

# THE COAST GUARD AND THE PACIFIC WAR

BY ROBERT M. BROWNING JR.



Landing Marines and supplies on enemy beaches was a major Coast Guard responsibility during the war.

When it was called for, Coast Guardsmen also took them off the beaches. Signalman 1st Class Douglas Munro, at the Lewis gun, died while saving nearly 500 trapped Marines at Guadalcanal.



**O**n Sept. 27, 1942, a group of diminutive landing craft sped toward the beaches of Guadalcanal. Huddled on shore, and fighting for their lives, were about 500 men of COL Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller’s 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.

Earlier that day, the same group of landing craft had put the Marines on the beach; now they were returning to extract them. As the LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) and LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) reached the shore, Coast Guard Signalman 1st Class Douglas Munro steered his LCVP between the evacuating Marines and the Japanese. By interposing his craft between the men on the beach and the enemy,

Munro allowed the landing craft to safely evacuate all the Marines, including the wounded.

As the last men climbed aboard, Munro steered his craft away from the beach. When almost clear, Japanese gunfire struck Munro and killed him instantly.

Munro was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

It is fitting that given the Coast Guard’s lifesaving tradition and the tremendous part the Coast Guard played during World War II, the Coast Guard’s only Medal of Honor winner was not only involved with a rescue but also an amphibious operation.

The Coast Guard’s participation in amphibious activity during World War II was



perhaps the most important war-related job the service performed. Incredibly, the Coast Guard fully manned more than 350 naval ships, including 76 LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank), 21 cargo and attack-cargo ships, 75 frigates, and 31 transports. In addition, the Coast

Guard manned more than 800 cutters, nearly 300 ships for the Army, and thousands of amphibious-type assault craft.

In the ships and craft of the amphibious forces, the Coast Guard discharged its most important role during the war — that is getting the men to the beaches and providing support.

The largest Coast Guard-manned ships were the transports, and they played a vital role in landing operations. Just as vital, and generally overlooked, was the absolutely critical small-craft operations. The LCVPs, LCMs, Higgins Boats, LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked) and others carried assault troops from the offshore transports and brought in reinforcements and supplies.

The handling of these small craft in the surf is a specialized skill, and it was not common among men in the Navy. Not so for men in the Coast Guard. Many of the coxswains had learned this skill from handling boats in the surf at lifesaving stations. In fact, Coast Guard coxswains from lifesaving stations were the most seasoned smallboat handlers in government service.

As only experienced men could successfully maneuver landing craft through strong currents, reefs, sand bars and heavy surf, their contributions to amphibious operations is immeasurable.

This experience was particularly important during the training exercises before the early amphibious operations. The Coast Guard's surfmen acted as mentors to the Navy coxswains trying to learn the nuances of controlling smallboats in the surf.

During the early part of the war several thousand Coast Guard and Navy men were trained to handle landing craft.

### The Solomons

The Coast Guard's first major participation in the Pacific war was at Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the first major Allied offensive of the war. Here the service played an important part in the island landings. Nineteen of the 23 naval transports attached to the campaign's task

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**Front Cover:** The battle for Okinawa was one of the last big battles of the Pacific War. It was also one of the bloodiest. Coast Guardsmen helped land the Marines on the beaches.

**Back Cover:** Thousands of Coast Guardsmen ferried men and supplies across the Pacific. The service played a little known but important role in both the Pacific and Atlantic campaigns.

force were either manned by the Coast Guard or carried Coast Guard members. The Coast Guard's primary role at Guadalcanal, and in almost every subsequent campaign, was to facilitate the landing of troops and supplies.

The Coast Guard continued its supporting role as the Allies moved north and west from Guadalcanal. In June and July 1943, the Army and Marines made landings at several points on Rendova, New Georgia, and Vangunu islands. Five transports with partial Coast Guard crews participated in the month-long operation.

Vella Lavella, just 40 miles from New Georgia, was the next link in the chain to be

attacked. It lay on the other side of the fortified and well-garrisoned island of Kolombangara. In a tactic repeated throughout the war, the Americans bypassed Kolombangara and landed on Vella Lavella.

On Aug. 15, the partially-manned Coast Guard *LST-334* and the fully-manned *LST-167* participated in the landings. For weeks both assisted with the supply of the troops ashore.

On Sept. 24, *LST-167* departed Guadalcanal and beached at Ruravai, Vella Lavella. Three Japanese dive bombers appeared as the last piece of equipment rolled off the ship. The LST's 20 anti-aircraft guns blazed away at the three planes as they rolled into

*The trip to an enemy beach was a voyage into the unknown for American soldiers and Marines. Coast Guard boatcrews faced the same dangers during the landings.*



their attack. The planes released their bombs and as they pulled out of their dive, one burst into flame and another began trailing smoke.

Despite the accurate and intense anti-aircraft fire, two bombs struck the LST. One penetrated the main deck, exploded, and the blast blew through the side of the ship. A second also went through the main deck and exploded on the tank deck, setting fire to 1,000 gallons of gasoline and 250 drums of oil that had yet to be unloaded.

The explosions caused an intense and lethal fire and forced most of the crew to abandon ship. Two officers and eight men died in the attack and an additional five men were listed as missing.

It took a week for American and New Zealand troops to secure Vella Lavella. Meanwhile GEN Douglas MacArthur began to attack New Guinea, located about 500 miles west of the Solomon Islands. Amphibious landings during a three-day period put

14,000 troops ashore without a casualty. Four Coast Guard LSTs took part in the landings at Finschafen Sept. 22. The Coast Guard-manned LSTs beached, Australian troops aboard stormed ashore, and the LSTs retracted without serious incident. Finschafen fell into Allied hands in only 10 days.

Bougainville Island, 75 miles northwest of Vella Lavella and the most northwestern of the Solomon Island chain, was the Allies' next objective. The goal was to secure a portion of the island and build a base to strike at the Japanese stronghold of Rabaul. On Oct. 31, the amphibious forces assembled off Guadalcanal. Nine of the 11 transports attached to the operation had Coast Guardsmen aboard. The initial landing force consisted of more than 14,000 men.

The Coast Guard-manned *Hunter Liggett* (APA-14) served as the flagship of the amphibious forces and carried more than 1,800 men. On Nov. 1, the invasion force arrived off the island and the boats of the transports went into the water with incredible efficiency.

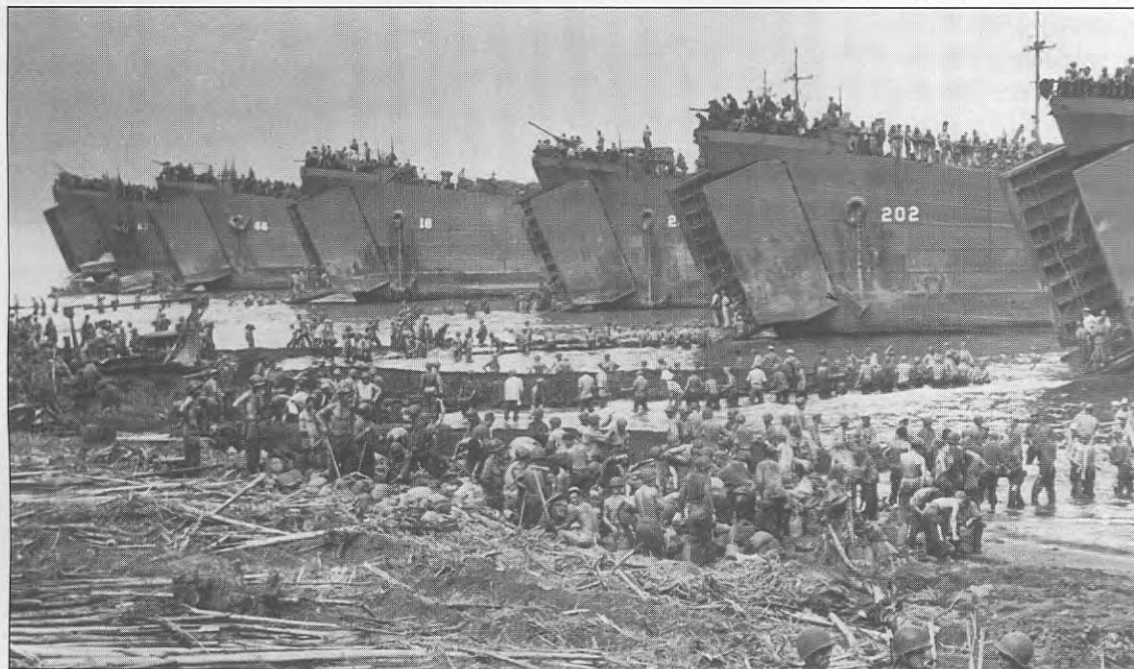
The *Hunter Liggett* led the transport column and opened fire on Cape Torokina with its 3-inch guns. With virtually no confusion, the first wave hit the beach about 40 minutes after the transports arrived.

In Empress Augusta Bay nearly 8,000 Marines went ashore in the first wave. Against light opposition, the men landed on 12 predetermined beaches that stretched for



Once a beachhead was secured, soldiers and Marines pushed inland. The steady stream of supplies, brought in by Coast Guard transports, kept the offensive alive. (Top, right) the landing at Empress Augusta Bay. The men unloading drums on Biak Island (bottom, right) are African-American soldiers from a segregated company. A column of U.S. troops (top, far right) push on past a destroyed Japanese seaplane on Makin. (Bottom, far right) is a scene from the Leyte landing.





more than four miles. The steep beaches, combined with moderate surf, caused nearly 90 landing craft to broach or swamp. Over a period of a couple of weeks more than 33,000 men landed and 23,000 tons of supplies went ashore. Coast Guard-manned LSTs helped move supplies ashore and evacuate the wounded. By the end of the year the island was virtually in Allied hands.

### The Gilbert Islands

As troops went ashore at Vella Lavella and Bouganville, the Allies staged their planned thrust into the Central Pacific. The Central Pacific Campaign began with the capture of the Gilbert Islands. The Gilbert Island chain is about 1,300 miles northeast of the Solomon Island chain. Here the Japanese augmented their forces, strengthened their positions and developed a centralized and efficient base force command, making the islands more difficult to conquer. The Allies planned the initial assault for the Tarawa and Makin atolls.

About 200 vessels assembled to put ashore 27,600 assault troops, 7,600 garrison troops, 6,000 vehicles, and 117,000 tons of cargo. The large number of ships were organized into three main groups, the Assault Force, the Carrier Force, and the Defense Force. The Assault Force contained many Coast Guard ships, and was further divided into a Northern Attack Force to assault Makin and a Southern Attack Force to attack Tarawa.

The Coast Guard-manned assault transport *Leonard Wood (APA-12)*, a veteran of both the North African and Sicilian campaign, operated with the Northern Attack Force against Makin. The *Arthur Middleton (APA-25)* sailed with the Southern

Attack group to Tarawa. Five Coast Guard-manned LSTs also participated in the landings.

In the Gilberts the Allies, for the first time, would face a strongly defended beach. On the small atolls there was no undefended place to land due to the narrowness of the beaches.

At the triangular-shaped Makin Atoll, the Japanese had fortified only one island, the largest island of Butaritari. The island hosted a seaplane base, but the defenses were incomplete and the garrison small. Only about 300 combat troops and 500 Korean construction workers defended the island.

On Nov. 20, the invasion force arrived. The transports approached and hove to about 6,000 yards offshore. Since a surprise landing was not possible, the beaches were subjected to a heavy bombardment. Carrier planes and battleships blasted Japanese positions before the landing craft reached the two beaches selected for landings.







The coral reef surrounding the island complicated the landings. A miscalculation of the lagoon's depth required the landing forces to come ashore entirely in the diminutive LVTs. Eight waves of larger landing craft, unable to get over the coral, caused confusion, delay, and the abandonment of landing craft at the coral heads. Many of the troops had to wade the 250 yards to the beach in waist-deep water. Fortunately for the Americans the Japanese inflicted relatively few casualties on those wading ashore because they defended the interior of the island rather than the beachhead.

The Coast Guard boatcrews had grueling and often dangerous jobs. They unloaded their craft on the beaches while under fire from Japanese snipers. The coxswains and their crews worked at Makin for several days, never leaving

their boats even to eat or sleep. Coffee and food were lowered to them on a line from the transports and they slept on their cargo while anchored in the lagoon — all the while being awakened by random fire from shore.

At Tarawa, 100 miles to the south of Makin, the Japanese had prepared strong defenses. The atoll is roughly triangular in shape and the coral heads extended between 500 and 1,000 yards off shore.

Betio, the only defended island, lay on the southern side of the coral formation and comprised a mere 291 acres which allowed the Japanese to

defended every inch. Only the Pacific island of Iwo Jima was more strongly defended. About 4,800 men, more than half combat troops, manned the fortifications.

Just before 4 a.m. Nov. 20, the Southern Attack force reached its destination off Betio. The transports arrived in their areas and immediately began lowering their boats. The *Arthur Middleton* arrived at the transport area off Makin at 3:55 a.m. Coast Guardsmen



*The ferrying of men and supplies to the front was only part of the Coast Guard's job. Exhausted and wounded troops were ferried back to Coast Guard transports for rest and treatment. The Marine (far left) is being helped into a Coast Guard-manned assault transport after the assault of Eniwetok. His face is not camouflaged; it is black from the coral dirt in which he burrowed to keep covered from enemy snipers.*

The *Leonard Wood* operated off Red Beach and had aboard more than 1,700 officers and men. They began lowering fully-loaded boats at 6:03 a.m. The boats waited for some time while the bombardment proceeded. The bombardment stopped at 8:24 a.m. and the *Leonard Wood's* boats touched shore at 8:40 a.m. The landings here went according to plan and the assault troops moved rapidly inland.

also served aboard three other transports and manned five LSTs that carried garrison troops ashore. The ships in the shore bombardment group shelled the beaches for only a short time prior to the landing of the Marines.

The *Arthur Middleton* carried the Second Marine Division Battalion Landing Team, an aggregate of over 1,400 officers and men. These men disembarked into LVTs that had been brought to the atoll by the large LSTs. The shallow-draft LVTs preceded the LCVPs and LCMs and made up the first three waves going to the beach.

The assault called for a landing inside the lagoon on the north side of the island. The tide, wind and sea delayed the LVTs arrival to line of departure. Real trouble developed when the successive three waves of the deeper-drafted LCVPs and LCMs attempted to run to the beaches. These craft could not get over the shallow reefs and the troops had to be unloaded into rafts, onto a pier that ran out beyond the reef, or into the LVTs on their return trips. That afternoon about 200 craft bobbed outside the coral reef with troops or supplies waiting to land. Complicating matters further, the Marines had failed to establish a completely secure beachhead and only nominally

controlled three by nightfall.

By the morning of Nov. 21 the beach parties established better control. The fighting continued and proved to be some of the fiercest of the war. The *Arthur Middleton* put ashore a beach party of three officers and 43 men that stayed ashore for five days, supervising the landing of boats and unloading equipment.

From Nov. 21 to 23, air and naval gunfire, and artillery brought ashore, assisted the Marines as they pushed the Japanese to the eastern end of the island. The Japanese did not surrender and had to be virtually annihilated.

### The Marshall Islands

Throughout the fall of 1943, the Coast Guard actively participated in the Allied drives through the Southwest and Central Pacific. In February 1944, during the Marshall Island Campaign, the Coast Guard once again played an important role.

For Operation Flintlock the Allies focused their attention on Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and Majuro atolls within the Marshall Archipelago. The plan called for Majuro Atoll to be taken first to provide an anchorage for the fleet. Kwajalein would be assaulted from both ends the following day, and for Eniwetok Atoll to be attacked about three months

Many of the Coast Guard's World War II transports were far larger than today's Coast Guard cutter.

They were often more than 500 feet long and capable of carrying thousands of men. The General A. W. Brewster (right). The Hunter Liggett (opposite page).



later to allow the Allies to consolidate their positions.

Assembled to capture these atolls was the Joint Expeditionary Force comprising nearly 300 vessels and more than 84,000 men. This force split into three groups: a northern group for an attack on Roi and Namur islands in the Kwajalein Atoll, a southern group for an assault on Kwajalein Island 45 miles to the south, and a third group for landings on Majuro Atoll, about 250 miles southeast of Kwajalein Atoll.

The flagship for the task force attacking Majuro was the Coast Guard-manned transport *Cambria* (APA-36). The Majuro force steamed into position to land troops on Jan. 31. Unknown to the Americans, the Japanese left Majuro Atoll in November 1943, and only four Japanese inhabited the islands. On Feb. 1 the task force entered the lagoon uncontested. This atoll would serve as the staging area for Central Pacific fleet operations for the next several months.

The Northern Attack Force, including six transports with full or partial Coast Guard

crews, gathered to strike at Roi and Namur islands within the Kwajalein Atoll, the largest atoll in the world.

They arrived in the Kwajalein area Jan. 30, 1944. The next day the fire-support vessels and aircraft began subjecting the Japanese defenders on Roi and Namur and other nearby islands to an intense bombardment.

The barrage killed a large number of the islands' 3,700 defenders. The American combat troops landed Feb. 1, with almost no opposition. All organized resistance from these two islands ceased just shortly after noon the next day. By Feb. 7, with some mopping-up actions, this attack force secured about 55 islands.

On Jan. 30, the Southern Attack Force arrived off Kwajalein. Battleships and cruisers began immediately laying down a devastating bombardment on the enemy defenses. The Coast Guard had four manned or partially-manned transports active in the assault.

The landing went so well that the Reserve Group, including five other transports with entire and partial Coast Guard crews, did not even participate. The amphibious forces secured Kwajalein and the nearby islands by the afternoon of Feb. 4.

The quick capture of Kwajalein and Majuro atolls allowed the American leaders to advance the date for the capture of Eniwetok Atoll from May 10 to Feb. 17. They now used the Reserve Group and the men that had not been put ashore.

Eniwetok Atoll lies 330 miles northwest of Kwajalein and is the most western island in the Marshall group. The three principal islands defended by the Japanese were Eniwetok, Parry, and Engebi.

A task group of 89 vessels assembled, including the *Cambria* which served as the flagship. The Coast Guard-manned transport *Leonard Wood*, *Centaurus* (AKA-17) and *Arthur Middleton* also participated, along with the partially Coast Guard-manned *President Monroe* (AP-104),

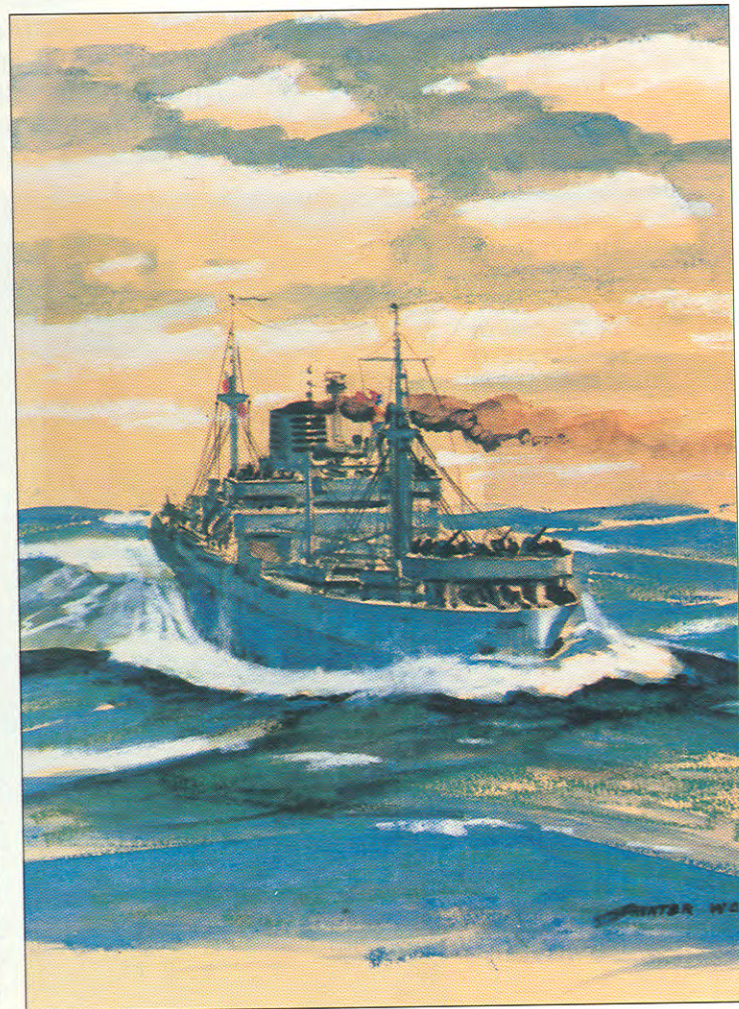
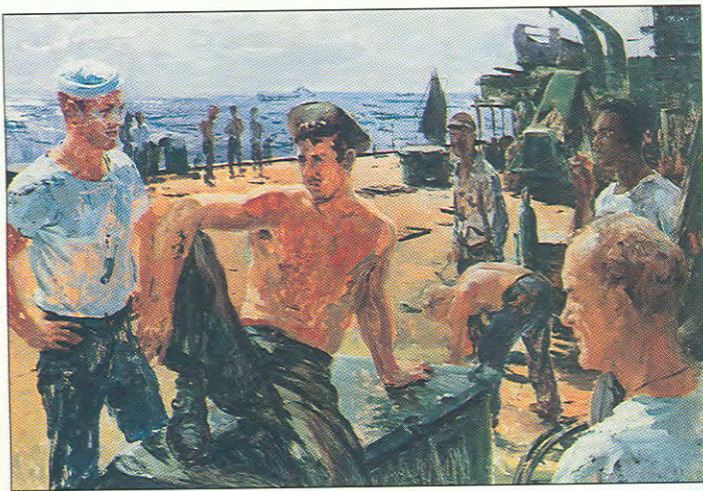
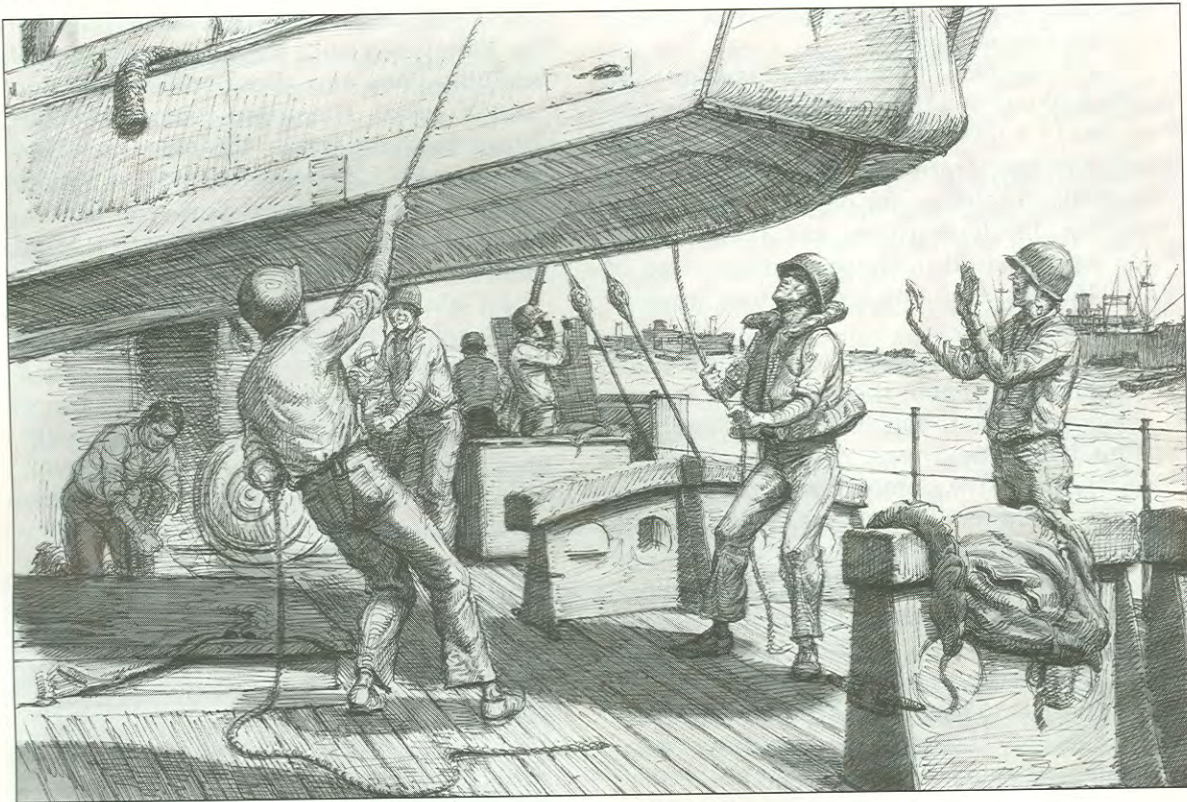


# Through artists' eyes



Coast Guard combat artists depicted Coast Guard action throughout the war. Their sketches and paintings are a valuable record of the experiences of Coast Guardsmen in action.





*Heywood* (AP-12) and *Electra* (AKA-4). In all, the transports carried nearly 8,000 assault troops. The transports assembled Feb. 15 for the trip to Eniwetok.

At Eniwetok Atoll the barrier islands were attacked one at a time. Each in turn was subjected to a heavy and continuous bombardment in preparation for the landings. The first island selected for capture was Engebi. On Feb. 18, the *Heywood* and *Arthur Middleton* participated in these landings. One of the *Middleton's* boats led the first wave to the beach.

After the first waves of landing craft reached the beach, the transports moved closer to shore to facilitate the unloading of supplies for the troops. As in the earlier assaults the heavy bombardment killed many of the defenders and the assaulting waves met only light resistance.

On the 19th, while the Engebi landings proceeded, the transports prepared to land troops on Eniwetok, and by Feb. 21 they had secured the island.

Parry Island was more strongly held than anticipated, therefore the landings were postponed until D-day plus 5 — Feb. 22. The naval forces subjected the island to gunfire for four days. Nevertheless, some defenders survived and the first wave met enemy rifle and mortar fire. The attacking forces quickly overcame the Japanese and secured Parry Island 12 hours after the initial landings.

## Saipan

The next move westward was the Marianas Islands in an operation called Forager. The Marianas Islands lie 1,300 miles east of the Philippines and about 1,300 miles due south of Tokyo. The group comprises about 15 islands that stretch 450 miles north to south and lie 1,200 miles west of the most forward American base at Eniwetok. The invasion would be a supreme test of Allied amphibious capability.

The planners assembled two attack forces and one reserve force for the operation. The Northern Attack Force that sailed for Saipan and Tinian consisted of 37 transports including the *Cambria*, *Arthur Middleton*, *Callaway*, *Leonard Wood* and LSTs 19, 23, 166 and 169. Seven other transports had partial Coast Guard crews.

The Southern Attack Force steamed for Guam and included the Coast Guard-manned transports *Aquarius*, *Centaurus*, cargo ships *Cor Caroli* and *Sterope*, the LSTs 24, 70, 71, and 207, as well as seven other vessels with partial Coast Guard crews. The reserve force included the Coast Guard-manned ship *Cavalier*.

The invasion forces included a total of 535 ships that carried an aggregate of more than 127,000 troops in four and one-half reinforced divisions. The operation called for the capture of the most important islands on the southern end of the Marianas chain:

Coast Guardsmen, participating in the invasion of Saipan, look over the wreckage of the pier at Charan-Kanoa, a small town in the Marianas islands. Scenes of wrecked towns and cluttered beaches were common throughout the Pacific.



Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. The islands north of these had little strategic value and few or no Japanese on them. The Navy began the campaign by subjecting Saipan and Tinian to heavy bombardments beginning two days before the landings.

At dawn June 15, the transports assembled off Saipan while the fire-support vessels and aircraft began an intense prelanding bombardment at 0800. Forty minutes later, 8,000 Marines streamed toward the beach along a four-mile front in 600 LVTs, supported by 150 LVT(A)s (Landing Vehicle, Tracked, Armored) that operated as light tanks. The larger landing craft such as LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry) and even the LCVPs could not be used to land the initial waves of the Marines because their deep draft prevented them from crossing over



the reefs that surrounded the island.

The larger landing craft brought Marines to the seaward edge of the reefs where the men transferred into the LVTs that crossed over top of the reefs. The LVTs shuttled between the reefs and the beachhead for load after load.

The Japanese made the trips to the beach difficult. As the battle raged it became imperative that larger craft be brought to the beachhead.

The Coast Guard mission became critical that morning when the main assault at the port town of Charan-Kanoa bogged down. Marines on the beachhead clung there with limited ammunition, medical supplies and support. Searching over a wide area of the lagoon, a Coast Guard landing craft, under intense enemy fire, probed until it found a four-foot-deep, 150-foot-wide channel. This act proved to be crucial in the battle for the beachhead. After marking a passage, a steady stream of larger craft brought supplies to the beach. The Marines eventually secured the beachhead and pushed the Japanese defenders inland.

The amphibious campaign against Saipan was considered a model operation in every respect. By 6 p.m., nearly 20,000 Marines had landed on Saipan. The Marines completely overwhelmed the enemy and spent a great deal of time fighting isolated Japanese units. Twenty-five days after the initial landings the island was in American hands.

### Guam

Guam is the largest and was the most important island in the Marianas group. Thirty-five miles long and five to nine miles wide it lies on the southern end of the chain and is almost entirely surrounded by a coral reef.

The assault ships sailed from Eniwetok to Guam and began arriving on the afternoon of July 20. The transports steamed to the southern side of the island and took their positions off the landing beaches.

The Coast Guard transports *Cor Caroli*, *Aquarius*, *Centaurus*, *Sterope*, the 180-foot buoy tender *Tupelo*, LSTs 24, 70, 71, and 207, and seven other Navy ships with partial Coast Guard crews all took part in the campaign.

Hoping to draw the Japanese away from the southern beaches, the *Arthur Middleton* made a diversionary landing north of the main landings. Several waves of the *Middleton's* boats went ashore without troops and then retracted. At the main

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Many Japanese soldiers chose suicide rather than surrender. This prisoner was captured on the island of Hollandia, New Guinea.

landings, the first wave of LVTs landed on the beach at 8:30 a.m. As at Saipan, the LVTs shuttled back and forth from the beach to the edge of the reefs to be loaded again.

Organized Japanese resistance lasted until mid-August and isolated fighting prolonged the final conquest of the island for many months.

An enlisted Coast Guardsman leads his shipmates in prayer. Quiet moments of reflection were interspersed between the intensity of combat.



### Tinian

The amphibious forces' next target was the island of Tinian. This island lies less than three miles southwest of Saipan. The task force that formed to attack Tinian consisted of 214 vessels, most of which were in the amphibious groups. The assault on this island was from shore to shore due to its closeness to Saipan.

Naval forces subjected the Japanese on the island to air and naval bombardment beginning June 11. The bombardment thoroughly destroyed the extensive defenses the Japanese had prepared. On July 24, all craft moved smoothly from Saipan to Tinian. At 6 a.m. the *Cambria* and *Cavalier* arrived off the beach to land troops. The *Cavalier* served as the flagship for Commander Reserve Transport Group and Commander Transport Division Seven.

That afternoon, the *Cambria* moved closer to the beach to evacuate wounded Marines. The transport received casualties by breeches buoy due to unfavorable sea conditions. During the afternoon, the transport brought aboard a total of 293 wounded.

With the capture of Tinian the Allies completed the conquest of all the important islands in the Marianas group.

### Hollandia

In April 1944, MacArthur decided to push 250 miles to the northwest of Finschafen, and seize the coastal area at Hollandia and Aitape. At dawn April 22, amphibious forces landed on the shores of Humbolt Bay and Tanahmerah Bay with little or no opposition. The Coast Guard had 21 manned or partially manned LSTs, transports and

frigates attached to the invasion forces. These landings completely surprised the Japanese who fled into the interior and lost towns and airfields with little or no fight.

On the night of April 21, 1944, the Coast Guard-manned cargo ship *Etamin* (AK-93), sailed as part of a 161-vessel task force, including 20 other Coast Guard vessels, organized to make landings at Hollandia, Tanahmerah Bay and Aitape. At 5:45 a.m. the vessel entered the harbor with the rest of the Eastern Attack Group.

On the night of April 27, Japanese torpedo planes attacked the amphibious vessels at anchor. At 11 p.m. one swung in low off the starboard side of the *Etamin* and released a torpedo. It struck the starboard side about 10 feet above the keel in the number-five hold and ruptured the shell plating and the shaft alley. The blast sprayed gasoline over the after part of the ship, but the gas did not immediately catch fire.

As the hold and the engine room flooded, gas fumes came in contact with the boilers and ignited. The engine room exploded in flames and all hands fought the fire as the stern rapidly settled. The crew abandoned ship with the loss of only two of the ship's complement of 200 Coast Guardsmen and 150 Army troops. Fortunately, this was the



only serious damage suffered by any of the naval vessels during the Hollandia operation.

In May, naval units approached Wakde Island, 115 miles west of Hollandia. On May 17, American and Australian warships bombarded the island before the Naval and Coast Guard LSTs amphibious units landed their men. There was no opposition to the landing and by evening the Allies established an eight-mile beachhead. The Americans had to kill the Japanese to the man before finally securing the island and its airfield on the evening of May 19.

On July 2, several weeks after the Normandy invasion and with a great amphibious force striking the Marianas, the Coast Guard participated in the landings at the island of Noemfoor which lies between Biak Island and New Guinea. Here eight Coast Guard-manned LSTs landed troops. At the edge of the reef that lay around the island, cargoes had to be transferred from the LSTs into smaller and more shallow-draft LCIs. The Coast Guard-manned frigates *El Paso*, *Orange* and *San Pedro* also served to screen the landing operations from enemy submarines and aircraft, and provided close fire support. On July 2, the landings went off as planned and the island and its three airfields were in Allied hands within four days. Mopping-up actions lasted until the end of August.

At the end of July, MacArthur sent an amphibious expeditionary force to Cape Sansapor, New Guinea. By doing so he made a 200-mile jump from his previous most advanced position. For all purposes this would finish his amphibious operations in New Guinea and he would be ready to strike the Philippines and fulfill his earlier promise to the Philippine people to return. The Coast Guard-manned LSTs 18, 22, 26, 66, 67, 68, 170, 202, 204 and 206 all took part in the landings and the follow-up activity. The Coast Guard-manned frigates *Bisbee*, *Coronado*,

*Eugene*, *Gallup*, *Glendale*, *Long Beach*, *San Pedro* and *Van Buren* performed offshore patrols during the landings.

The conquest of the Marianas and New Guinea cleared the approaches to the Philippines except for two groups of islands. Before proceeding, the Allies needed to capture the Caroline group that included Peleliu, Angaur, Ngesbus, Ulithi and Ngulu, and the islands of Morotai and Halmahera in the Moluccas.

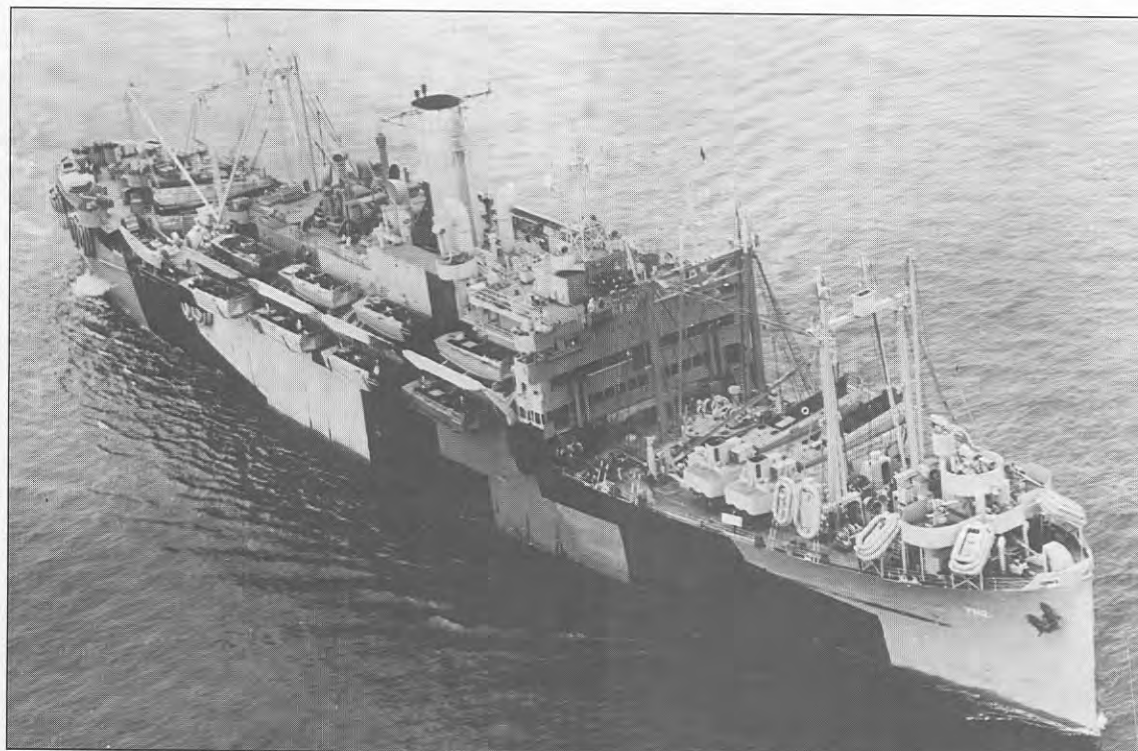
The island of Morotai in the Moluccas lies 500 miles southwest of the Palau islands. Cruisers, destroyers and aircraft bombarded Japanese positions to secure the beaches for the nearly 17,000 Army troops poised to land. Nineteen Coast Guard vessels including 11 LSTs and eight frigates participated in the landings. At 8:30 a.m. Sept. 15, the first men landed on Pitoe Beach on the east side of the island. Coral heads and uncharted beaches hampered some of the landing operations. The Japanese did not contest the landings and most of the small enemy force fled the island. The Allies quickly captured an airfield on the island and within weeks landed 45,000 troops.

Landings on Peleliu in the Palau Islands,



Coast Guard ships delivered tons of mail to soldiers, sailors and Marines including 18,000 bags that completely filled three holds being loaded onto a transport bound for shore.

The Leonard Wood participated in numerous Atlantic and Pacific campaigns. The vessel carried 2,500 troops to the invasion of the Philippine Islands and was the flagship of Commander Transport Division 20.



the westernmost islands in the Caroline chain, on the same day, were a different story. The immense amphibious forces attacking the Carolines comprised about 800 vessels, carrying nearly 20,000 soldiers and more than 28,000 Marines. The Coast Guard-manned vessels at Peleliu were the *Aquarius*, *Centaurus*, *LST-19* and *LST-23*. The transports *Crescent City*, *Fuller* and *Stringham*, with partial Coast Guard crews, also participated. The transports of the task force arrived off the beachhead at 5 a.m. Sept. 15. With determination, the Japanese contested the landing and inflicted about 200 casualties at the beachhead.

Peleliu did not differ from many of the other Pacific Islands — reefs surrounded the island complicating the landings and the support of the operations. Coral heads and boulders obstructed the landings for even the smallest landing craft. Once again only smallboats and the tracked LVTs could be used to get directly to the beach. The large LSTs approached the beach as close as they could and then the smaller craft travelled back and forth to land troops and supplies. The Coast Guard-manned LSTs were as efficient as usual. *LST-19* lowered its ramp at 7:18 a.m. and all the LVTs were out and heading for the beach in 10 minutes.

During the first two days of the operation the Japanese kept the beach under mortar and light artillery fire. This, however, did not halt the steady flow of supplies to the beach. The LSTs provided the critical logis-

tical support to sustain the offensive. By Sept. 26 the Americans had surrounded the enemy but the fight did not end until mid-October.

Just two days after the landings on Peleliu the Coast Guard-manned transports disembarked troops on Angaur Island. Angaur, the southernmost of the Palaus, lies only six miles south of Peleliu. After subjecting the island to an intense bombardment from sea and air, the *Callaway* and *Leonard Wood* landed men on the northeast and eastern side of the island against light opposition.

The *Leonard Wood* served as the flagship of Commander Transport Division 20 for the landings. Carrying more than 1,800 officers and men of eight different Army units, the *Wood's* task group made a feint 30 miles northeast on the eastern shore of Babelthaup Island before steaming to Angaur to disembark troops. The *Callaway* served as the flagship for another task unit. Assault troops went ashore at 8:30 a.m. using almost every type of amphibious craft. The troops on the *Wood* loaded into their landing craft and cleared the ship in 19 minutes.

The troops established two beachheads within 30 minutes of landing and pushed into the interior. The Japanese garrison, probably numbering about 1,600, fled inland to better defensive positions. The cost of rooting the Japanese out of caves and brush was heavy, and the medical staffs aboard the two Coast Guard transports treated nearly

400 casualties during the operation. Even though the Japanese were completely overwhelmed, the Army did not secure this island until 10 months later and, remarkably, some Japanese held out in caves for more than a year after the Allies stormed ashore.

The capture of the Caroline Islands cleared the last obstacle for the advance on the Philippine Islands. The Coast Guard played a significant role in the invasion of the Philippines. The Coast Guard cutters and Coast Guard-manned ships participated in nearly all amphibious actions in the Philippine Islands and suffered through the kamikaze attacks with the rest of the fleet. Nearly 30 Coast Guard amphibious ships landed Marines and Army garrison troops.

The Philippine Islands consist of 10 major islands and more than 7,000 smaller islands. The Allies chose to invade Leyte Island in part because they considered the gradually sloping beaches would facilitate easy landings. In Allied hands they could then build it into an air and logistical base to attack the island of Luzon and other Japanese strong points.

Code named King-Two, the operation comprised 738 vessels and a landing force of more than 193,000 troops. Converging from many bases in the Pacific, they formed off the islands. In this tremendous fleet were 35 Coast Guard vessels and seven others with partial Coast Guard crews. The Coast Guard ships included five large transports, two attack cargo vessels, 10 frigates and 12 LSTs.

On the night of Oct. 19, the invasion flotilla approached Leyte Gulf in the darkness. Once inside the gulf they steamed to their assigned areas at two landing sites. The Northern Force landed at two beaches near San Ricardo and

the Southern Force went ashore on two beaches off Dulag. At dawn the naval ships on either sides of the beaches began laying down an intense and deafening bombardment against enemy positions.

The crew of the *Leonard Wood*, flagship of Commander Transport Division 20, went to General Quarters at 7 a.m. Just over an hour later the *Wood* reached the transport area. At 8:16 a.m. the men lowered boats and the nearly 2,500 troops aboard began debarking at 9:15 a.m. The other Coast Guard transports, veterans of many campaigns had their men in the water in a timely fashion. The *Aquarius* put an LCVP over the side for an advanced beach party of four men. These four Coast Guardsmen were the first men to land on Leyte after the bombardment.

The Japanese did not vigorously contest the landing as predicted. Some mortar fire fell close to the Coast Guard ships but none suffered any damage. Air opposition did not



*Steward's Mate First Class Corilo Mangauel Santos, born in the Philippines, greets a Filipino in an outrigger canoe off Leyte Island in the Philippines. The Coast Guard played an integral role in the liberation of the Philippines.*

develop until later, but when it did it was in the form of the "Divine Wind" or kamikazes.

The Coast Guard-manned LSTs sailed with both Northern and Southern Forces. Among the first ships to hit the beach they unloaded their cargoes of vehicles, troops, and critical supplies by pontoon causeways fitted to the vessels. Once unloaded, these ships plied back and forth from the staging areas to the invasion beaches to keep the troops supplied.

In November, on one of these trips, the *LST-66* was attacked by a Japanese suicide plane. It beached on Dulag Beach Nov. 12, and began unloading vehicles and cargo. At 5:18 p.m. an enemy aircraft crash-dived into the after starboard 40mm and 20mm gun mounts. The plane's fuselage passed through the splinter shield of the 40mm gun mount and disintegrated. Unbelievably the plane did not explode but did shower the entire length of the vessel with gasoline and aircraft parts. No serious fire started but the crash killed eight and wounded 14 Coast Guard and Army men.

The Coast Guard-manned frigates also played an important role in the operations. Most performed screening, fire support and escort duty during the landings and resupply activities. The *Bisbee* and *Gallup* were both involved in landing troops of the 6th Ranger Battalion on Homonhon Island two days before the landings on Leyte.

The frigate's role of escorting convoys from the staging areas to the invasion sites likewise was crucial. In late November, the *Coronado* and *San Pedro* left Humbolt Bay, to steam the 1,250 miles to escort a convoy of ships bringing supplies and men to Leyte.

The next objective was Luzon, the largest

island in the Philippine group. The capture of this island would deny the Japanese access to the South China Sea and give the Allies the capital city of Manila and the best port in the Far East — Manila Bay. The Coast Guard-manned ships that participated were the *Arthur Middleton*, *Aquarius*, *Cambria*, *Callaway*, *Leonard Wood*, *Cavalier*, and 10 Coast Guard-manned LSTs. Seven other ships had partial Coast Guard crews.

On Jan. 8, 1945, the *Callaway* steamed with the task force toward the landing beaches. About 35 miles from shore,

Five LSTs and one LSM discharge cargo at the foot of Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Feb. 24, 1945. The battle for Iwo Jima was one for the most hotly contested of the war. (Opposite page) Supplies pour onto the beach at Iwo Jima.



Japanese kamikaze aircraft began attacking the convoy. The gunners aboard the *Callaway* shot down two diving planes, but a third flew through the hail of gunfire and plowed into the superstructure. Flames leapt up the starboard side and engulfed men at their stations. Firefighting parties quickly put the fire out, but the flames killed 29 men and wounded 20 more. None of the troops aboard were injured and the damage to the ship was slight, so the *Callaway* continued on course to the invasion beach.

At 7:15 a.m. Jan. 9, the transports began debarking troops in LVTs and other amphibious craft. The first waves of landing craft went in under the protection of a heavy bombardment and reached the beach at 9:30 a.m. The *Leonard Wood* debarked more than 1,000 men and 457 tons of cargo. At the beach the transports met some mortar and artillery fire 30 minutes after arriving, but supplies went to the beachhead in LVTs, DUKWs (an amphibious vehicle), and self-propelled pontoon barges.

Despite the attacks, the amphibious forces maintained an incredible schedule to get men and supplies to the beach. By the end of the first day of the invasion, the Allies had established a beachhead 15 miles wide and four miles deep. They landed 68,000 troops with equipment and supplies that equaled an incredible seven tons per man.

Troops and supplies arrived daily as the

most of the important points on the island, returning the American flag to the fort on the island, the scene of the United States' 1942 capitulation.

### Iwo Jima

With the major points in the Philippines secure, the Allies began looking to the final assault on the Japanese islands. Along the route lay Iwo Jima, an island less than four miles long and just over two wide. Allied planners believed the capture of this volcanic island would ease the later operations because it could be used as an emergency air base for crippled heavy bombers returning from missions over Japan. Furthermore, fighters could fly from Iwo Jima and could supply cover for the entire distance to the targets and back.

Nine hundred vessels sailed in the numerous task groups of the Fifth Fleet and in sup-

port of the operation. These ships carried expeditionary forces of more than 70,000 Marines, nearly 4,000 men in the naval landing force, and more than 36,000 garrison troops to attack the determined Japanese garrison of 21,000.

The Allies set Feb. 19 as D-Day. The assault forces arrived off the southeast side of the island to land men at seven predetermined beaches stretching only 3,500 yards. Included in these ves-



Allies drove toward the capital of Manila. On Jan. 31, the Secretary-class cutter *Spencer*, converted into an amphibious-force flagship, helped to direct landings south of the entrance to Manila Bay. The Allies drove toward Manila and captured the capital city Feb. 6, but several strongpoints still remained in Japanese hands. One of these, the strongly fortified island of Corregidor, had to be taken. The *Spencer's* sister ship, the *Ingham*, served as flagship for this task force — the only Coast Guard vessel that participated. On Feb. 16 the *Ingham* steamed to within 3,500 yards of San Jose Beach, south of Corregidor, to facilitate the landings. Within three days the troops had captured

sels were the *Bayfield* and the *Callaway*, 14 LSTs, and the submarine chaser *PC-469*.

With no reefs surrounding the island, the landings promised little difficulty. The attack forces arrived off the beaches before daylight and began debarking troops into the LVTs, and lowered LCMs and LCVPs for the assault. The LVTs landed the first five assault waves. The anticipated good beach conditions unfortunately did not materialize. The surf broke directly on the beach, broaching and carrying the small craft sideways up on the beach. It did not take long for the shore line to become littered with craft.

The successive waves of landing craft had

difficulty getting to the beach and likewise became damaged and lost. The Coast Guard coxswains found it necessary to back the craft into the wind and current to keep grounding hard onto the beach. The beachmasters, salvage parties and beach parties normally kept the beaches clear, but due to the intense Japanese mortar fire, none of these men could remain on the beach. Therefore the coxswains in the landing craft had to take all the initiative to get to the beach, unload, and back off. The wreckage eventually caused the beach to be closed to everything smaller than an LCT until tugs and other craft cleared it for later waves to disembark troops and supplies.

The Coast Guard landed Marine divisions along with their gear, bulldozers, vehicles, rations, small arms, water, and virtually everything that would keep the landing forces moving inland.

One of the most enduring images of the capture of the island is the Marines raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi. The *LST-779* claimed the honor of supplying this flag. The honor of providing the first flag raised, however, is claimed with some conviction by the crew of the Coast Guard-manned *LST-758*.

### Okinawa

The Coast Guard's final major amphibious

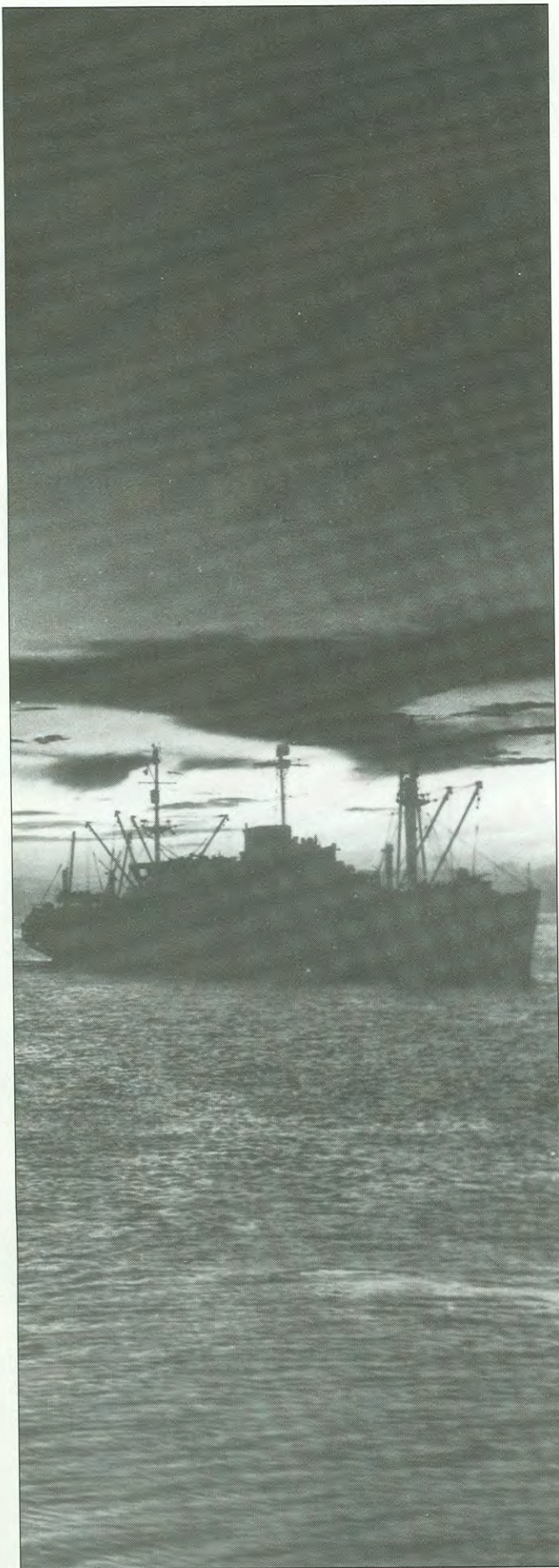
action was at Okinawa. Operation Iceberg proceeded along the same successful formula that other Allied invasions had taken. Carrier aircraft and surface ships shelled and bombed the island for nine days prior to the landings. The Coast Guard had a total of 53 ships that participated, and another six with partial Coast Guard crews accompanied the invasion forces. These transports, cargo vessels, amphibious force flagships, and more than 40 LSTs and LCIs formed part of the overall force of more than 1,400 vessels carrying more than 548,000 soldiers, sailors and Marines.

The amphibious task force arrived off the beaches on Easter morning, April 1, 1945. The Japanese chose not to defend the beachhead. Therefore the greatest initial threat faced by the attacking force was Kamikaze attacks. During these attacks a suicide plane struck the Coast Guard-manned *LST-884*. The plane plowed through the shipfitter's shop and into its cargo of ammunition. Racked by fire and explosions, the commanding officer ordered all hands to abandon ship, but the attack had cost the lives of 24 men.

The beachmasters and their men waged their own battle with an unseen enemy. The coral off the beaches at Okinawa complicated the unloading of supplies. The LCVPs and LCMs had only six hours a day, near high

*Cluttered beaches were normal after every landing. This scene is from the Noemfoor landing.*





tide, to unload the craft. Due to the tremendous needs of the campaign the beachmasters found it necessary to unload as many of the craft at high tide, pile the supplies on the beach, and then move the material inland at low tide. This kept the transports at anchor for a long period of time and offered the Kamikaze pilots, suicide boats and torpedo craft ample time to strike at the fleet.

The Coast Guard remained active with the amphibious forces until the surrender of Japan. Afterwards the cutters performed various operations with the occupation forces including mine-sweeping activities. The Coast Guard transports finished their major work in the Pacific by transporting thousands of men home in the "Magic Carpet" trips.

The Coast Guard made a tremendous contribution to the war effort as part of the amphibious forces in the Pacific. The men of this nation's smallest military service proved as heroic and valiant as the men in the other branches. When the Coast Guard was returned to its peacetime role in 1946, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal stated that during the war the Coast Guard "earned the highest respect and deepest appreciation of the Navy and Marine Corps. Its performance of duty has been without exception in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service."

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