

LST 884

by James Clinton Bolton
Boatswain's Mate First Class, USCGR
514 E. 78th St., New York City
A Coast Guard correspondent

Note: The following account of the action of the CG LST 884 is composed from the action report written by its Commanding Officer plus interviews with numerous survivors.

Aboard a Coast Guard LST 887 at Anchor, Ulithi, April 28, 1945: One of the most stirring naval incidents of the Okinawa campaign is the story of the Coast Guard manned LST 884. In a new chapter of dramatic Coast Guard action the crew of the 884 fought a Japanese air attack; was crashed by a Nip suicide plane; abandoned ship to return shotly after to fight and put out fires and finally, with a skeleton crew, nursed the lifeless hull of the landing ship on a 1200-mile, 9-day journey to this advance base. With gutted living quarters, a ravaged galley, emergency rations of food and water and no power for lights or propulsion, the battered 884 limped into this anchorage the other day . . . a floating symbol of the great tradition of the nation's oldest wartime service.

LST 884 was one of a group of invasion vessels selected to make a diversionary faint on the southern beaches of Okinawa. The faint, an actual invasion operation, was designed to cover other and more extensive landing operations at various beaches on the western side of the big Japanese island. With a force of Marines and a cargo that included ammunition as well as amphibious combat vehicles the 884 made the run from Saipan to the assault area without incident.

At four in the morning on Love Day (April 1, 1945) the Marines were alerted and all hands stood by to carry out the assault schedule. At 5:21, Battle Station was ordered, and shortly thereafter enemy aircraft were reported in the vicinity.

Almost at once three Jap planes were sighted by the gun crews of the 884 and along with the other ships in the convoy, they opened fire on the Nips. Two of the planes were shot down without damage to shipping. The third, making a suicide attempt, hit the 884. Although the pilot was obviously dead, the plane had sufficient way on it to go into a shallow dive, smashing into the Coast Guard ship just above the waterline and just aft of the forward part of the superstructure.

The plane, in flames when it hit, drove into the 884 with a terrific impact that carried it through a sleeping compartment, thrusting its forward portion through a second bulkhead and on down through the shipfitter's shop to eventually halt on the tank deck.

As repair parties raced to the scene fire broke out in the main engine room which was brought under control in a short time. But the crash had fired the tank deck and also the ammunition cargo which was carried.

As this explosive load started to detonate the situation was made doubly perilous by fire which swept the amphibious tractors on the tank deck which were ready for debarkation. Clouds of yellow acrid smoke increased the hazards of fire, buckling bulkheads, from explosions and one of the two bombs carried by the suicide plane was wedged in the engine room escape hatch and burning. The black gang did not know until later that this was potential