FLOTILIA 8 Serial No. 18-44 GROUP 23, ¢ FLEET POST OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. 15 March, 1944. Commander, LCT Group 23. From: To: Commander in Chief, United States Fleet. Via: Commander, LCT Flotilla 8. Commander, Task Group 76.3.2. Commander, Task Force 76. (Commander, 7th Amphibious Force) Commander, SEVENTH Fleet. Assault on Talasea, New Britain, Action report of. Subject: Article 762, U. S. Navy Regulations. Reference: Com7thPhib Conf. ltr. FE 25/Al6-3(3), Serial 0596 of 30 October, 1943. Operations Order 32-44, CTG 76.3.2. TRACING, TALASEA AND WILLAUMEZ PENINSULAR. - P. 4 Enclosures: FIELD ORDER 2-44, 533rd ENGINEERS, U. S. A. P.S On March 2, 1944, pursuant to reference (c), LCT's 245 and 298 departed Cape Cretin, New Guinea under this command and proceeded to Cape Gloucester, New Britain, where the Commander Group 23 was directed to report to the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, for special assignment. Present at Cape Gloucester upon arrival of these ships were LCT's 255, 260 and 397. All had orders directing them to report to either the 1st Marine Division or the 533rd Engineer Boat Battalion, also at Cape Gloucester. At this time the 1st Marine Division, which had landed at Cape Gloucester on December 26, had advanced against enemy opposition about 50 miles along the north coast of New Britain to Rein Bay. The 5th Marine Regiment was there established at Iboki Plantation, being supplied by water by LCT's 260 and 397 of this flotilla. The balance of New Britain was held by the enemy. On 3 March all LCT's present were placed under this command by authority of reference (c) and ordered by the commanding general to make up part of a task force to assault the enemy base and barge depot of Talasea. This is 110 miles from Cape Gloucester eastward on the Willaumez peninsular, New Britain. At this base were believed to be about 3,000 Japanese. The assault was to be made by the 5th Marines, therefore the 5 LCT's present loaded the 1st Marine Regiment at Cape Gloucester and departed for Rein Bay, arriving on the morning of 5th. There each LCT loaded 5 Amphibious Tractors (Alligators) and 125 troops, a total of 625 men. The plan was to proceed in to the assault beach until the LCT's were in front of the reefs, then lower the ramps of the LCT's and discharge the AMTracs directly into the water, where they would proceed to the beach under their own power with all their troops aboard. 31518

Also present for the operation were 33 LCM's and 14 LCV's of the 533 Engineer Boat Battalion. Overall charge of the movement was in the hands of their commanding officers. Escorting were 6 PT's of PT Squadron 21.

Beach, Talasea. Arrived without incident 0800 March 6, as scheduled. Expected air support strafing and boming did not materialize, so it was decided to land without bombardment. LCT's making up first and second waves proceeded to 800 yards off beach and discharged AmTracs without indident. As was expected, shore positions conformed to general Japanese tacties of holding fire until assault wave was almost on beach. As AmTracs approached beach, considerable machine gun and mortar fire was observed, but very little directed toward LCTs. Upon landing of AmTracs, LCT's returned to Rein Bay without escort, where they immediately reloaded with additional troops and supplies. LCT 255 developing engine trouble, she was directed by the Commander, LCT Group 23, to return to Cape Gloucester and continue lightering duties there. She took no further part in the operation.

LCT's 397, 245, 260 and 298 departed Rein Bay 0800 March 7, and arrived at Red Beach 1530. Unloading was completed at 1700, despite occasional interruption from enemy mortar shells. Together with Army LCMs, LCTs embarked 88 casualties and 14 dead and returned to Rein Bay, arriving 0300 March 8.

LCT's 397, 245, 260 and 298 reloaded with troops, ammunition and provisions and departed 2300 March 8 for Garua Harbor, Talasea, on the eastern side of the Willaumez Peninsular. An Australian pilot was picked up off Red Beach. Escorting were fighter planes of the 5th Air Force. At Buli Murli on the tip of Willaumez 4 enemy barges were observed on the beach, poorly camouflaged. The Commander, LCT Group 23 detached LCT 397 and set course sufficiently to starboardkto pass within 1,000 yards of beach, then turned slightly to port to allow all guns to bear from the starboard quarter, and expended one magazine from all guns (2 20mm., 3 50 cal., 2 30 cal.) on targets. Machine gun fire was returned weakly, but no hits scored on 397. One enemy barge was observed to ground on ringing coral reef. No barges were observed actually destroyed, while this command was present, but Chief of Staff, 1st Marine Division, later credited 397 with one barge destroyed in this incident. LCT's proceeded to Garua Harbor and discharged cargo during the night without incident. They sailed from Garua Harbor 0700 March 10, without escort, and arrived Rein Bay 2200. Damaged and broken equipment was returned to Cape Gloucester the following day, and ships were released from Task Unit on March 12, for departure Cape Cretin with escort.

3. by LCT 397:

Only ammunition expenditure was as follows,

20mm. 120 50 cal. 750 30 cal. 100

All ordnance meterial performed satisfactorily.

- No battle damage was sustained by LCTs. Smaller boats suffered 7 casualties and one LCM damaged. The 5th Marines suffered moderately heavy ca sualties, percentage-wise, from mortar and machine gun fire. The enemy suffered loss of one landing barge.
- Navigation and communications could have been considerably improved by the inclusion of an ICC equipped with radar and adequate radio facilities. ICTs were never in communication with shore stations, because no radios in operating condition were a vailable on ICTs used.
- 6. The Commander, ICT Group 23, wishes to particularly compliment the commanding officers and all hands of ICTs 397, 245, 260 and 298 for the excellent manner in which this operation was carried off. Continuous operation and general quarters alerts were very wearing, yet everyone carried out his duties with willingness, enthusiasm and skill.

J. R. GREGORY.

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