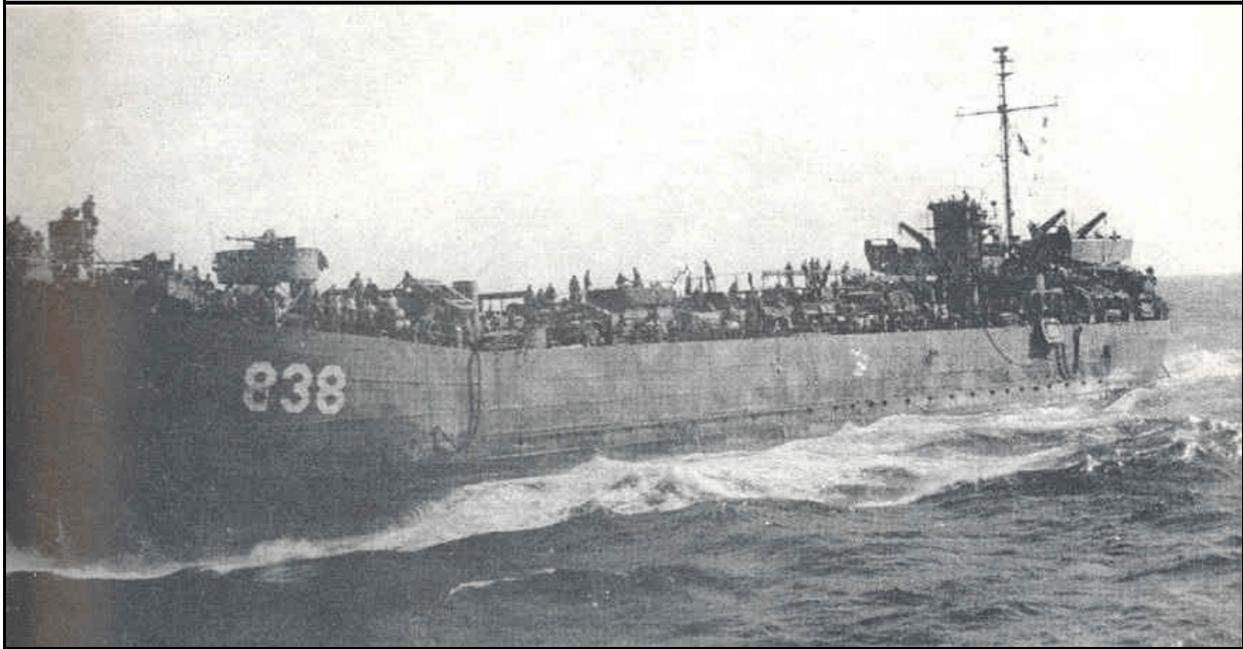


Helping the Survivors of LST-884

by Gerald B. Ingraham

130th Naval Construction Battalion

SC1c, USN, 1943-1946



LST-838 enroute from Saipan to Okinawa - March 1945

On April 1, 1945, LST-838 and the convoy bringing the 130th Naval Construction Battalion and the 2nd Marine Division arrived off the southeast coast of Okinawa. The 2nd Marine Division was assigned to conduct a feint landing operation on the Minatoga beaches 40 miles southeast of the actual landing beaches on the western coast.

The feint was on the extreme southeastern coast of the island. Weeks later, when this southeastern coast had been taken by the Army's 7th Infantry Division, the Battalion learned that the Jap had been best prepared on that strip of coastline, had dozens of interconnected caves and tunnels equipped with guns on railway tracks ready to cut our assault to ribbons. American strategy had pinned this defense power down, while poorly defended Yontan and Kadena airstrips on the western coast fell quickly under our main assault. The Battalion Cruise Book discusses the feint as follows.

We had lots of company standing off Okinawa on Easter morning. Hundreds of ships; all over the sea, friendly vessels. Reefs encircled the entire island with few breaks; this coastline presented fewer natural obstacles.

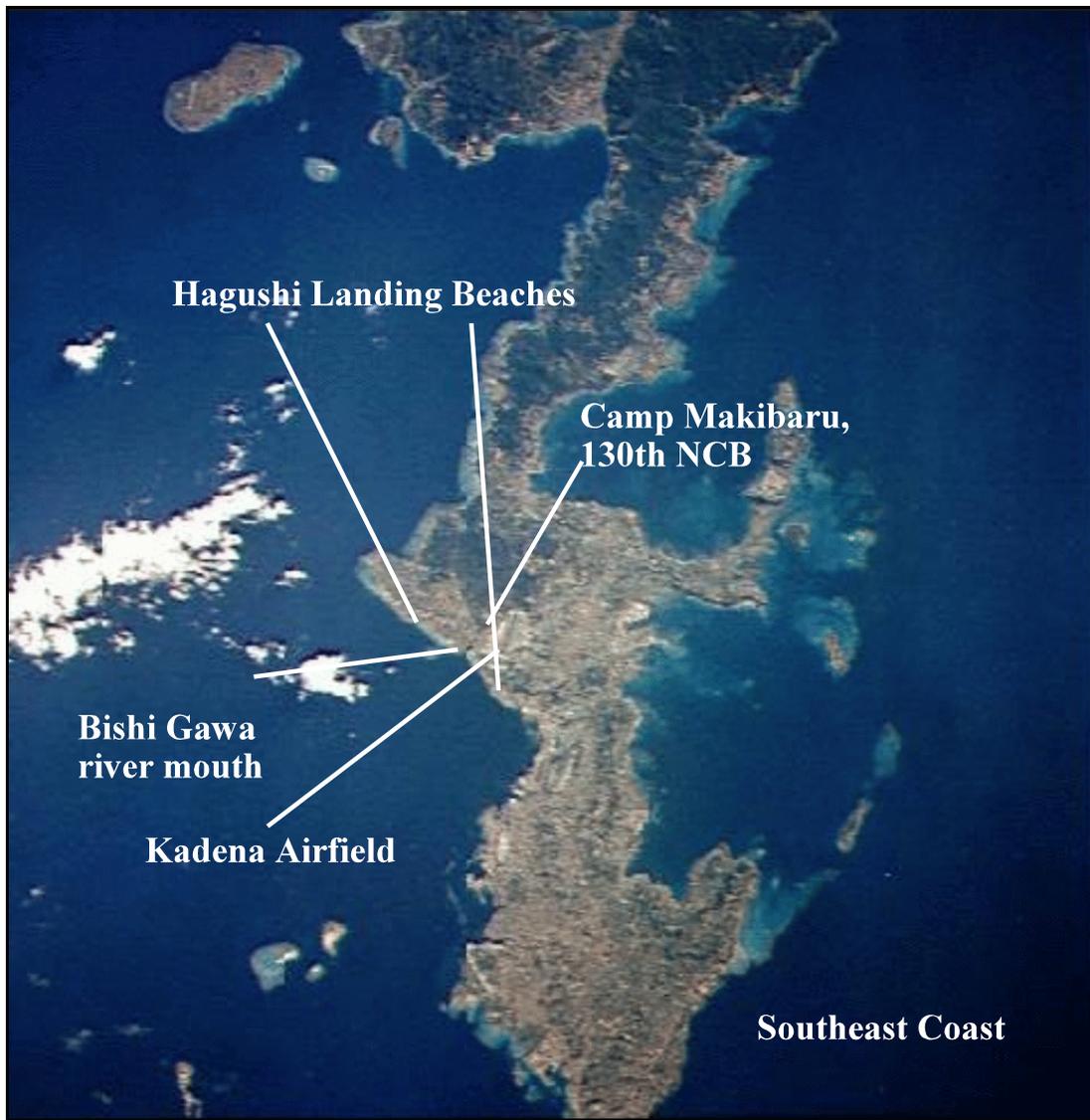


Photo of Okinawa from Space Shuttle Challenger (NASA photo)

Long before daybreak action commenced. The fleet laid off-shore pounding beach emplacements with its big guns; cruisers and battlewagons out near the transports, destroyers like bulldogs barking their guns under the nose of Jap shore batteries. Like ducks on a pond, we floated in the middle with about fifty other LSTs. Rocket boats slid up and down the coast, closer in even than the destroyers, pouring fire into the beaches.

Seven waves of landing craft were sent toward the beaches but turned back at a predesignated time. After hoisting the craft aboard their mother ships and re-embarking the troops, we sailed away to the northeast for the night to retire and return the following day for a repeat feint landing.

During these demonstrations, I watched in wide eyed wonder with mouth agape as this seemed to reduce the pressure on the ear drums. The explosion of shells landing in the distance and those landing nearby had the air currents in continual turmoil causing one's exposed flesh to ripple. The pulse pounded. Adrenalin accelerated. I felt compelled to become a part of the turmoil and energy pulsating about me, but there was nothing to do but witness. Witnessing this event made one conscious of his true insignificance. It also made one aware of the awesome power man could produce.

After this second demonstration, we steamed between 50 and 150 miles southeast of Okinawa in our retirement area. We were ordered to return for our landing on the western beaches on the morning of April 11th, arriving the Hagushi beaches about noon on April 12th. During retirement, the ships steamed on various courses and speeds, alternating between the base course and a zig zagging course. Various drills (fire drills, abandon ship drills, etc.) were conducted in preparation for the return to Okinawa. In addition, some of the ships in the fleet were attacked by Kamikaze planes.

The Battalion Cruise Book reports one of the first Kamikaze strikes in the Okinawa Campaign, one which was too close for comfort to LST-838.

It was still quite dark when we had our first brush with the same Jap Kamikaze (suicide) planes which we were later to know so well. Amid the noise of spasmodic booming of the Navy's big guns, suddenly we heard the warning come over the speakers, 'Enemy aircraft approaching.' Straining eyes and ears, intensely alert with alarm, most of us saw nothing until 20s and 40s opened up, throwing orange and red spurts across a narrow strip of water.

Some saw that bat-shaped splurge of denser blackness hurtle into the dark convoy, but, if the guns which opened up found their mark, they were too late. That Jap pilot dove to meet Honorable Ancestors via two bulkheads of the LST in the lane next to us [LST-884]. Hit just above the water line, gasoline from the Kamikaze spewing flame over decks, the LST lit up the dawn. We stood by to pick up survivors as "Abandon ship" became the order aboard the ill-fated vessel.

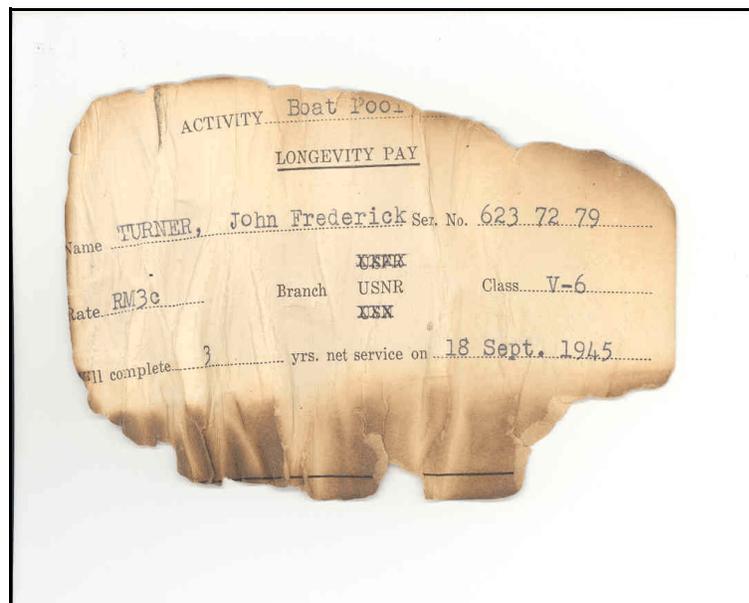
Everything was unreal to the spectator; only the man in the water appreciated and felt the crisis. Later, we began to feel and appreciate vicariously the experience of burning Marines caught in a flaming compartment, or of one sailor who, both arms shot off, leaped from

the burning ship to discover that he needed arms to stay afloat. Some we took aboard were horribly burned.

Several ships including our LST moved in to rescue the survivors. We recovered 79 men, some of whom were horribly burned. I helped take some of the casualties on-board and into the deckhouse galley of LST-838. We laid them on the tables and stove tops where only a short time before food had been prepared. The smell of burned human flesh and the exclamations of the men questioning if they were going to die was indeed overpowering to all of us. Two of our cooks were so psychologically affected as to be unable to work in the galley for several days thereafter. Even I was emotionally drawn out by this suffering. When one of the casualties peed on himself, I uncontrollably wet my own pants.

But, I did what I could to try and relieve their suffering. My fellow shipmates were impressed with my cool demeanor - unknowing of my own hidden trauma - and first aid knowledge in helping those survivors in the galley. My pre-war civilian work at Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver, Colorado proved of value. It now seems an act of Fate, because at Fitzsimons I helped care for a young patient who, too, was horribly burned and who insisted that I be the one to care for him and change his bandages which was very painful for him.

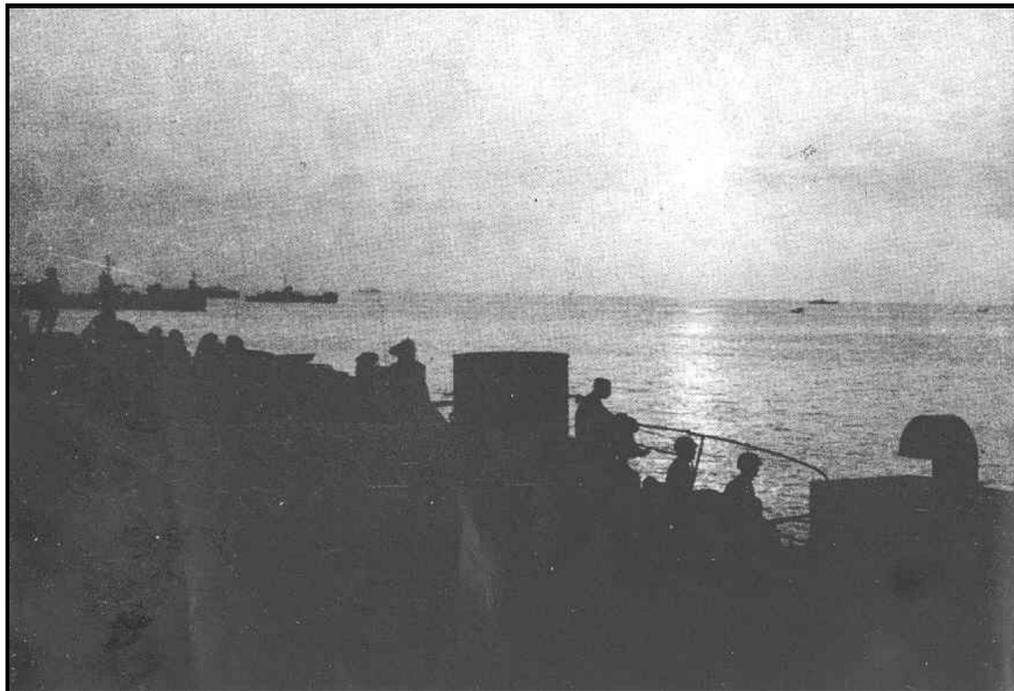
I have a half burned personnel record (shown below) that was blown by the heat and flames onto our ship. I kept it for who knows what reason. I often thought of writing the Navy Department to find out if this sailor was a survivor or not. Somehow or other, as time has passed, doing it now seems like it would be an act of idle curiosity. It is best to let the memories lay undisturbed.



Burnt paper from LST-884 (my archives)



**Battleship Maryland firing on southeast coast of Okinawa during feint - April 1-2, 1945
(National Archives photo)**



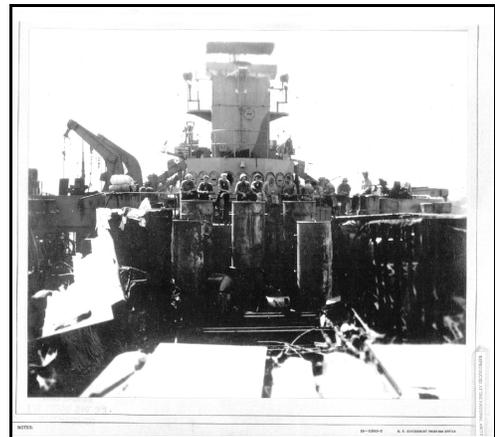
**View of ships in Task Force 58 from LST-838
on the southeast coast contemplating invasion (Battalion Cruise Book)**



LST-884 following abandonment of crew



**LST Galley - similar to that on LST-838
The injured sailors were placed on the stove
and table tops**



**Damaged LST-884 on southeast
coast of Okinawa - April 1, 1945
(National Archives photo)
We recovered 79 survivors from
this LST; 24 sailors and Marines
were killed**