

overhead dropping TNT. Those arriving late in the afternoon with Dr. Wassell were told by the officer in charge of evacuation that there was no shelter. What did they care about shelter after ending the slow, arduous journey through the jungle?

There were more important things to do. They had to find a ship. Someone noticed a ship at anchor in the port. Why not try it? It was a little Dutch river boat with accommodations for 18 passengers. Nearly 800 were already aboard.

With the help of a strapping Dutch sailor, the three stretcher cases who started the journey to the coast with Wassell were carried up the gangway and quartered on top of a hatch. As soon as the Dutch skipper saw them, he refused to take them because they were unable to walk. And if they stayed, there were a few Japanese submarines lurking along the coast ready to make their escape a flop.

The stretcher cases decided to gamble on it, including those who arrived late that night at the port and were squeezed aboard the ship. By dawn, the *Janssens* was underway.

Whaley was an eye-witness to the action that followed. "The first thing the next morning," he says, "everybody but the three of us who couldn't walk scrambled below to get away from nine large bombers that were overhead. They went over. They didn't bother about our small tramp steamer. But a few hours later the planes flew over and machine-gunned the ship and fired aircraft cannon and machine gun shells."

Whaley, Anderson and McCurdy rolled up to the edge of the cargo hatch. The Jap planes—wave after wave of Zeros—made run after run across the ship, and fortunately no bullets hit the trapped sailors. And they only wished they

weren't as helpless as they were, especially McCurdy who had fire in his blue eyes.

When the planes were out of range they were carried down to the next deck, and there they learned that all the life boats except one had been destroyed.

The *Janssens* was steered into a small cove along the coast expecting another bombing. Another air raid alarm sounded, and the same bombers flew overhead—this time not bothering the overcrowded ship. But the passengers were hysterical. They wanted to get off. The skipper finally sent around a notice that he was going to take the ship on to Australia but that he would only take volunteers.

It was up to the sailors themselves, not Dr. Wassell, to decide what they wanted to do. The doctor asked them to make their own decision and said that whichever way they chose he would stay with them. They all agreed to stay with the ship.

After unloading three-fourths of the passengers, the ship was once again anchored aweigh. Anderson, Kraus, Leinweber and a few others still had that tight feeling in their throat. They had far to go and much of it through submarine-infested waters. Their position was a lot worse than any danger they had ever run into on Java.

They became excited momentarily when a lookout rang the air-raid alarm and noticed later that he had made an error. He had mistaken a large bird for a plane as it glided along on the air currents without beating its wings.

Then there were several days of sailing without contact. The Japs were not evident. The sailors kept looking over the rail at the horizon. Finally, on the tenth day, someone saw a submarine off the port beam.

Pao San Ho, who had not yet shed a

smile, took a deep breath. It seemed like his escape would be a flop after all. He was glad that he kept his life jacket on, and the others quickly donned theirs when the submarine didn't answer the recognition signal.

The submarine gave them the jitters. It dogged their course, keeping the same distance away. The happy expression of reaching Australia faded from their faces. San Ho didn't show it from the start.

The minute they saw the submarine they knew something was up. Probably their number. An Australian patrol bomber passed over and signalled the *Janssens* for recognition. Then it flew over the sub and returned. The sailors sighed. Since the plane didn't attack the sub, they reasoned that she must be a friendly one.

Pao San Ho was as poker faced as the ace of spades when the plane flew ahead. Then suddenly he started grinning. The ship had reached an Australian harbor. Everyone was so excited that he got his best bib and tucker to go ashore.

Just like Whaley had pictured it, the harbor was the next best thing to home. He broke out his razor and trimmed his beard. With his lanky frame encased in white duck trousers again, a sport shirt pulled over his husky shoulders, and a determinedly cheerful smile wrinkling at the corner of his blue eyes, he was typical of the seven sailors who were carried off the evacuation ship.

Four of these sailors today have returned to sea duty, two are discharged on account of their battle scars, one is receiving medical treatments, and one is still a prisoner of war. William McCurdy, who was killed in action in February 1944, won the Bronze Star medal for heroism on Admiralty Island.

## LCMs Under Fire

### *A Flotilla of Landing Craft Makes History off Normandy*

**F**LOTILLA, consisting of LCMs, 66, 89, 61, 80, 68 and 70 want the folks to know they're in this war in a big way; they were told the 50-footers couldn't make it to France on D-day under their own power—but they did. The LCM 68 almost "had it" on the way across the Channel. She was rammed and had her oil line cut. James L. Smith, MoMM1c, was repairing the damage when the craft hit the beach for the first time in the initial assault wave.

"I no sooner had that job done than we ran into one of those obstacles the Germans had planted under water; we fixed her up though and got out again," he relates.

Every member of the crew of this craft got minor shrapnel wounds but none turned in to sick bay.

Then after the worst was over on their particular beachhead in Normandy with shrapnel holes punched through their sides, their oil lines patched and one of them with a sizeable hole stuffed with life belts they were told they couldn't make it to Cherbourg under their own power—but they did. They were the first

to Cherbourg, unloaded the first Liberty ships there and remained for two weeks on the job before they were relieved and sent back to a port in southern England. LCMs were not built for comfort or for pleasure yachting so crews in the flotilla scrambled about the beaches and gathered up enough bunks from abandoned ships to outfit their own craft with portable sleeping facilities.

"It wasn't exactly like home but I guess it beat some of the foxholes we saw," said Charles H. Branton, MoMM2, of LCM 66. "Of course we weren't too anxious for sleep while we were being escorted through those mine fields by one lone little PC boat on the way from our beachhead to Cherbourg."

Speaking of mines, Earl P. Fontaine, MoMM1c, praises the French help in combating them, "The Jerrys had laid a lot of these eggs and it was because of the loyal help of the French in Cherbourg that our forces were able to eliminate a lot of these mines. When the men of the flotilla made their first landing of American supplies in Cherbourg they found that the German demolition units and our

own bombing attack had done a real job of destruction of port facilities." But the Navy Beach Battalions and Seabees and the Army Engineers have gotten it back into shape fast. Those guys really go to town when they get started on something, reported August W. Griesinger, Jr., Cox.

Another Cox who had a good word for the French patriots was Harold F. Crocker, who said, "They saved a lot of ships and lives, whether it was our own particular necks or not."

Two typical members of the courageous little LCM flotilla were William "Red" Vananda, MoMM3c, and Edward Beasley, Cox., both from LCM 89 who made five trips ashore with the rest of their crew of five to unload the badly needed supplies brought ashore from the Liberty ships. On the sixth trip the Nazi 88's made a direct hit and shrapnel killed three of the crew. Disregarding the danger they finished unloading the craft, patched up 44 shrapnel holes in the bulkheads, wound string around holes in the fuel line and kept the craft afloat until the next day when they could pull alongside a flagship for a quick welding job.