

This is the story of a ship. No, please! Don't stop reading, for this is the unusual story of an LST - Landing Ship, Tank - from commissioning to decommissioning. It is the history of LST 540!!! This is all fact, yet it possesses the polish that a factual report usually lacks!!!

The 540 slid down the ways at Evansville, Indiana on February 10th, 1944. With a pre-commissioning combat crew and a ferry crew aboard, she sailed down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, Louisiana, where the ship was turned over to the combat crew, who officially put her in commission on February 22nd at Algiers, Louisiana.

From here we will begin the chronological history of a ship which has traveled well over one hundred thousand nautical miles in its twenty-three months of active duty. During the remainder of the month, the ship underwent the usual fitting out of a naval vessel before putting to sea. Ammunition and all types of provisions were loaded aboard, and a series of necessary adjustments were completed by shipyard workers, including loading of the USS LCT 611 on the main deck.

March 1st we sailed independently for Norfolk, Virginia, a green, inexperienced crew aboard, consisting of sixty men and seven officers. We were not in the Gulf of Mexico more than six hours when one half of the crew decided to have six meals a day --- three down and three up. During the trip, the crew regained some of its ego which was lost through seasickness, when an afternoon of firing practice turned out surprisingly successful. Needless to say, Capes Romano, Fear, Lookout and Hatteras took that ego right back. Just when ninety-nine per cent of the crew reached the stage where they felt that one more miserable day would end it all, we sighted Cape Henry Lighthouse, which is the entrance to Little Creek, Virginia, on March 10th. During the next seventeen days we managed to change Commanding Officers, refuel, take aboard sixty additional crew members, run aground, requiring the assistance of two Navy Tugs, lead our tank deck with mines, torpedoes, depth charges, and smoke floats, put out two fires on our tank deck caused by said smoke floats, and make last minute telephone calls to our homes, bearing the sad tidings of our near by sailing date. We received our orders on March 26th, and the following day we sailed for Oran, North Africa, in company with the USS COAST GUARD CUTTER INGHAM, acting as escort, having missed two previous convoys due to the afore mentioned fires.

Using the oft-quoted wartime phrase, "this was it." For the major part of the trip, the crew began to get acquainted with shipboard life and long sea voyages. On Easter Sunday, we met the escort carrier, GUADALCANAL, which was sunk in the Mediterranean Sea later that year, and to us it was quite an event seeing aircraft land and take off on this vessel, after sailing in monotony for two weeks. On April 12th, we arrived at the Rock of Gibraltar, and while there, we learned that the GUADALCANAL had sunk two German submarines the same day we met her. These submarines had supposedly been trailing us for three days.

That exciting incident, along with many others, is still talked of today by present and past crew members of the 540. We were hardly at Gibraltar

five hours, when, saying goodbye to the INGHAM, we proceeded independently, under orders, for Oran Harbor, a twenty hour trip from the Rock. We were warned of enemy air activity enroute, but our short trip was luckily uneventful.

On April 19th we loaded our tank deck with units of General De Gaulle's 1st Armored Division, and billeted about one hundred crack French and Arab tank men, members of the Free French Army!! That night we sailed in convoy for Great Britain. News reached us on the 22nd that Oran Harbor took a thorough pasting from the Luftwaffe the night after we left. It would be a gross understatement to say that we were merely lucky, for Someone was traveling with us!!!

Excepting a false alarm submarine alert, our voyage to Great Britain was boring, tedious, and long, due to the slow-moving, six knot convoy, and we finally arrived at the Welsh port of Swansea on May 2nd, and moored to the Prince of Wales Docks, where we unloaded De Gaulle's tanks and men.

Twenty-four hours later we got underway for Penarth, Wales, about sixty miles east of Swansea, and adjacent to Cardiff, the capital of Wales, we arrived and anchored that afternoon in the Penarth anchorage, and began preparations for launching LCT 611 off our main deck. Three days later, the 611 was successfully launched, and for the first time, our main deck was completely devoid of any type of equipment.

Now began a month of preparing for what was to be the largest single amphibious operation of the war. Drills of all kinds were suddenly emphasized, particularly firing practice, battle stations, beaching practice, abandon ship, recognition, and gas attack. There was also a psychological effect. We noticed that we were working a little harder than usual at first, cleaning the ship up as if we were slated for an admiral's inspection. We even chipped the rust off our weather-decks, and repainted them. We weren't left much time for personal thoughts of fear for the forthcoming events. The inevitable was approaching with greater speed than we had expected. We all knew it and made it obvious through our nerve reactions.

Toward the middle of May, when the situation was gradually becoming more and more tense, we were ordered to proceed from Portsmouth Harbor, where we were anchored at the time, to Harwich, a little seaport seventy miles north of London. This meant going through the Dover Straits at a time when the German-Manned French coastline had to be respected. After being delayed a few hours at Portsmouth, due to an air-raid alert, we finally started out at the break of dawn, heading north into the English Channel, in a convoy with three other LST's. During the entire afternoon and evening up until twilight time, the sky was polka-dotted with Liberators, Mitchells, Havocs, Mosquitoes, P-38's, and Spitfires, going and coming to and from raids on important targets in Germany and France. This wonderful sight warmed us considerably, and gave us consolation in view of the oncoming night.

At sundown, we sounded G.Q. (General Quarters, or simply, Battle Stations). We were told over the public address system by the captain that we would have to remain at G.Q. until sunrise the following day, in order to facilitate and hasten our defense in the event of an attack, which seemed imminent to all of us. We were unashamedly scared, and it is doubtful whether any man heading

into danger, as we were, would not feel the same. Thus we settled down at our battle stations for a long, cold night (The English Channel never observes the seasons, and that May night was as cold as any December night in Maine, and twice as damp), broken only by the serving of sandwiches and coffee at 11:00 P.M. and 3:00 A.M. !!!

The narrowest section of the English Channel is between Dover and Pas-De-Calais. These two ~~are~~ separated by only nineteen miles of water. We were estimated to "Run the Gantlet", as it was called during pre-invasion days, at approximately midnight. At 1:30 P.M., just when we were finishing our first delicious serving of sandwiches and hot coffee, the excitement started, and didn't end until 4:00 a.m.! Suddenly, tracers started to peck out at the sky from the French side. Our first thought was that the Jerries had seen us, and were opening fire on us. After a few shaky minutes, we agreed that our first thought was wrong. Yet, the strange illumination thrown off by these tracers could have very easily made our location visible to aircraft. While this morbid thought raced around in our heads, a huge yellow flare went off directly above us, making everything around us look like daylight. We weren't scared, we were terrified!!! We waited quite nervously, needless to say, but nothing happened. The flare went out as suddenly as it had lit up, and our hearts slowed down to accelerated gallops. But not for long, as each event followed closely on the heels of the one before. Those of us who had gun stations on the main deck, had a perfect ringside view, unwilling as it was.

Next came the big guns from France, and their deafening roar, and of course, the ever-present tracer-fire, ripping the air above us, and doing its darndest to make our short visit as unpleasant as possible. At the time, that wasn't at all hard to do. This subsided before long, and another waiting period availed itself. Soon enough, however, we were once again on our toes. A plane had gone down near us, and we were ordered to turn on our searchlights and comb the water arround us- with our engines stopped!! Luckily, we were well past the narrow strip, and even if we were spotted, the big guns would have a difficult time getting range on us. After a while, we stopped the vain search for survivors, and continued on our journey.

Thus ended our first exciting and fearful night in the E.T.O. To say our relief was great upon arriving at Harwich that day would be, monopolizing the understatement business.

On June 1st, Lieutenant Frank J. Oberg took command of the 540, a position which he held for fifteen months, gaining respect, and confidence from all who served under him. His skillful handling of the ship in all circumstances was a feat which cannot go unmentioned in this history. Some of the hazards we encountered during those fifteen months would surely have turned out disastrous, if Mr. Oberg had not been in command.

June 2nd we embarked four hundred troops, and loaded both decks with invasion equipment. These troops, and their equipment, were British. That night, the captain called the crew together for a pep-talk, and before we went to sleep that night, the entire operations plan for the invasion of the Normandy coast was laid out before us, and explained thoroughly. D-Day was scheduled for June 5th, and in case of inclement weather, its alternate date was the 6th! We were to operate under the English for the invasion and

a few follow-up trips. We were part of the Fourth Assault Group, first wave, which was slated to hit Normandy on D-Day. The initial phase of the entire operation was called "Neptune", a code name, or the invasion itself.

On June 5th, as everyone can recall, the weather did hold up the show. But we received orders to sail in convoy for Normandy, and we left that day. We rendezvoused off the Isle of Wight with another convoy, and together we put out for the French coast. General Eisenhower had promised to have five thousand planes in the air on D-Day, and during the short trip across the Channel, and at Normandy, the sky was black with this promise, which seemed to pass well over the established mark. We arrived in Normandy on D-Day, but could not beach until D plus 1! To describe the awesome sight and terrible noise of this dramatic climax to two years of preparation, and the emotional output of the crew, would take too long. But one can easily imagine and visualize. It carried on all through the battered night. On the 7th, we went to G.Q. so many times, no one even attempted to keep count. During one attack by M.E. 109's and J.U. 88's, we really opened up, pouring out the twenty and forty millimeter shells as fast as the guns would fire. Although it has never been confirmed officially, to this day we all believe it was our guns that shot down one of the M.E.'s !!!

We finally feached, unloaded, retracted, and sailed in convoy to England, having had our "Baptism in Fire"! The next phase of the operation was the Rat-Race, or follow-up. We made a total of thirty-three follow-up trips, including two to LaHavre, one up the Seine River to Rouen, and two extension trips to San Michel-on-Greve, thirty-nine miles from Brest, in Brittany. Operations from English ports folded up a few days after we made our last trip, which was to Rouen. We were there from start to finish, carrying a total of more than five thousand troops, and over three thousand vehicles. We also took back to England two thousand Nazi prisoners. Every member of the crew that was aboard in the E.T.O. has received the following commendation:

"Commended for valorous action under enemy fire while landing the assault troops in the initial Invasion of Normandy and the hazardous conditions encountered during the follow-up landings of the campaign."

It would be impossible to relate in full the details of all the experiences we encountered during the Normandy campaign, but here are some of the highlights:

During the month of June, and part of July, German night raids on ships in Mornandy were very frequent, and we repelled air attacks in all of our first seven trips to the beachhead. It slackened off after that. On our second trip to France, we saw a merchant vessel blown up by a floating mine. We had passed over the same spot three minutes before.

We were anchored off Normandy during the big storm which washed away the American beach's pontoon causeways. On June 19th, at the height of the storm, we lost our stern anchor and nine hundred feet of cable. That night we saw for the first time a Buzz-Bomb, or V-1. On June 21st, during a nuisance raid, we had a very close call when a five hundred pound bomb,

dropped by enemy aircraft, exploded in the water two hundred and fifty feet off our starboard bow. This was termed as a "near-miss" !

We went into dry-dock on July 20, at the London suburb of Canning Town, to repair minor damages. On one trip from Normandy to London, we were in convoy with eleven American merchant vessels and two other LST's. In the port column were six merchantmen and one LST, while in the starboard column were five merchantmen, us, and another LST behind us. Going through the Dover Straits that night, we were attacked by a group of German E-Boats. Everyone of the five ships ahead of us were torpedoed and sunk by these E-Boats. We weren't even touched, due to the fact that our water replacement was so small an amount, allowing any torpedoes that may have been aimed at us to pass beneath us, as a torpedo requires fifteen feet of depth to acquire any degree of accuracy.

We left operations on September 29th, and proceeded to Plymouth, England, to prepare the ship for a homeward bound cruise. That however, was too good to be true and on October 4th, we were recalled to duty in operations. Then, after two more months of making trips to France, we once more put in at Plymouth, England, in preparation of going home. We were supposed to leave for the States on December 15th, but our sailing date was delayed, due to the sudden Nazi comeback at the Belgian Bulge, and we had to be ready in the event we were needed. But we finally did effect all our necessary repairs, loaded USS LCT 614 on our main deck, loaded up with provisions, cleaned up the ship from bow to stern, repainting everything that could be reached with a paint brush, and underwent a series of material inspections by the Group Staff. On December 27th, we sat sail in convoy for the United States, a happy, very happy, efficient, experienced, and battlewise crew.

The trip across was dull and drawn out, to say nothing of the cold and rough weather encountered all the way back. We were all impatient to get our hands on those thirty day leave papers, and that in itself made the crossing seem twice as long. But on January 13, 1945, we arrived safely at Norfolk, Virginia, locking the same day at the Naval Operations Base.

The period between January 13th and March 10th was spent in General Navy yard availability to recondition the ship and make authorized alterations. Two thirds of the officers and men were granted thirty days leave, the other third remaining on board to see the ship through her availability, and were later granted leave and transferred to reassignment. USS LCT 614, was hoisted by a crane off our main deck shortly after our arrival Stateside. A short trip was made to Davisville, Rhode Island, to take on cargo on our tank deck from the Seabee base there, said cargo being consigned to Port Hueneme, California. The ship returned to Norfolk and the USS LCT 536 was hoisted on t our main deck March 7th.

March 10th we said goodbye once more to Norfolk, this time heading in the opposite direction. Our next stop was the Coco Solo Base in the Panama Canal Zone. One week later to the day, we arrived at Coco Solo, and the next morning we began going through the locks of the Canal. By dusk, we were on the Pacific side, enroute San Diego, California. Upon entering San Diego harbor at daybreak, March 28th, we were diverted and rerouted straight to Port Hueneme. Without even stopping, we about-faced and headed up the California coast to Port Huenema, a Seabee base, docking there on March

30th, and unloading our cargo the same day. On Easter Sunday, April 1st, we sailed independently (incidentally, we had been sailing independently since we left Norfolk, Virginia, on March 10th) for Seattle, Washington. April 7th found us sailing up Puget Sound and into Lakes Union and Washington, and that night we docked at the Lake Washington Shipyard to complete repair availability and logistics.

When we left Norfolk we had acquired forty-three officers and men as additions to the crew, replacing those who were transferred for reassignment. While in Seattle, on April 13th, twelve additional men reported aboard for duty, thus rounding out the ship with a full crew. This will be the last time changes in the crew are noted, for in the nine months we have been in the Pacific Theatre of Operations, men have been coming and going in dribbles, which makes it impossible to list them all without taking up too much space.

On April 15th, we loaded with troops and equipment of the 1079th Aviation Engineers. The next day was a sad one for so many of us. It seemed that our three months stay in the United States was all too short to be enjoyed. Those who were going overseas for the first time probably felt the worst. To the others, this was only an encore of something that had happened not so long before, and those were the ones who tried to put on a big show of nonchalance for the benefit of the newer and less experienced men. But it didn't work. We all knew that going overseas this time was going to be a little different. They fought a different kind of war out here against a very different enemy, a more vicious and bloodthirsty one. Yes, that bleak, dismal April 16th we sailed out of Puget Sound and into the Pacific Ocean, there was a universal feeling aboard ship of more dark days to come. From the time we left Norfolk, more than a month before, until the time we reached Seattle, we had firing practice almost everyday we were at sea, and this time we weren't preparing for just one big job; we were preparing to fight the Jap wherever he could be found. Thus every one of us knew down deep that we might find a much tougher situation out here than we had in the E. T. O.!!! It wasn't a very pleasant thought!

It would be easier to briefly summarize the events leading up to our arrival at Ie Shima and Okinawa, simply because nothing of too great importance occurred at that time to warrant a thorough explanation. First we arrived at Pearl Harbor on April 27th, and sailed again on May 1st for Eniwetok, in the flat, barren, desert waste of the Marshall Islands. During this trip we crossed the international date-line, and those of us who had never before crossed the date-line were initiated into the Royal Order of the Golden Dragon, the initiation being conducted by the few men who had previously crossed this line. A wild time was had by all, and it was a perfect excuse to rid ourselves of all the nervous tension we had been gathering since we left Seattle. Arriving at Eniwetok May 13th, we refueled and departed for Guam the 15th. May 19th we were pulling into Apra Harbor, Guam, when our orders were changed, and we were diverted to Saipan, which was only one hundred and twenty miles north of Guam. We arrived at Saipan May 20th. This was the Mariana Island Group! At Saipan, we disembarked the troops we had been carrying ever since Seattle, and embarked more troops and equipment of the 806th Aviation Engineers. Incidentally, they were part of the crack outfit that built the B-29 air strip on Saipan in record time.

We put to sea on May 24th, destination Ie Shima and Okinawa, of the Ryukyu

chain! Now we were on our toes again. The Navy had been taking a terrific beating at Okinawa, and that made us a little edgy!!

Every so often we picked up Radio Tokyo, and listened to their news and music. Sometimes we'd hear Tokyo Rose. In the convoy from Saipan to Ie Shima there were forty odd ships present, and Tokyo Rose knew it!!! She warned us that the Japs had a big welcome waiting for us, and she didn't pull any punches in her tongue-lashing. While enroute, we heard the shocking news of Ernie Pyle's death on Ie Shima.

We anchored off Ie Shima on May 30. That night we encountered our first Jap air-raid - - - - Kamikaze style (Suicide Planes)! The next day, while waiting for further orders, we saw a little Jap-held island that couldn't have been more than one mile wide and two miles long, taken over by American Troops. Timing the operation, we noted that it took our boys eight minutes to secure that island!!! A destroyer layed off and shelled it, a plane bombed and strafed it, and half a dozen landing craft loaded with troops beached from different sides. The destroyer stopped shelling and the plane returned to its base, while the troops mopped up. This all happened in the course of eight minutes. Later we learned that there were numerous such tiny islands in the vicinity, and the boys managed to take one a day. They claimed their fastest timing was three minutes, on an island a little larger than the one above!!!

That night the Kamikaze came over in droves. The next day, June 1st, we received orders to move down to Okinawa and unload our troops and equipment. We anchored off Hagushi that afternoon, and awaited orders to beach. We remained at anchorage until the 6th, and each night Suicide Joe from Tokyo paid us a visit. Once they attacked in broad daylight. We beached on the 6th, unloaded everything by the 8th, and spent the 8th and 9th trying to retract from the beach. Unknowingly, we had beached on some coral reef, and stuck there. On the 9th we finally managed to retract with the assistance of two Navy Tugs, but in the course of retracting, the ship suffered heavy damages. Seven tanks were ripped open, the starboard propellor shaft was completely disalined at two places, a gaping hole was torn on the bottom of the hull, and most important, the entire fresh water system was polluted, with the exception of one tank which held only two thousand gallons of fresh water. We hastily effected a few temporary repairs, and the next day we made a convoy for Leyte, Philippine Islands!! With only two thousand gallons of fresh water on hand, it could not be used for anything but drinking purposes. Every man was rationed to one pint of water twice a day. Salt water showers were the only method used to keep us partially clean. On the 15th we pulled into San Pedro Bay, Leyte, Philippine Islands, and were assigned to a Service Squadron for immediate repairs.

Repairs were not completed until July 24th, when we sailed for Mangarin Bay, Mindoro, Philippine Islands, to load up with troops for another trip to Okinawa. We arrived at Mindoro on July 26th, loaded up on the 27th and left for Subic Bay, Luzon, Philippine Islands, for rerouting in convoy to Okinawa. On August 1st we sailed for Okinawa, and arrived there the 5th. We unloaded the same day at Naha!

Events passed before us rapidly during the next five days. They were world-shaking events. The dropping of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima August 6th and

its after-effects left us awe-struck with the terrifying knowledge of how far science had actually progressed. During the next two days, the Armed Forces Radio Station at Okinawa kept the airwaves humming with previously "top secret" information on this, the most significant and momentous world occurrence in the year 1945!!! It was still a puzzling mystery to each and every one of us when on the 9th, only three days after Hiroshima, Nagasaki was the target of the second dose of atomics. The Japs were down for the count, but still there were few Americans who realized that day the full import of these two bombings, and their imminent result!

If the author of this chronological discourse were more adept and experienced in the field of journalism, he would be more capable of describing in stronger words the high spirited emotional impact that the first word of the Japanese surrender brought to this ship. For that matter it is doubtful whether anyone, no matter how proficient and word-wise, could describe the actual feelings of Americans all over the world on that historical day.

It was 9:30 in the evening, and most of the crew were attending a movie on the Tank Deck, when we first heard of the news. It would be fitting at this point to make honorable mention of the fact that Jim Winfough, one of our signalmen, who was standing watch on the bridge at the time, was the first person aboard the 540 to hear the gratifying news. Over the public address system came the muffled announcement. Instantaneously, we arose from our seats and roared as one. Then came the releasing of all the pent up emotions of four bad years. Men openly thanked the Lord, wept unrelenting tears of joy, hugged, and in instances, kissed one another, danced, and in general, made no effort whatsoever to conceal their feelings from the others. Everyone was filled to his fingertips with overwhelming happiness and the joy of life.

We went topside and saw what seemed like every gun in the area firing skyward. It was a beautifully colorful scene, with rockets, flares, and tracer-fire crossing paths. It was too easy to get injured standing around on an open deck watching it all, however, so we went below again, and celebrated for two days. Many of us were never more happy and relieved at any previous time in our lives. It meant no bloody invasion of the Japanese homeland, among other equally important and advantageous results. The war had ended in unconditional surrender. Although, it was not as yet known whether the surrender terms would be officially accepted, we knew this initial announcement was the beginning of the end!!!

On the 12th, we left Okinawa for Subic Bay, Philippine Islands, and two days later Japan accepted our surrender terms, and President Truman, in a momentous radio broadcast to the world, officially proclaimed the cessation of hostilities! We arrived in Subic on August 17th and left for San Pedro Bay, Leyte, the 19th, arriving there the 22nd. While at Leyte, the point system for discharge came into effect, and then we began to feel the peace. On the 27th we sailed for Batangas Bay, Luzon, Philippine Islands, which is about forty miles south of Manila, and anchored there on the 30th! We discovered that we were going to load with occupational troops, and excitement on that theme buzzed about the ship.

September 1st we changed captains, loaded up and got underway on September

6th, sailing in convoy for Yokohama, Honshu, Japan, as part of Phase One of Operation Campus. (Campus was the code name originally given to mean the invasion of Japan, and when the war ended so suddenly, it was carried over to mean the Occupation of Japan. One can readily understand how near by the D-Day of Japan was going to be, and the part we would have played. With that reminder on hand, we of the 540 can look back on the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with a good deal of thankfulness. In more ways than one, the Atomic Bomb was a Godsend to us.) After nine days and nine nights of the roughest waters this ship has sailed on since coming out to the Pacific, we arrived at Yokohama on the 15th. The peace treaty had been signed formally aboard the U. S. S. MISSOURI September 2nd.

We stayed in Yokohama five days, managing in that time to unload the Army, send ten men Stateside for discharge, and launch U. S. S. LCT 536 in true LST style. For the remainder of the report, it would be impractical to mention whenever men left the ship for separation from the naval service, as this occurred all too frequently to keep an accurate record. These ten were the first to leave.

We left in convoy September 20th and arrived in Manila Bay September 28th. Four days later we sailed for Batangas Bay, and arrived there October 3rd, loading up with more occupational troops, and sailing to Manila on the 6th, arriving there the same day, and shoving off again on the 7th, Yokohama bound. We received a storm warning two hours out of Manila, and it looked like a bad one, so we put in at Subic Bay for the night. The next morning, October 8th, we left and every single day of the trip we pitched, bucked and tossed until the relieving day we reached Tokyo Bay, which was October 19th. We learned later that we were riding the rear end of the terrible storm that ravished Okinawa.

This time we found Japan a little too chilly after coming up from the sultry weather of the Philippines. We unloaded in a hurry and left in a huff for San Pedro Bay, Leyte, October 25th, and arrived November 2nd, after a calm, pleasant voyage all the way down. November 6th saw a change in captaincy once more, and another load of men and equipment for Japan. We were beginning to wonder if the Navy was setting up a special shuttle service for the 540. With news reaching us constantly of LST's going home we were getting anxious, and as expected, all sizes, shapes, and colors of false rumor concerning the destiny of LST 540 emanated from the crew, who were gradually losing spirit. We sailed in convoy for Yokohama November 8th, preparing for rough weather enroute, and cold weather on arrival. We put out a fire on the main deck, caused by some calcium carbide we were carrying, and no damage was sustained. We didn't hit rough weather until the end of the trip, when we were caught by a powerful wind that ripped awning stanchions clear off the boat deck. The cold was waiting for us when we arrived in Yokohama November 17th, and gave us a rousing welcome. At first during the night, it felt like the cooling system, rather than the heating system, had been turned on! But we were given a wonderful opportunity to get used to this typical English weather. From November 17th to the date of this writing, we never left the Japanese area. We remained in Tokyo Bay itself until December 20th, and then we made a trip up to Shiogama, the embarkation and debarkation port for army units stationed in the Sendai-Shiogama area. This place is two hundred miles north of Tokyo Bay, on Honshu Island, and the temperature seemed to drop

ten degrees every ten miles enroute.

Although we stayed up there until mid-afternoon of Christmas Day, when we departed for Yokohama with a load of Ordnance men and equipment aboard, ruining our holiday, we still can't be robbed of having had a "White Christmas"! It snowed heavily the night before, and it was extremely pleasant to see that white stuff bedecking the ship and the surrounding landscape on December 25th. We got back to Yokohama December 27th, and unloaded our cargo December 28th. That same day we received orders to begin preparing the ship for decommissioning.

It would do well to pause briefly to explain the reason for our decommissioning the ship! The northern islands of the Japanese homeland are in dire need of coal. The Japs naturally, have no merchant navy to send coal up there. In fact they no longer have a navy, merchant or otherwise. The United States Government is leasing out ships to the Japanese for this and other important uses. Therefore all LST's operating in the Pacific whose numbers are below 660 will be decommissioned and turned over to the Japs. The crews of these ships break up into three groups. Those with low points are being assigned to other ships, those with high points who are eligible for discharge within thirty days after the decommissioning date, will be sent home, and those in between will be dispersed to various naval bases in the area for reassignment. This is not official as yet, so those orders may at any time be altered or even changed completely. It is only a widely believed supposition.

It would be futile to attempt a description of the decommissioning process. It went along slowly and awkwardly. On January 1st, 1946, New Year's Day, we again changed skippers.

At this writing, we expect to decommission within forty-eight hours, and probably sooner than that. The last remnants of LST 540 are practically all removed, and it's just a matter of a short wait now.

There is the story, and here is the closing summary: The U.S.S. LST 540 has seen twenty-three months of active duty in the naval service. She has at all times upheld the highest of U.S. Navy standards and traditions. Anyone who at any time was a crew member can be duly proud of her endurance, operating disposition, and battle efficiency. Her participation in two major engagements, both in different theatres of War, has highlighted her sparkling career. She has carried our burden nobly and successfully through Africa, Wales, England, France, Panama, Territory of Hawaii, Marshall Islands, Mariana Islands, Ryukyu Islands, the Liberation of the Philippine Islands at Leyte, and the Occupation of the Japanese Home Waters at Tokyo Bay!!! She maintained her grouchy spells during rough weather, and was known to be stubborn on various occasions, but she was never promiscuous, and her manner never deviated from the unladylike!!!! Pages and pages of well deserved praise could be written in tribute to this stalwart vessel, but her brilliant record speaks for itself perfectly. Enough has been said! Another ship is leaving the naval service, and in her wake are two years of outstanding meritorious duty and don't you ever forget men, she was a happy ship ! ! ! !

PROLOGUE

17 January 1946.

The decommissioning of a naval vessel tends to recall many memories, both of the ship and the men who served aboard her. There isn't one man whose name appears on the attached address list that I haven't known personally at one time or another. For my part, it's been a grand experience coming in contact with every one of you. I shall always treasure the pleasant memories I have of the 540 and its crew. The refreshing little experiences I've encountered in the past two years have aided greatly in making life most agreeable to me aboard ship. There are some remembrances which I would prefer to forget, but I'm glad to state that they are few. This may not be worth a plugged nickel to half of you, but I'm still going to tell you that you were, you are, and you will always continue to be "four oh" in my books, and I only hope each of you can say the same about the others.

I'd like to thank Wally Carter for the tremendous amount of work he has generously put into this project. His moral and technical backing has been superb. Well done, Wally, and many thanks!!!

I sincerely hope you all enjoy to the fullest extent reading this meagre account of some of the travels and experiences of the 540. If I have erred in any respect, I hereby apologize for my mistakes. Please try to realize that this matter was begun and completed during the busy days of decommissioning. I regret that I could not put it all down.

The address list contains the names and addresses, and in some cases, the telephone numbers, of all the men who were aboard when the ship left Seattle, April 16th, 1945.

Good luck to all of you! Again I say, it has been a wholesome pleasure to have been your shipmate. The experience is priceless, and I sincerely wish that we will all meet again someday.

S. Robert Sembroff