



Ship's History U.S.S. LST 552



The LST 552 was built by the Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Company of Evansville, Indiana. The workmen barely had time to finish their work before the 552 was moving down the Indiana River towards New Orleans to be commissioned and outfitted. The commissioning date was the 19th of April 1944 and Lieutenant R. E. SANDVIGEN assumed command. Soon after the commissioning ceremonies she was outfitted, and the main deck loaded with the LCT 784.

The shakedown cruise was taken near Panama City, Florida between May 1, 1944 and May 12, 1944. The usual period of shakedown for LSTs lasts 3 weeks, but the 552 was put through in two. She left the builder's yard in record time, and now with this shortened shakedown cruise, it seemed as if the 552 was destined to play an important part in events that were soon to follow.

After the shakedown she returned to New Orleans for a final check-up on her hull and machinery. A U.S. Army Air Force Unit was embarked, and the tank deck loaded.

On 24 May 1944 she set sail for the Canal Zone for her maiden voyage. The trip was made by way of

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and she arrived at the Canal Zone on the 7th of June, disembarking the Air Force Unit on that date.

Before leaving Balboa on the 9th of June it was learned that the 552 would first proceed to San Diego, California, then set sail for Pearl Harbor. The main deck was further loaded with small boats, and on 1 July 1944 the 552 left the United States of America for overseas duty.

The LST 552 steamed into Pearl Harbor on 11 July 1944. There the Navy Personnel were disembarked, and all cargo unloaded, including the main deck LCT load.

On 25 July two Navy doctors and 12 Pharmacist's Mates reported aboard for duty, and the second deck on the port side was converted into a hospital section. It was now apparent what part the LST 552 was going to play in future operations against the enemy. How great the part and how soon it was going to be played remained a mystery for only a short while.

Pontoons were affixed to each side and on the 28th of July the 726 Amphibian Tractor Battalion (Company B, Company D, and Headquarters and Service Company) was embarked. It was then learned that the 552 would get its first taste of fire by being in the initial echelon for the invasion of the Palau Islands.

The LST 552 had two weeks of intensive training in the Hawaiian Islands for the coming operation. Finally on the 8th of August she set sail for the Solomon Islands to participate in final rehearsals for the invasion of the Palau Islands. She arrived at Florida Island, Solomon Islands on the 26th of August. After one week of further invasion practice she joined the convoy headed for the [enemy]-held Palau Islands.

The 552 arrived off Anguar Island, Palau Islands, on the 17th of September without mishap. The expected air attacks did not materialize. "H" Hour was set for 0800, and the LVTs on the 552 were to be in on the 5th wave. Everything went according to schedule and in 3 days the U.S. flag was raised on Anguar Island. The embarked surgical team aboard functioned smoothly and treated many casualties directly from the beach.

On the 20th of September the LVTs were reloaded, and the 552 joined a convoy proceeding to the western part of the Caroline Islands to occupy Ulithi Atoll. Upon arrival it was found that the [enemy] had departed and Ulithi Atoll was occupied without a shot being fired.

On the 25th of September 1944 the 552 weighed anchor and set sail for Humboldt Bay, Hollandia, New Guinea arriving there the 29th of September 1944. After two weeks of availability, during which necessary repairs were completed, the following units were embarked: 6th Army Headquarters; 69th Engineer Topographical Company; 1603d Map Depot Detachment; 1st 42nd Philippine Civil Affairs units. The 552 was to have the distinction of bringing the first unit of Philippine soldiers back to their homeland. On the 18th of October she weighed anchor and set sail for Leyte, Philippine Islands for her 3d and most important invasion of the war.

The ship arrived at San Pedro Bay, Leyte Island, Philippine Islands on the 24th of October, 1944 and from that day until she left Philippine Islands she was under constant air attack.

While proceeding into the beach on the 25th of October, 1944 to discharge her cargo, the ship was directly attacked by three "Betty" bombers. The attack was aggressive and the [enemy] pushed in close despite heavy anti-aircraft fire from the ship's guns. All three of the bombers were shot down, but one managed to unload its bombs and hit the 552. One bomb landed amidship and two straddled the ship. The fire that the bomb started was immediately brought under control and extinguished with the aid of a fire fighting boat. Five men of the ship's company were killed and twenty of the embarked troops lost their lives. There were 20 of the ship's personnel and 60 of the Army wounded by bomb fragments and strafing. The wounded were expeditiously and expertly treated by the embarked Naval Surgical team. The bomb hit occurred in the morning and all during the rest of the day while unloading was taking place the ship had to fight off numerous air attacks. The [enemy] continued their attacks on through the next day and on taking leave of Leyte on the evening of the 25th of October, the 552 helped the convoy shoot down one attacking [enemy] plane. Lieutenant R. E Sandvigen, the Commanding Officer, received the Silver Star medal for his fine leadership in repelling the numerous air attacks and unloading the ship while under heavy fire from the enemy.

The following named men are wearers of the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in this action:

- HAYMAKER, Charles E., Ensign, USNR
- ARENDASH, John A., F1c, USNR
- AUSTIN, Lawrence A., GM3c, USNR
- BARRETT, Donald Elton, BM2c, USNR
- BASINAIT, George Louis, S1c, USNR
- BURKLEY, William I. Jr., S2c, USNR
- BURROWS, Marvin C., S2c, USNR
- CAMPBELL, William J., S2c, USNR
- CLARK, William P., MoMM2c, USNR
- HANNON, John J., S1c, USNR
- JAHRLING, Warren J., SF2c, USNR
- KOMORNIK, Joseph C., GM3c, USNR
- LEWIS, Alan L., S1c, USNR
- LOGUE, Herman C., S2c, USNR
- MAYER, Victor W., MoMM2c, USN
- MESSINA, Stephen, MoMM3c, USNR
- MILLER, Kenneth D., SM3c, USNR
- SCAMMERHORN, William N., F1c, USNR
- SMITH, Harry L., Cox., USNR
- WILLEY, Walter E., S1c, USNR

On arrival at Humboldt Bay, New Guinea on the 1st of Novmeber, the damage caused by the bomb hit was assessed. On the 5th of November, the ship departed for Milne Bay, New Guinea for repairs, arriving there on the 10th of Novmember.

The ship's crew enjoyed three weeks of some much needed recreation while repairs were being completed. Finally, on the 1st of December, after a final check-up, the 552 departed for Oro Bay, New Guinea to load up for her 4th invasion, the landing at Lingayon Gulf, Luzon, P.I. Upon arrival at Oro Bay on the 2nd of Dexember, the following Army Units were embarked: Headquarters, 473; Quartermaster Battalion, Mobile; Headquarters, Philippine Civil Affairs Unit No. 19; and 775th Tank Battalion.

The ship departed from Oro Bay on the 22nd of December and arrived at Humboldt Bay, New Guinea on the 25th of December. Three months back mail was waiting for the ship upon arrival there, and the many packages and letters went a long ways towards making Christmas of '44 a merry one for the crew of the 552.

The ship weighed anchor on the 30th of December and joined the convoy headed for Luzon. As the Palau invasion, the expected air attacks did not materialize, and after an uneventful voyage, she arrived at Lingayon Gulf, Luzon Island, P.I. on the 11th of January 1945. Soon after arrival, she proceeded into the beach and began unloading her cargo of tanks and men. That night [an enemy] 8 inch gun in the hills over-looking the beachhead began shelling the beach. There were over 30 LSTs on the beach unloading, and none could retreat because of low tide. The shelling continued all night, but fortunately the [enemies'] aim was poor and no ships were hit. All cargo was completely unloaded by the 12th of January and the ship departed from Lingayon Gulf on the evening of that date.

Soon after arrival in San Pedro Bay on the 17th of January, the following Army Units were embarked for the invasion of Zambales Province, Luzon: Headquarters and Service Company, 339th Engineer Construction Battalion; Headquarters 112th Engineer's Group.

The 552 got underway on the 25th of January for invasion number five. Upon arrival off the Zambales Area, it was found that that section of Luzon was void of [the enemy]. What had started out to be an invasion in full force turned out to be just a dry run. All equipment and troops wer expeditiously unloaded and on the 30th of January, the ship left Luzon.

The 552 arrived back in San Pedro Bay, Leyte on the 3d of February and less than a week later loaded up again. This time the voyage was only going to be a supply run to Mindoro. On the 8th of February, the ship left Leyte with the following embarked units: Casual Detachment, 24th Infantry Division; 832nd Signal Photo Interp. Group; 24th Quartermaster Co.; and 24th Division MP Platoon. She arrived at Mindoro on the 11th of February

and unloaded in four hours. Due to the bow anchor windlass motor burning out, her departure from Mindoro was delayed until 14 February.

Arriving back in Leyte on the 17th of February, the ship had a few weeks for routine repairs and maintenance before embarking with the following Army units: 145th Field Artillery Battalion (Headquarters Battery, Service Battery, Medical Detachment, 419 Group Headquarters, A, B, and C Batteries). Soon after loading up rehearsals were begun for the invasion of Okinawa Jima. On the 25th of March the 552 weighed anchor for "D" Day landings at Okinawa, her sixth and final invasion.

The ship arrived at Okinawa on the 1st of April. As the 552 was carrying high priority cargo, she was one of the first LSTs to beach. Unloading was a slow and tedious process due to the 5000 rounds of artillery ammunition aboard. [Enemy] planes did not put in their appearance over the beachhead until the second day although ship's company were at their guns almost continuously because of numerous flash "reds". On the 2nd day of Okinawa the ship received an assist for [an enemy] plane that was shot down in the harbor. For the remainder of the nine day stay at Okinawa, the ship's gunners helped fight off several more enemy air attacks. Due to the many ships firing on these attacks, no claims were made for the planes downed. The ship was completely unloaded on the 9th of April and the 552 departed from Okinawa Jima on that date.

On the 17th of April, the ship reached Ulithi Atoll, returning to the group of islands she helped occupy on her second invasion. The usual period for routine repairs and maintenance was taken and on the 29th of April the 552 departed for Noumea, New Caledonia, making one stop at Manus, Admiralty Islands along the way. Upon arrival at Noumea on the 13th of May, the 539th Amphibious Tractor Battalion, Company B, was embarked for a roll up operation to the Philippines. The ship stood out from Noumea on the 2nd of June.

The trip up to Leyte, P.I. was made with one stop at Manus, Admiralty Islands and an overnight stay at Ulithi Atoll. The ship arrived at Leyte on 22 June and disembarked all Army vehicles and personnel. The hospital unit that functioned as a surgical team aboard the 552 was transferred to a more active duty station. The ship went into drydock for 12 hours, having just enough time to clean out her sea chests. The usual period for maintenance was taken and on the 12th of July 1945 the ship was underway from Leyte for Espiritu Santo to participate in another "roll up" operation.

The ship arrived in Tulagi Harbor, Florida Island, Solomon Islands on the 25th of July 1945. She left there on the next day and after bucking heavy seas the entire trip arrived in Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides on the 31st of July. The 539th C. B. M. U. was embarked and the 552 weighed anchor for the Russell Islands on the 5th of August. Arriving in the Russell Islands on the 8th of August, pontoons were affixed to her sides. She departed from the Russells on the 13th of August for Okinawa Jima. The first stop on the way up was Eniwetok to undergo some necessary repairs. The war with Japan ended while the 552 was enroute, and an appropriate celebration was held by firing all of the ships guns. Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall Islands was reached on the 19th of August. There the pontoons were launched and repairs completed. She departed Eniwetok on the 3d of September and after a short stop at Ulithi Atoll, proceeded to Okinawa Jima, arriving there on the 23d of September. While at Ulithi Lieutenant Robert Jack MC KENNA, USNR assumed command of the 552 relieving Captain SANDVIGEN, USNR on the 16th of September.

All vehicles and personnel were disembarked by the 6th of October. On the 8th of October the 552 put to sea in a typhoon and the ship experienced heavy seas and winds up to 85 knots. Returning to Okinawa on the 11th of October the ship loaded up with mail, and on the 16th of October departed for Leyte, P.I.

She arrived at Leyte on the 21 October, and after unloading the mail, received orders to return to the U.S. of America for further disposition. At this writing on the 25th of October 1945, the 552 looks back on an impressive record: participation in 6 invasions, during which she received credit for shooting down 3 [enemy] bombers and for two assists; a total distance of 49000 miles traveled; transportation of over 3000 troops and 10 crossings of the equator. The 552 made a large contribution to the Pacific war and now with orders to return to the United States of America, no more appropriate award could have been given her and her crew for their accomplishments.