

You are probably anxious to hear about our experiences at the Ryukus to here goes:

As you know, we were at Leyte just before going to the islands southwest of Japan called Nansai Shoto, meaning western islands. They are also named Ryukus and Okinawa Gunto and Loochoo Islands. This is enough names that any map you look at, and I suggest you get a map to refer to, will have at least one of these names. There are over 800,000 people on these islands and they are called Okinawans and speak a dialect called Ryuku. Practically all of them can read and write, and newspapers are published in the city of Naha which also has street cars. The Army showed us Algebra and Trigonometry notebooks of the students of schools. Instead of Japanese numerals and formulae they used English $A^2 - B^2 = C^2$ etc., but writing was in Ryuku. There are several very poisonous snakes in the area.

Well, getting back to us, we seemed to have pulled the wrong number from the hat. LST 649 was to be in on the first invasion with some other LST's. We had a load of LVT's (amphibious tanks) and a large amount of 5" ammunition for Destroyers plus a load of troops from the 77th Army Division. We were to invade the island of Hokaji Shima just five miles from Okinawa 6 days before L day (same as D Day) so our first was L-6 day. On the next day, L-5 day, we were to invade Tokashiki Shima providing Hokaji was taken in one day. L-4 day we were to launch the LST. L-3 and L-2 we were to be a floating reserve and hospital evacuation ship. L-1 day we were to invade Kiesel Shima where artillery was to be set up to shell Okinawa which was to be invaded L day at which time we were to stand by as a hospital evacuation ship. The L + 15 day we were to invade Ie Shima. This generally describes what we were to do and did do.

We left Leyte with enough time to arrive at Hokaji Shima in the wee small hours of the morning on L-6 day with, as I said before, amphibious tanks, troops, and 5" ammunition aside from our own. The excitement started the day we were leaving. One of the laundry men asked one of my electricians what a certain string was doing attached to a large vent fan on the tank deck. The electrician didn't know and said, "I'll untie it." He untied ~~at~~ the end at the vent fan, and fortunately, instead of pulling the other end he followed it and it went right to the 5" powder cases. On further investigation, the string was found tied to the pin on a hand grenade in the ammunition. Whoever set it up expected that when the fan was turned on it would jerk the pin out and off would go the grenade, ammunition, and ship. We never found the man for sure, held a newotic army man on suspicion.

The rest of the trip was pleasant and it got cooler and cooler as we were going northward. We arrived at Hokaji just before daybreak on L-6 day. It was really quiet and we were so close that after it was light you could see people on the island. Well, daybreak came and though I hate to sound dramatic, "All hell Broke loose." Even the newsreels can't describe or show the terrible shelling, bombing, and rocketing that we saw and heard. The battleships shelled from way out, the LCR's shot rockets close in, and the dive bombers dropped bombs galore.

After a few hours of shelling, we as well as the LST's opened our bow doors and let out our stream of LVT's loaded with men. The army invaded the island and the LCVP's were bringing casualties to our ship soon afterwards as we were set up to take care of them before they were sent to a hospital ship.

Well, Hokaji was taken that day and Tokashiki the next with the same procedure. (we saw only one Jap shot down on L-6 day). We didn't see any Jap planes at Tokashiki, but were even within machine gun range of the island. One Jap shore gun had us spotted at Tokashiki. They took four shots at us (about 4" shells) each coming closer. We got underway as quick as we could, and the Jap gun was knocked out so they missed.

These islands, especially Okinawa, were about the prettiest places I've seen, and the weather was beautiful. The farms were like a patchwork quilt of green, brown, and yellow, and there were many cows and horses which could be seen with the naked eye easily.

The LCT was launched as I told you in a previous letter and we took Kiesel Shine with a little shelling from Okinawa which was in plain sight. The next day (the big day) it looked like all the ships in the world had gathered to shell Okinawa and cause lots of noise. We saw our first Japanese planes get shot down, and saw a ship near us get hit by a suicide plane. We were the first ship to have our fire and rescue party at the scene. We had both small boats at the burn-ship in a few minutes with men, fire fighting equipment, and breathing apparatus. Our men, especially one of my electricians, was largely responsible for getting the fire out, because we knew how to use the fire fighting equipment well. The fire lasted over four hours, but when it was over we had plenty of souvenirs from the Jap plane including its landing gear and one wheel. One man found the remains of the Jap pilot, but of course left him alone.

The next day, the air raids got very hot, so the ships that had nothing to do, including us, went on ~~the~~ a trip to sea for almost two weeks to get out of the raids, although there were some raids out there.

When we got back, we invaded Ie Shima which was rather rough as you'll know by the news. Here we really saw the Jap planes go down and how they explode in the air when hit. We were just a few hundred yards from where the great Ernie Pyle was killed and we knew about it shortly. We had a ringside seat here as we could see most of the island, even the captured civilians.

Through the whole campaign, though we had one small shell hit the deck and a bit of flak, no man in the crew was scratched. Some men were afraid, others just took it easily and calmly.