgiving canned turkey and a beer party.

Tom Robson: *On November 27, 1943 we beached on Tarawa and were unloading barrels of gasoline. The crew was anxious to find souvenirs so were going ashore rolling a barrel and taking their time returning. The beachmaster wanted the "23" unloaded as soon as possible and was troubled by the shore parties scattering through the coconut groves sightseeing instead of unloading. He made it plain to our skipper that our crew was checking out the pretty native girls who wore no vests around their chests, and they were to stop it immediately and finish the unloading.*

Our crew picked up a Jap motorcycle at Tarawa. It had a side car. Eddie Lemata has a lot to do with getting it going when we got it back to Pearl Harbor. It was used to get the mail while in PH until the shore patrol took it away.

A near miss by a bomb on December 3, 1943 buckled two plates in the hull. The Japs also bombed the gas we brought ashore about 100 yards from our ship, setting it afire. We worked the rest of the night to unload the rest of the gas.

Don Davidson: *December 3, 1943. It was late at night and we were on the beach at Tarawa. We were at general quarters anticipating an air attack after unloading most of our cargo that included several hundred barrels of gasoline a short distance from the bow doors. I was on the conning tower with our skipper (LT. Swann) and the O.D. manning our portable radio that was on frequency with the flotilla commander. A lone Japanese bomber flew over and dropped a bomb on the gasoline we had just unloaded. Lt. Swann told me to contact the flotilla commander and request permission to withdraw from the beach. The reply was "negative." We could not have withdrawn anyway as the tide was out and we were high and dry.*

Loaded damaged Amtracks and departed December 8, 1943 in convoy for Hilo, Hawaii. Arrived Hilo on December 19. Arrived at Pearl Harbor from Hilo on December 24, 1943. Picked up mail. Ship in drydock for repairs, and new guns added. No liberty on Christmas, but a big blowout on ship which was appreciated by all.

Loaded provisions and Marines and departed for Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands on January 22, 1944 as flag ship with a three-striper (Commander Whiteside, USN). Arrived at Kwajalein Atoll February 2, 1944. There were many other ships there. Cruisers and battleships were shelling the island. Artillery fire was coming from

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one of the smaller islands directed at Kwajalein. Our planes were bombing and strafing Jap positions. There was no air opposition from the Japs. The soldiers established a beach head and were moving inland. Huge fires were raging.

On February 3, 1944, D-Day + 1, the "23" pulled into a lagoon on Kwajalein and cut the pontoons loose. The pontoons were rigged and the "23" pulled into the beach. Jap shells fell within 25 feet of the ship. Japs were slowly being driven back out of pill boxes. The front had moved about 500 yards inland. The crew had had very little sleep, if any, during the last 30 hours. The ship was in condition II; six on, six off. A sniper got through our lines and took a few shots at the ship around 2300. Wagner opened up with a Thompson and chased him off. On February 4, 1944, the "23" was still on the beach unloading. There were quite a few dead Japs around. Some Japs were now surrendering. There were an estimated 5000 Japs on the island. After unloading, the "23" pulled off the beach and tied up to a PA to take on cargo.

Tom Robson: On February 5, 1944 the "23" moved from the PA to the beach. She ran aground on a coral reef but managed to get off. She hit more coral on the beach. The pontoons were being rigged for unloading. On February 6 I got ashore in the afternoon and saw some of the most horrible sights I have ever seen. The smell was unbearable. Dead Japs were everywhere. I remember RM Bolt and myself looking for souvenirs. During our hunt I stepped on a tube of black ink and it shot all over Bolt's leg. We came across some guys diffusing what looked like unexploded 16" projectiles - we got out of there fast. Along the way we came across a couple of Army guys guarding a stack of Jap wine or beer. We asked about getting some, and they said when they go down to the other end, we should help ourselves. We filled up a Jap sea bag with all we could carry. On February 7 we were stuck on the beach, and on February 8 we were finally retracted.

On February 9, 1944 the "23" was chosen to act as a supply and refueling ship for small boats. The reason for this was that she was the only ship in the flotilla with a fresh water evaporator. Refueled two LCMs. An LCI came alongside and gave us some ammunition. LST 227 came alongside and gave us 80,000 gallons of fuel. The "23" then moved alongside a merchant ship and started taking on stores.

The "23" was assigned to a task force to mop up some of the atolls around Kwajalein. On March 7, 1944 she departed Roi Island with 400 Marines and 9 Amtracks. She sailed with 2 LCIs and a YMS and was also accompanied by a DE at times. Planes were overhead.

March 8, 1944: We arrived at Wotho. 11 Japs committed Hari Kari and one was shot. Marines destroyed a radio station.

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March 10, 1944: Arrived at Ujae Atoll. 5 Japs committed Hari Kari and Marines took one prisoner who was wounded by a grenade used by others to commit Hari Kari. One Marine was killed when a hand grenade went off in his pocket.

March 13, 1944: Left Ujae and arrived at Lae. No Japs were found, but the natives were unfriendly and it was suspected that they had hidden the Japs.

March 14, 1944: Back to Kwajalein for supplies and then back to Roi Island to pick up Marines and Amtracks.

March 17, 1944: Left Roi Island in a flotilla of 3 LCIs, 1 can, 1 mini mine sweeper, 1 LCT and LST 127. The sea was so rough that the LCT, which was carrying tanks, couldn't make it so the flotilla returned to port.

March 20, 1944: Landed at Ailinglapalap (last place Amelia Earhart was heard from). Marines killed 38 Japs and took two prisoners. Five Marines were wounded.

March 22, 1944: A flag raising ceremony was held in the native village to impress the king. The natives claimed there was a white man and woman seven or eight years before but the Japs took them away.

March 24, 1944: Arrived at Namu Atoll. One Jap policeman, one Jap school teacher and one Jap woman with her four children surrendered by waving a white flag on the beach.

March 25, 1944: Left for Kwajalein and then Roi Island. Arrived Kwajalein and took on stores and a new bunch of marines.

March 26, 1944: Mail Call.

March 27, 1944: Left Kwajalein for next invasion. Our convoy was made up of the "23", 3 LCIs, 1 DE and a mine sweeper. On the way to Bikini Atoll there was an accident aboard the ship. A Marine was cleaning his rifle when it went off, practically tearing the hand off another Marine. An operation to save his hand was attempted aboard ship but it seemed hopeless. A plane arrived and took him to Kwajalein. As the "23" approached Bikini Atoll the DE picked up four natives in an outrigger. They were trying to escape believing we were more Japs.

Tom Robson: *While on Roi Island it was learned from the LST 127 that at one of their landings the Japs waved a white flag to surrender. As the Marines approached, the Japs opened fire killing five Marines and wounding eight. The Marines killed all the Japs.*

March 28, 1944: Arrived at Bikini Atoll. Marines found four dead Japs (Hari Kari) and killed one who tried to escape. These Japs were a bomber crew shot down a few weeks earlier.

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Tom Robson: *On March 31, 1944 we arrived at Rongelap in the morning. A tower was visible on the island. The "23" came close to another island and let some marines off to question the natives. They learned there were eleven Japs on Rongelap. The crew was told the following day they were to blast the Jap emplacements with the 40 mms and the 3" 50. The natives were sent to offer the Japs a chance to surrender but the Japs refused.*

April 1, 1944: Marines went ashore on Rongelap looking for 11 Japs but found none after looking for three days. There was a big radar station on the island.

April 3, 1944: The "23" stood off and shelled the radar station for two hours. Left Rongelap for Uterick.

April 5, 1944: At Uterick Atoll we couldn't get past the coral reef so we discharged the troops at sea. They had 25 miles of rough water go through to land. It took about two hours. The Marines killed 14 Japs. The "23" left the same day for Kwajalein.

As each atoll was secured the American flag was raised and the atoll was claimed by the U.S.

On April 6, 1944 we returned to Kwajalein and then to Pearl Harbor where we arrived on April 24, 1944 and went into dry dock for repairs. On the way to Pearl Harbor we were in convoy with six LSTs, eleven LCTs, two sub chasers, a DE, and a mini mine sweeper.

On May 1, 1944 Lt. Swann, the commanding officer, was relieved of duty and promoted to Lt. Commander. George Martin was made skipper. On May 11 the "23" moved to Maui. On May 12, 75 mm howitzer shells were loaded. DUKWs were loaded on top of the shells and Amtracks were placed in front of the shells. Approximately 350 Marines and a few soldiers were loaded.

On May 21, 1944 we were nesting with 34 other LST's and 3 Transports in seven columns in West Lock. We were in the second column near the middle. We were fully loaded with ammunition, fuel and Marines getting ready for Saipan. Around 13:30 there was a terrific explosion when the LST 39 on the outward end of the first column exploded. Debris from the "39" covered other LST's causing five others to also explode. Fire was breaking out on LST's all around us. Our crew reacted quickly and while some were throwing life jackets to men in the water, others were hosing down the decks to prevent fire from spreading to the "23". Some chopped the hawsers which enabled the "23" to back out away from danger. The Port Director told the "23" to go out to sea and await further orders. At 1900 they called us back into the harbor. At 2005 the "23" returned through the sub nets and moored to the starboard side of LST 29 in Nan dock at 2045 hours. The exploded ships were

still burning. The next day the entire crew turned to cleaning blood and body parts off the deck. On May 24 the "23" went to the Pearl Harbor magazine across the channel and they were still fighting fires on the LSTs.

Tom Robson: *On May 21, 1944 while I was on liberty the LST in front of us blew up and caught fire. This started other LSTs exploding and burning. There were several men blown onto our ship and lived. Troops and sailors were trying to swim to shore but many were burned alive by the oil burning on the water. There were also many human parts lying on our decks along with parts of other ships. Our crew cut the lines and tried to get the ship clear of the explosions and burning oil. Fire hoses were manned and the "23" succeeded in getting out to sea.*

Don Davidson: *On May 21, 1944 I was in a Higgins boat in late afternoon with two others of our crew (can't recall who they were) returning from Pearl Harbor to our anchorage in West Lock. As we were entering the anchorage we saw the first LST explode. I recall seeing a huge smoke doughnut go into the air along with trucks, jeeps, bodies and debris. At first I thought it was the cluster that the "23" was in but it was not. Soon the second and third LSTs blew. I recall the maddening exodus of the remaining LSTs trying to get out of the West Lock, the "23" among them.*

Within thirty minutes or so, three more LSTs exploded. I was scared as hell as this was the worst thing I had ever experienced. I recall that we tried to reach men swimming away from the mess but flaming gasoline engulfed them before we could reach them. When the fireboats arrived we were directed to dock our boat some distance away. I don't recall how we spent the night but we returned to the "23" the next day, and a few days later we were on our way to Saipan.

Harding Sortevisck: *According to the May 21, 1944 log, over fifty Marines were missing. Perhaps some were picked up by other ships. From other accounts of this catastrophe I have read, some people were caught in the screws while LSTs were getting away from the accident, but I have no idea if our ship was involved.*

According to the log the following officers were aboard at the time of the explosions: Littlefield, LTJG; Darnall, LTJG; Martin, LT; Houdek, LTJG; and Sortevisck, ENS. There was no order to abandon ship. Many of the crew have no recollection of seeing officers at the time. Chief Quartermaster Williams took the ship out to sea after the lines were cut with fire axes. One of the lines, a ten inch hawser on the port side fell into the water and entangled the port screw. The ship continued on one engine. The "23" went beyond the sub nets for several miles and while she was drifting, waiting for orders, Ensign Sortevisck went over the side with a knife and tried to cut the hawser free but was unsuccessful.

Tom Robson: *Somewhere in the Pacific Ocean while travelling toward an operation in a flotilla, a ship signalled they had a man aboard that was believed to have had appendicitis. Since we had a doctor aboard they wanted to transfer him to our ship.*

A breeches buoy was rigged using line and various pulleys. The sea was rough and the ships were rolling. It was almost impossible to keep the lines taut as the sailor was pulled from one ship to the other. On occasion the man dipped into the sea and then popped into the air. We thought if the appendix problem didn't kill him, he may drown from the ducking. As I recall, he made it safely aboard dripping wet. The doctor's examination revealed a stomach ache and nothing more.

On May 25, 1944 we put to sea heading for the Marianas and Saipan in a flotilla of about 60 LSTs. The "23" was loaded with 75 mms, DUKWs, Buffaloes, Marines and some Seabees to tend to the causeways and some Navy to operate the mine sweeping LCI. On June 7, 1944 we arrived at Eniwetok and joined other ships in preparation for the invasion of Saipan. On June 15, 1944, D-Day, we were in the first wave but we had a hell of a time trying to get on the beach. The Japs fired everything they had at us and we were finally ordered to stand off until further notice. The "23" pulled among some transports and picked up about 500 more men bringing the total aboard to around 1000. The Marines were trying to establish a beach head and the "23" was standing off about 3000 yards from the beach waiting for further instructions. There were a great many Marine casualties. The boats approaching the beach were met with very heavy mortar fire. The beach head finally appeared established and supplies were starting to move ashore. The "23" moved in closer and drifted all night. On June 17, 1944 the "23" was hit by friendly fire and five of the crew were injured. Executive Officer Houdec was seriously injured, Howard Glen got it in the leg, Chief Young was hit in the groin, and Trujillo and Al Johnson each got it in the foot. On June 22, 1944 we finally landed and discharged cargo and Marines. On June 23, 1944 the "23" was still on the beach unloading. The Japs on Tinian threw a few shells our way. One hit the LST 119 and went through the starboard side into her steering engine room. We finally retracted from the beach and went alongside LST 275 to give her fuel. That night Jap bombers flew over and dropped a few bombs on the beach with little effect. No return fire. On June 24, 1944 we left Saipan and anchored near Tinian. 17 air raids in 8 days. Following this the "23" was sent back to Eniwetok with several other LSTs just to get them out of the way. She arrived at Eniwetok on June 30, 1944.

On July 4, 1944 we had a pineapple swipe and raisin jack party.

On July 12, 1944 the "23" left Eniwetok and arrived back at Saipan on July 17, 1944. We took a pilot on board before docking. He maneuvered our ship into a crash landing against the side of LST 40. Our bow anchor ripped a hole in the starboard side of the "40"s crew quarters.

On July 18, 1944 Ellison was caught straggling in Garapan. He became a P. A. L. and was put on the burial detail. There were still snipers around.

Harding Sortevisk: *July 18, 1944: After the disaster at West Loch, Pearl Harbor, my first engagement was at Saipan. I remember we were short of gas or oxygen or both. So a day or two after the invasion I went ashore with a few of the crew one dark night. We crept ashore on the LCVP and sneaked down to a fenced storage area. We climbed the fence, lugged several cylinders back to the boat and headed back to the ship, congratulating ourselves on our success without being shot. Our high was short-lived because when they were checked it was found that they were all empty.*

On July 24, 1944 we participated in the invasion of Tinian. The "23" was cruising the island quite close when the commander of our flotilla said "Martin, what the hell are you trying to do - take the island by yourself?" It was then that we were sprayed by shrapnel and a couple of the crew were hit but none of the wounds were serious. Falbo got hit in the foot. At 0730 the first wave hit the beach. We let out our Amtracks and started unloading ammo and supplies. Every once in a while ack ack bursts would land near our ship scaring the hell out of us. Departed Tinian on July 28, 1944, arriving at Eniwetok on August 3, 1944. After provisioning and loading troops we left for the Solomon Islands on August 4, 1944 and arrived at Florida Islands on August 11, 1944 at a place called Hutesin Creek. Beautiful scenery and lush vegetation. In that area we practiced maneuvers. At Purvis Bay, Florida Islands, on August 31, 1944, sixteen of the crew were relieved to go back to the states.

Harding Sortevisk: *August 12, 1944. One day while it was quiet down in the Solomon Islands I went surf board riding with some of the crew behind the LCVP, using the engine cover for a board. We had a great time until we returned to the ship and were told the area was full of alligators. Lucky us.*

Don Davidson: *September 4, 1944. We were departing Guadalcanal en route to the assault of Peleliu. I was in the process of installing demolition charges into all of our radio gear. I checked all switches to their off position and was inserting one charge, with the plug inserted, into our IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) transmitter when it blew up. I ended up on the deck of the degaussing room wondering what the hell had happened. Fortunately, the charge was all the way into the casing and it took the full impact of the explosion and all I had were powder burns on my hands and face. Investigation showed that a wrong switch (single pole instead of double pole) had been installed and somehow the battery clips on the power source had been reversed during recharging. Thus the demolition charge was "hot" and if it had grounded before it was all the way into the casing it could have blown my head off.*

On September 15, 1944 we landed on Peleliu. The island was heavily bombed and shelled by our forces but the Japs poured in heavy mortar fire on the beach which caused considerable damage. Departed Peleliu on September 29, 1944. We sailed through a heavy storm and arrived in Guadalcanal on October 8, 1944, where we had mail call. On October 9, 1944 we left for Espiritu Santo.

On October 12, 1944 we arrived at Espiritu Santo for repairs and dry dock. On November 8, 1944 some of the crew raided the officers' club and got eleven cases of brandy. Departed on November 14, 1944 for the Russell Islands.

Tom Robson: *October 20, 1944. The LST 23 had logged many miles and hours on her main diesel engines. It was time for a checkup after participating in six operations all the way from Kiska to Peleliu. Clement Gavin and myself, MOMMs, were assigned to start pulling cylinder heads for checking valves and carbon deposits. We rigged the overhead chain hoist, attaching the hook to the head. All holding bolts were removed so we began to hoist. We pulled and pulled with all our strength. The head loosened but wouldn't come clear. All at once we realized we hadn't removed the snifter valve that screws into the head through the engine wall. Upon removing the valve, the head was easily removed but the valve was bent beyond reuse.*

We rushed to the starboard shaft alley where spare parts were stored and found a new valve. Lucky for us. We completed the rest of the overhaul without incident. We must have done something right as old reliable powered the "23" to Lingayen Gulf, Leyte and Guam, then a thirty day trip back to San Francisco. in May, 1945.

Engines were to be overhauled at the shipyard. I got a job for \$5.00 an hour there doing the same thing that I had done at Espiritu Santo. This time I removed the snifter valves before pulling the heads.

Tom Robson: *While at sea in rough water on the way to one of the "23"s invasions we were given an opportunity to pass mail to a mail ship that would send it home. A line was tossed to the other ship, and a mail bag and their line attached for the transfer. As the ships rolled and slack in the lines would be gathered in and out it happened. The bag dipped into the sea, then shot into the air, then back into the water. The transfer was completed.*

My next letter from home asked what happened to the letter as the ink had run and the letter was almost illegible.

Harding Sorteveck: *November 12, 1944. This story involves the crew's favorite beverage - beer. We had returned from a special supply expedition with about 20 or 30 cases of beer. Being cautious, the officers stationed certain trustworthy (???)*

members of the crew at different locations while we unloaded the beer. An inventory after unloading revealed that despite our extra caution we lost two cases. If that wasn't bad enough, another crisis developed later on. Being smart (we thought) we filled a refrigerator with beer, had a hasp welded on the door and padlocked it. A check later on revealed an empty refrigerator. The crew outsmarted us by knocking out the hinge bolts and cleaned out the entire refrigerator. I should have been suspicious because on a late night watch I heard a lot of singing coming from the fantail. Oh well, we never found out who the perpetrators were, but I'm sure morale was given a big boost that night.

Bob Henderson: Shortly after leaving Espiritu Santo I served my first wheel watch. It was the 1600 - 1200 watch and the event took place well after dark. I was on the phones to the engine room and had been calling down for an increase of five rpm or a reduction of five rpm as ordered from the Cons. Suddenly the order came down to "Stop All". I duly reported this to the engine room and got the reply "What?" This was repeated several times and each time I was getting louder when the command "All Back Full" came down from the con. By now I was screaming into the phone and still got the reply "What?" Shortly the order came for full right rudder, which the helmsman complied with. After we got back on course, an officer popped into the wheelhouse and wanted to know what the hell was going on. When I tried to explain he asked why I didn't use the telegraph. I told him I didn't know how to use it and thought it was only for the captain to use when docking. Shortly after that we had lessons on how to take over the watch and how to use the equipment.

On November 17, 1944 we arrived at the Russell Islands and took on pontoons and left for Bouganville on November 20, 1944 with fifteen Seabees aboard. On November 22, 1944 we arrived at Manus and took on 300 black troops and on November 23, 1944 we were underway to Cape Gloucester, New Britain Island. On November 27, 1944 we unloaded the black troops as part of a move to get our troops off Bouganville and replace them with Aussies.

Tom Robson: While on Manus on November 22, 1944 the LST 23 was at anchor with the two effect evaporator in operation to make fresh water. I was on security watch with about all to do was check the boiler that was making steam to operate the "evap". The water level in the boiler had to be checked from time to time and water added manually as necessary. This was due to the automatic float valve being out of order. Depending on the level of water in the sight glass it would take fifteen to twenty minutes to fill.

I opened the filling valve and went up on deck to get some fresh air, thinking I'd return in a few minutes to turn off the filling valve. A considerable amount of time passed when someone mentioned the word water. I immediately remembered the

boiler. I got to the boiler compartment and I found the boiler was full and overflowing to the bilge of the main engine room. I looked into the bilge and saw about a foot of water. At that time someone came down to the engine room and noticed an unusual amount of water. He thought we had a small leak in the ships bottom. I suggested pumping it out and monitoring the situation before getting too excited about a hole in the bottom. I pumped out the water and kept my mouth shut.

The next morning the Oil King who was responsible for checking the use of water reported that 3000 gallons of water over normal use was used in the last twenty-four hours. This excessive use caused the immediate shutting off of all fresh water showers and all but one wash basin in the crews quarters. Needless to say, there were a few sailors who missed their showers and were slightly upset. I kept this secret for 49 years until our ships fifth reunion - my first.

On November 29, 1944 we started loading up for the next invasion, and had maneuvers with LVTs and rockets, etc. On December 8, 1944 we were back to sea heading for the Admiralties hauling stores. On December 9, 1944 we arrived at Manus in the Admiralties. After taking on some supplies we left Manus on December 15, 1944 for Lae, New Guinea where we practiced landings. We lost a DUKW with a 105 mm. On December 18 or 19, 1944 we left Lae for Manus and arrived December 22, 1944. On December 24, 1944 we loaded stores until 2330. We finished loading on Christmas and then got time off in the evening to see a pretty good movie.

Tom Robson: On maneuvers before Peleliu we had a load of Army "ducks" with 105 howitzers. We laid off Lae, New Guinea letting the "ducks", Army personnel and 105s off the bow ramp at sea. They were to go ashore, set up the howitzers, and return to the ship, traveling up the bow ramp while we were still at sea.

As one of the "ducks" was coming up the ramp, it lost traction and slipped partially backward with the stern taking on water. A line was attached to keep the "duck" from further slipping back. Its front wheels were still on the ramp. A steel cable was attached to the "duck" and run through a series of pulleys to the elevator capstan on the main deck. The capstan started, strained, then broke loose from the deck causing the "duck", howitzer, ammo and Army personnel gear to sink to Davy Jones's Locker. The Army personnel were saved. Another SNAFU operation.

On December 27, 1944 we got a pep talk and the "23" left Manus bound for the Philippines loaded with troops, ammunition and vehicles. On January 6, 1945 we entered the Sulu Sea. On January 7, 1945 we entered the China Sea. On January 8, 1945 Radio Tokyo announced that our convoy had been destroyed.

Harding Sortevisk: *January 6, 1945. One night, I believe I was on the mid to 4:00 a.m. watch, and we were travelling somewhere in a four line convoy of LSTs. We were the third ship in a four ship line on the starboard side of the convoy. At the stern of the next inboard line was an AKA or APA. Suddenly the commander of the flotilla gave the order "Five emergency" which meant that each ship should make an immediate 50 degree turn to port. Well, the ship ahead of us went to starboard, the AKA-APA kept going ahead, and several other ships were doing different maneuvers. After we made our turn I noticed the AKA-APA heading for our midships. By using flank speed and making starboard and port turns we avoided a collision by about five yards. The flotilla commander, in shock, gave the order to return to the original course and after many course and speed changes everything returned to normal. With all the annunciator changes to the engine crew I thought for sure Captain Martin would be rushing up to the bridge but I guess he was a sound sleeper.*

Radio News Flash: *January 7, 1945. The Japs say that four planes of the special (suicide) attack corps attacked and instantaneously sunk two carriers and one battleship in the China Sea off Lingayen. They also said three planes of the same attack corps attacked and sunk one large transport, one destroyer and one tanker in the Sulu Sea. Japanese reconnaissance planes sighted a large convoy of over 100 landing barges and escort in the Mindanao Sea (guess who?). The Japs also say they know the whereabouts of two other large convoys, one in the Sulu Sea and the other off Mindanao. They predict a landing on Luzon.*

Tom Robson: *We had a Navy sub-chaser as an escort while heading for the operation at Lingayen Gulf in the PI around January 8, 1945. The escort needed fuel and water, which we were to supply. The sub-chaser came alongside the "23" and a spring line was attached to our bow. A canvas fire hose was passed for water and a rubber hose for fuel. All at once a puff of smoke came from their stack and their boat lost power throwing a strain on the spring line, causing it to part as did the hoses. The sub-chaser dropped far back in the convoy and signalled that the fuel we supplied was 90% water. Not so. They again signaled that they had transposed the hoses and their diesel engine conked out - situation normal, all fouled up - SNAFU.*

The Navy warships preceding the convoy sustained severe damage from the Kamikazes. On January 9, 1945, the crew had been on GQ for sixteen hours. The attacking forces at Lingayen Gulf found little resistance and quickly established a six mile beach head. We beached on schedule next to a burning LSM. There was a Jap plane that had been shot down earlier about 100 yards off our bow. We finished unloading by 2400 and on January 10, 1945 at 1000 we departed for Leyte.

On January 15, 1945 we arrived at Leyte and took on more supplies and troops. Also, monkeys, dogs, a parrot and fighting cocks appeared on board. On January 22, 1945 the "23" left Leyte to take reinforcements to Lingayen Gulf. In Leyte, many natives came out in dugouts to trade. Mori joined some of the natives in their boat and went around to other ships with them pretending to be a native and help them trade. On January 27, 1945 the "23" arrived at Lingayen Gulf at San Fabian Beach and delivered the supplies and reinforcements on January 28, 1945.

Although the Japanese put up little resistance on land they made frequent Kamikaze attacks, once hitting an Australian cruiser off our stern in the bridge. Also, there were one-man subs and suicide swimmers with explosives on their backs and it was necessary to keep members of the crew on deck with rifles watching for them.

We departed Lingayen Gulf on January 31, 1945 and returned to Leyte on February 5, 1945. That night Jap planes flew over. The ships were all ordered to keep their guns secured. The shore batteries opened up and the sky was full of tracers and exploding ack ack. We lay on deck and watched the fireworks which was really stupid since all that shrapnel had to come down somewhere. We were lucky no one was hit. After we pulled off our ramp a lone bomber flew over and dropped a bomb on our ramp.

On February 6, 1945 we left Leyte after 1 1/2 months in the Philippines and arrived at Manus on February 14, 1945. In Manus, on February 18, 1945 the "23" went between two obstruction buoys and put a hole in the bottom of the evaporator room. The leak was not noticed until the evaporator was flooded. That meant salt water showers from then on.

On February 10, 1945, somebody let the monkeys out and Serletto's little monkey ran down the anchor cable and fell overboard and was lost.

Bob Henderson: *While on liberty in Tulagi, Riley and I spotted a path leading into the jungle. We decided to see where it went and followed it into the jungle. After going quite a way up a hill we saw a dirt street lined with huts with thatched roofs. As we started to enter the street several of the native men stood in a line across our path, the center man and spokesman held a long handled axe in his hands. No women or children were in sight. The men were quite short and appeared quite dirty with scaly skin. The spokesman accused us of wanting their women and told us to leave. It didn't seem worth arguing about so we left and when rocks started landing around us we broke all records getting back to the beach.*

On February 18, 1945 we left Manus for Tulagi and arrived at Perris Bay in Tulagi on February 23, 1945. On March 18, 1945 we moved from Tulagi to the Florida Islands, then to Guadalcanal. Left the "Canal" on March 19, 1945 and arrived at the Russells

on March 20, 1945. Left the Russells on March 21, 1945 with a load of trucks and tanks for Eniwetok where we arrived on March 27, 1945 and unloaded the trucks and tanks. Left Eniwetok March 28, 1945 and arrived at Guam on April 3, 1945 where we took on water. We departed Guam on April 6, 1945 for Pearl Harbor. There were subs in the vicinity. At this time, due to unusual atmospheric conditions we could pick up the talking on the SCR from the SCRs on the ships in the invasion of Okinawa. They were reporting Kamikazes coming in from all directions and before we realized what was going on we were all searching the sky for planes.

During this leg of our trip a man from another LST developed eye trouble and since we had a doctor on our ship the man was transferred to us by breeches buoy.

On April 24, 1945 we arrived at Pearl Harbor. Our steering gear broke down and it was necessary to steer through the winding channel by hand crank below the decks. On April 25, 1945 we left for the States.

Frank Serletto: *April 30, 1945. Boy, we sure had a scare today. It happened around 1630. Martin came down on the mess deck and called all hands topside. "Man overboard!" While we were having roll call two guys out of the black gang were looking all over the ship for Ken Nicodemus. They opened the forward magazine and a lot of smoke rolled out. Boy, there was a bunch of scared guys when that happened. Meanwhile the fire had been put out. While the fire was still smoking they picked up the can of 40mm shells and threw it over the side. We can sure thank God this wasn't our time to go.*

Nicodemus had jumped over the side but was picked up by the following ship and returned to us. He told the whole story. This afternoon he went up in the magazine with the intention to kill himself. He opened a can of ammo and took out a clip and then started to beat them on the deck but they wouldn't go off. He then started to burn matches under them but they still wouldn't go off. He then took off his shirt and lit it afire and put it in a can of 40mm ammo. He said he then went out of the magazine and went looking for a chain to wrap around his neck. He couldn't find any chain so he went back to the fantail and jumped in the water. It beat hell out of me as 20mm and 40mm are supposed to have the most sensitive fuses of any ammo we have.

We arrived at San Francisco on May 4, 1945 and passed under the Golden Gate bridge at 18:30. We unloaded our ammo on May 5, 1945 and arrived at the repair dock on May 6, 1945 for major overhaul.

While in San Francisco, many of the crew were shipped out to other assignments and reinforcements took their places. The "23" was refitted as a hospital ship and became the LSTHA 23.

Alex Featherston: *The LSTHA 23 was in San Francisco Bay loaded with ammunition, fifty Navy corpsmen and ten Navy doctors. The ship had been completely reworked and new guns installed. One liberty section had already had their last liberty before sailing and the other section was ashore when all "HELL" broke loose. Bells rang, whistles blew, horns honked, and the radio was announcing Japan's surrender. The radio was turned on and the crew remaining aboard found out what was going on.*

All of us aboard could only look at the lights and listen to the noise. Bottles that had been sneaked aboard to celebrate the end of the war were brought out and shared with those who had not planned ahead. The gunnery officer came to our gunner mates' compartment which was the forward starboard troop compartment with a bottle so we could have a drink together. He was surprised at the number of bottles already being passed around. We didn't get much sleep that night and as the liberty section returned we heard about the wild time going on in San Francisco as well as the announcers going wild on the radio.

We had been scheduled to leave the next day and had sealed orders to pick up troops and meet to form an invasion force to attack the islands of Japan. The sailing date was postponed and no liberty was allowed for two or three days to allow people to calm down and verify the peace feeler. The doctors were put ashore but the Navy corpsman remained. After one more liberty for each section we finally sailed.

Felix Maloepszy: *We left Alameda, California right after VJ day for Pearl Harbor where we picked up an Army unit, which we took to Japan. We weren't out to sea for two weeks when we ran out of coffee mugs. Seems most of the original crew just deep-sixed them every time they had coffee. We ended up drinking from soup bowls. Most undisciplined crew I ever ran into. Then there was the case of the missing beer. The Captain threatened a Navy inquiry for stealing government property. Once on a beach in Okinawa someone decided the Captain should have his own Jeep. Before you knew it a Jeep was stolen and within an hour it was painted Coast Guard grey. The Captain had them put it back on the beach. We made two trips to Japan, then Okinawa and the Philippines. I left the "23" in Okinawa at the end of November. I was discharged in Boston on December 7, 1945 after more than three years service.*

Alex Featherston: *We set sail for the Philippines to pick up troops and at the same time disembarked the Navy corpsmen. The troops were the same ones we had been scheduled to transport. They were a group of Army combat engineers who had seen*

action in Europe and were transported to the Philippines through the Panama Canal, and they were not a happy bunch. Most already had enough points that if they had been in the States could have been discharged. A convoy of six LSTs was formed and we headed for Sasebo, Japan - the same place we had been scheduled to go before VJ Day, and with the same troops.

Upon reaching Japan we stopped at the entrance to the strait which led to Sasebo harbor and picked up a Japanese pilot to guide us through the mine fields. We stood watch at the rail with the 30-06 rifles as well as manning the machine guns on the bridge to watch for mines. We were the first of the six LSTs and mountains were on each side of us with gun emplacements. During the trip to the harbor two mines which had floated loose were detonated by gunfire. The distance seemed quite long since we were moving through a mine field with gun emplacements on both sides.

Upon reaching the harbor there was an aircraft carrier under repair and many, many two-man submarines in various phases of construction. The only other American ship was a Coast Guard 83-footer tied up at the downtown dock. We beached at a cobblestone seaplane ramp and unloaded our troops.

The Japanese immediately set up tents a short distance from the beached LSTs so the girls could do business and others trade for cigarettes.

Later we were told if we wanted to go ashore to stretch our legs we could, but to go in groups, and we were leaving the next morning at 0800. As we left the ramp we were handed a carton of cigarettes to use for trade. They were going for thirty yen per pack which was the equivalent of two dollars, also the going price for some entertainment. My group stopped a Japanese truck which was a wood burner and the ones in front got him to drive us around what was left of the town. After a while we pulled into an undamaged or rebuilt area with a large 4' x 20' sign lit with electric lights that read AMERICAN RECREATION AREA. This of course contained bars, places to eat with girls to sing and play instruments, and of course, the rooms upstairs. After messing around a while and having a few drinks a group from the "23" decided to see if we could get back to the ship. We were not sure of where we were or of which way to go to get to the ship. We walked a while and stopped a streetcar and got on. Someone tried to explain to the driver that we wanted to go back to our ship and he grinned and indicated we were to sit down, the Japanese on the car had given us their seats. We rode for a while, and then he stopped and said something and all the Japanese got off so we did, too. We were on a turntable and the streetcar was turned to get onto another set of tracks, and everybody got back on and we rode some more. After a couple more turntables and more riding the driver stopped, turned and indicated we should get off. We did, and lo and behold, we were on the dock where our ship was beached.

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Everyone was back by 0800 so we were ready to leave on time. The bow doors were closed and locked and one of the officers decided he would check to make sure they were locked and found a girl in the starboard upper door lock compartment with the sailor who had bought her for 300 yen. She was put off the ship with the pilot as we left.

As we left we met a Navy mine sweeper that wanted to talk to the skipper. It seemed that they were running behind and had not swept the passage as we thought. They wanted a copy of our chart to follow.

After moving troops, prisoners and materials to various destinations in the Far East, the "23" returned to the states in early December, 1945. The "23" was decommissioned on May 24, 1946, struck from the Navy list on July 3, 1946, and sold to Kaiser Company, Inc. of Seattle, Washington on April 6, 1948 for scrapping.