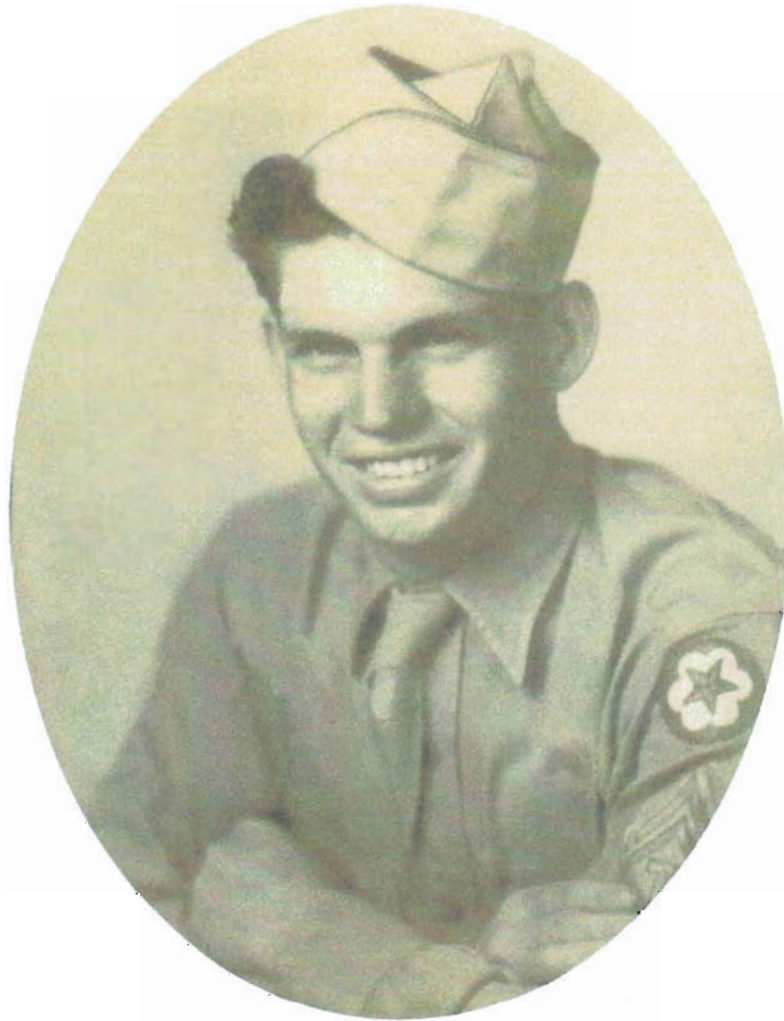


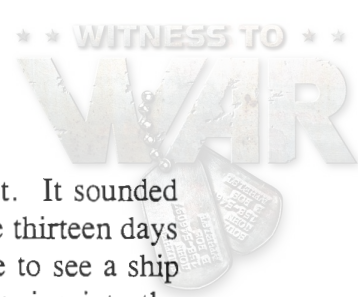


CECIL'S STORY

Cecil Herman Robinson

JULY 20, 1924 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1998



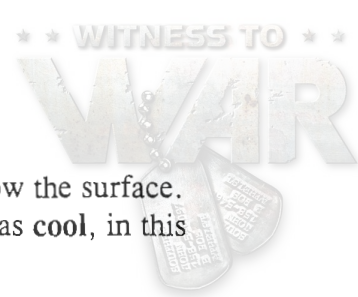


So when the day came for the big ride, we were all looking forward to it. It sounded exciting. Although we would soon loose all excitement. During the entire thirteen days at sea on this voyage, we would see no land, sometimes we would be able to see a ship at a great distance. I believe we traveled through the **Arafura Sea**, then going into the **Ceram Sea** before reaching the **Pacific Ocean**, and then **Leyte Gulf**. One of the things that we had thought very little about, and which we would soon find very embarrassing, was the toilet facilities. The only thing we had was a **bucket** with a rope tied to it. I had grown up in the country where we had an out-house toilet, and we had gone through the camp tour in New Guinea with a more-or-less **out house**, but this was much worse. Anywhere you could go with your bucket, you were still in view of any of the other three men if they cared to look. As we ate very little on the trip, we didn't have to use the bucket all that much. I believe we all tried to condition ourselves to use this bucket after dark as much as possible. Too bad we did not think of cutting some bushes and throw them aboard before leaving shore in New Guinea.

We had traveled for several days, the weather had been very good, no rough water, yet I had been able to get sea sick already. We were traveling about five knots pr. hour, allowing the boat to roll over the swells with both vertical and horizontal motion. I also think being right near these swells, and watching them, caused a lot of the sea sickness. Lee D. Bryant stayed inside the wheel house and lay down most of his time, he had not been sea sick at all. Joe McAleer and Warren Breneman sat on the fan tail and played cards much of their time. Most of the time I had been sick, though I had enjoyed sitting on the fan tail watching the water and playing cards with Joe and Warren. I remember we had seen one or two large sea turtles, they were usually quiet far from the boat. If our path brought us close to them, they would drop below the surface immediately. We were beginning to get bored, had seen no land, no other boat or ship.

Warren Breneman had always demonstrated stability, a great sense of judgment and a high degree of knowledge. Yet he overrode these traits to enjoy a little comfort. I do not remember if it was his idea or mine, though on this day the sea was very calm, the water clear and the sun boiling hot. I guess with too many days with nothing to do and nothing to read, we had gotten tired of playing cards and talking. Here we sat, looking at the clear blue water and thinking how nice it would be swimming in it. We knew that if we fell in we could not swim fast enough to catch up with the boat, and without a radio or signal lights, we would have no way to report such an accident. And if we did cut the boat free to use it in recovering someone, we would be in extreme trouble.

So one of us decided to tie a line around our waist and tie the other end of the line to the boat. We did not have to worry about the screw underneath the stern of the boat cutting us up because it was not turning, due to our boat being towed. We could either jump in from the stern of the boat or just let ourselves into the water slowly, then let ourselves be carried back to the end of the line. With the boat traveling about five knots we did not have to stroke our arms or legs to stay at the surface. All we had to do was hold our arms out in front of us. The palms of our hands going through the water would steer us



to the left or right, or we could keep our body on the surface, or dive below the surface. This was turning out to be relaxing and fun. (We would have accepted it as **cool**, in this day and time).

One day (maybe the second day), Warren was out in the water, and had let himself go back to the end of the line, where he was relaxing while the line would drag him along without any effort. The end of the line which was tied around his waist had been left long, the thin strings of the line had become untwisted and had wrapped around his leg. We did not see or know this and neither did he know what had happened until he felt the thing around his leg. All of a sudden when he felt this mass of strings around his leg and foot, he began to shout, "pull me in, pull me in, something has got my leg!" We jumped up and could see that he was losing no time in pulling himself in with both hands as fast as he could. We grabbed the line and started to assist him in getting to the boat as fast as possible. As soon as he started climbing aboard we could all see that it was the line which had become unraveled and was wrapped around his ankle. I think this told us something, making us realize how many things could have happened, and with a much worse ending. We did not use the line again to go swimming.

A few days after Breneman's experience with the line, we would all see something in the water, of what appeared to be a **sea-serpent**. I do not remember what time of day it was, it was plenty light, not late in the afternoon, or real early in the morning. I remember someone saying, "look out there!" He was looking and pointing over the port side, about mid point of the boat. All four of us, Lee D. Bryant, Joe McAleer, Warren Breneman and myself would see this object moving through the water. The body of the object we were looking at appeared to be of uniform size, long and round, maybe around two to three feet in circumference and about 50 to 60 foot long. I do not remember seeing the head of the object, which looked like a large snake going through the water. At this time I do not remember the color of the object. I do not believe it was a bright color, or a solid color. We even mentioned grabbing our rifle and shooting at this thing. We had second thoughts about this. I believe we mentioned something like, "suppose it comes at the boat." We probably realized what a small boat we were on. The best I remember, we could see lengths of it out on the surface of the water, and portions of it between these visual parts as if they were hidden from view by the waves of water. It resembled a large snake swimming in the ocean, and due to the waves caused by moderate wind, some parts of it would be submerged in these waves of water. None of the four of us talked of this much afterwards, mainly due to the prospect of being ridiculed.

About one year ago, 1997, I had the opportunity to be in Mobile, AL, where Joe McAleer and Warren Breneman still live. I called and talked to both of them. I asked them again, "did we see the object of which we believed to be a **sea-serpent**"? They both confirmed again that they still remember, and I am not dreaming. I guess it will continue to remain an **unsolved mystery**. Recently, 1998, I have read a book, **IN THE WAKE OF THE SEA-SERPENT**, by Bernard Heuvelmans. There are more than five



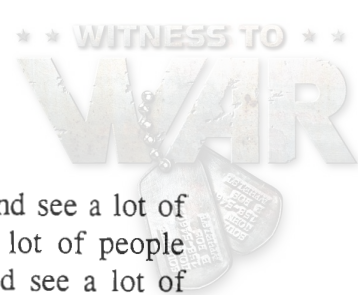
hundred documented sightings, covering many places in the world on sea-serpents. The ones that I have read about, in this book, do not describe a serpent meeting the description of the sighting I remember. Yet my sighting has been fifty-two years ago, and I made no written description of this.

This invasion on Leyte was to be the strongest in the history of the world, with 157 combat ships and 581 other vessels of the Seventh Fleet protected by 106 warships of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet. There were four divisions of the Sixth Army, with two more divisions of reserves, garrison and logistical troops. There were 160,000 men to be landed. This invasion would take place about 20 Oct. 1944, although we would not arrive until about 23 Oct. Behind this armada of seven hundred ships would be the four of us on one of the 45 foot tug boats belonging to the 350th Boat Company of the Transportation Corps. This would make a total of more than 200,000 U. S. troops heading for Leyte. To the best of my memory, we had about four to five of these 45 foot tug boats being towed, the same as we were, although we never saw any of them from the time we left Hollandia, until we arrived in Leyte Gulf. (I would like to add that during the early part of the war, the U.S. Coast Guard was manning a lot of the small boats during invasion landings.)

As we came into Leyte Gulf, we would have a visitor, which would be a **Japanese plane**. I believe this was the first thing I could remember seeing, other than the large barges ahead of us in our tow, and the sea-going Navy tugboat. We were sitting on the fantail of the boat of where we had been most of this trip. We heard and looked up to see an airplane, single engine, very low and coming from behind us. We had plenty of time to look it over, two or more of us were trying to name the plane (we had sat through training lessons back in California to identify airplanes when shown silhouettes of different kinds). I remember calling it one of the U.S. fighter planes, I think someone else called it something else. As it passed right over our boat, we could then see the **rising sun** underneath each wing. It did not fire on us, or the barges ahead, nor did it drop any bombs. We would then wonder why it flew so low, yet leave without any gunfire. I guess it was their way of saying, "come on in and join the party".

As we continued on into the Leyte Gulf we would begin to see many ships anchored, with many of them having heavy damage. From this day on we would see plenty of Japanese airplanes and they would not be flying over us to welcome us in. We would spend Thanksgiving and Christmas here in the Leyte Gulf, 1944.

On the 20th of October, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur had returned to Leyte Island, the town of Tacloban was seized, and this campaign would last about two months. **It would cost the lives of 11,217 Americans, and 113,231 Japanese.** No one in my Company would be wounded, or killed during this entire campaign. We were in the right places at the right times. We would have plenty of work to do for the next two months.

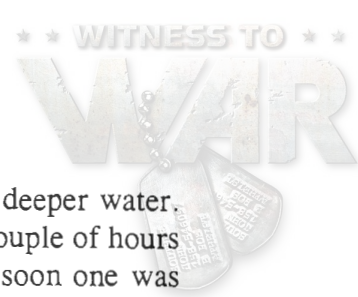


About one week after we arrived at Leyte, we would be near the shore and see a lot of activity and would notice a flag-ship anchored, or standing by with a lot of people looking in the direction where this activity was taking place. We would see a lot of camera people with this group. We would soon see that it contained many high ranking army officers. We could tell that a small landing craft had come nearly to shore and was letting the ramp down for the officers to walk ashore. We would soon be told that we were watching a repeated episode of General Douglas MacArthur returning to the Philippines. This was the first time that I had actually seen the General. I would see him again on his flagship in the **Lingayen Gulf**.

I do not remember whether we got a short-wave radio after reaching Leyte, or whether it just started picking up a station broadcasting in Japanese. This station would play American music, there was also a lady broadcasting in perfect English, referred to as **The Tokyo Rose**. We would pick up this station each night and listen to it. She would spread Japanese propaganda by telling us how foolish we were to be there fighting in these jungles, getting killed, or would be dead soon, while our wives or sweethearts were back home going out and having fun with all the 4F men. She would then put a record on with songs that would make a **grown man cry**. This was the only entertainment we had. She would also tell us such-and-such was going to happen, she would even tell us where some things would be bombed tonight and it would usually happen. For instance, one night we tied up beside a large 100 ton crane, the only barge-type 100 ton crane in the South Pacific. We were going to spend the night there. I do not remember why we had made this choice, it may have been due to some convenience the crane had and we did not have. We were listening to the Tokyo Rose station when she announced that "the large floating crane docked at a certain place would be bombed this night". We realized that she knew exactly where it was, and we were sitting there.

We decided it may or it may not happen, but why take the chance. We removed the bow and stern lines from the crane and pulled out into the bay where no other ships were anchored. We also decided not to use any lights for the night. We had previously been allowed to run a generator, which supplied a small amount of lighting. We had gone to bed when we heard sirens and horns blowing, warning that enemy planes had been spotted. It wasn't long before we would hear the planes' engines, we would also see search lights racing through the sky, trying to pick up sight of the planes. Tracer bullets were streaming through the sky from our artillery units and also from ship guns. Small bombs were coming down, we had jumped out of our bunks and were going down into the engine room. I remember Robert Pannell had put his mattress on top of him, I believe he remained on deck. When it was all over there was wet sand all over our bunks and the deck. The 100 ton crane had taken a couple of hits, although the bombs had only penetrated the top deck, without serious damage. We would find out the Japanese were so low on war materials, they were now dropping personnel bombs.

Another night we were anchored out in the bay, this night we had a small light burning, using the auxiliary generator. We were playing cards, and had anchored inland near the

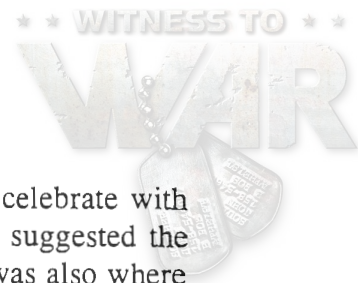


shore and we had noticed quiet a few larger navy boats anchored out into deeper water. They also had lights burning. We had been playing cards for probably a couple of hours when we noticed the other boats getting closer and closer to us. Pretty soon one was slowly coming nearer and nearer to our boat. I was still on the same boat with Lee D. Bryant. He stopped playing cards and began to watch the boat that was approaching our boat. It was coming so near we began to think it might hit our boat. Lee began to yell at the boat, trying to alert someone, telling them that they “were going to run aground”! We thought the water was shallow because we had anchored, and our anchor line was not very long. We were all now standing on the deck and wondering what was going on? Finally Bryant went to the bow of the boat and started to pull on the anchor line to check it. The anchor line was pointing straight down. By this time the other boats were so far from us, we could hardly see their lights. We now realized that we were the ones who were drifting. As a matter of fact we were drifting so far out into the bay we had passed by the other boats or ships, of which we thought were going further from shore. We were extremely lucky this night, if we would have gone to bed, where would we have been the next morning? We would have probably been out in the ocean, and completely lost, or we could have washed up to enemy-held shore? This would stay with us to remind us how important it was to check our anchorage often and to be sure that someone was on watch, especially at night and when at anchor.

I would later learn that my friend, Robert Pannell, who was on another tow and on another tug boat like the one we were on, would have their towline break as they were entering Leyte Gulf. It was told that the towline between the last barge and their tug boat broke as they were entering the Leyte Gulf area. They had quiet a time getting the remainder of the line cut so it would not get into their propeller screw. I do not remember other problems they encountered due to this. I do remember them saying, “it was a good thing that it happened during daylight.”

We would stay very busy here, moving barges, moving a floating crane from ship to ship and a lot of bringing barges from the entrance of the gulf back through a narrow channel to locations where they could be unloaded. I remember many times we would be towing one or two barges in this narrow channel, when a PT boat would come wide open, either meeting us or passing us. We would try to flag it down to a slower speed, due to the wake from these boats causing such damaging waves as they passed by. When the wake would hit our boat and the barge, the towlines would usually break. Then we would have a terrible time trying to reach the barge before it would go into shallow water and get grounded. We got to the point where we hated to see a PT boat.

Christmas was coming up soon. We found out that we would be eating turkey. The way we found out was that we were sent out to move a barge, the barge turned out to be a floating reefer full of frozen turkeys. When we finished moving the reefer, the person in charge asked us how many people there was in our Company? We told him and he gave us a large crate of frozen turkeys. I don't remember where the cooks kept the frozen turkey until Christmas, though I remember having turkey every day during



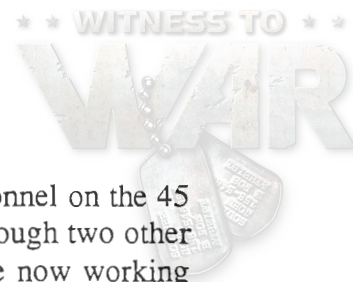
Christmas. I think it lasted about three days. We were also wanting to celebrate with a bottle of whisky. We asked other GIs where we might buy one, they suggested the Red Cross building in Tacloban (this was a town inland a few miles). It was also where General MacArthur's Headquarters was then located. One of my friends and myself got the day off and hitched a ride on one of the cargo trucks which was constantly carrying supplies in from off-loading ships. We located the Red Cross Building, we waited around until one of the nurses was alone and told her what we were looking for. She said they had no whisky but she would sell a quart of 100% alcohol for twenty dollars. She told us what we could mix with it. It may have been cool aid. I do remember us buying it. I would always remember how the Red Cross had made money on the side though. I am not sure what else they did.

I will tell this story of an incident which happened soon after we arrived at Leyte. I was not living in camp at the time, I was living on the tug boat, though we would come to the camp to eat, read the bulletin board and get our mail. The Commanding Officer decided to break our camp up, putting one-half of the people on a **small island**, which was closer to the people working and living on the boats. He sent a detail of men to the island to start setting up the camp, he had one of our boats take them there and drop them off. They had been told that a boat would pick them up that afternoon. At the end of the day they waited, but no boat showed up. The person who took them there got busy with another job. **No one else had been told to pick them up.** The men on the detail had no way to communicate back with anyone.

After dark one or two Japanese airplanes came over this island to drop some Japanese paratroopers. The U. S. Artillery picked them up by search lights which were searching the sky from every direction. Artillery bullets and tracers were streaking through the sky also. The men we had sent on the detail could see the search lights coming lower and lower as well as the bullets whizzing over their heads. They jerked their steel helmets off their heads and began to use them to dig fox holes in the sand. I don't remember the outcome of the paratroopers but it seems that they were killed before landing. As soon as this episode was over, someone started asking "where so and so was", and it was soon discovered that they had not been picked up. One of the boats was dispatched immediately to pick them up. This was just one instance of how easy it is to goof-up. These men later had quite a story to tell.

When the **Leyte Invasion** was over it had involved 282 Warships. The Americans had lost one light carrier, two escort carriers, and three destroyers. The U. S. had sank four Japanese carriers, three battleships, six heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers. We would continue to be under attack while there, mostly from the dropping of personnel bombs after dark. Tokyo Rose was still playing American music and spreading propaganda until we left for Luzon.

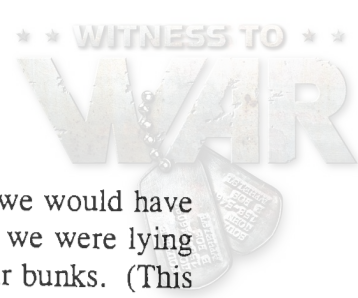
We were given orders again to prepare for another trip to an unknown destination, though we had already heard rumors that it would be in the northern part of the



Philippines. During the stay in Leyte Gulf we had some changes in personnel on the 45 foot tow boats. I was still working on the boat with Lee D. Bryant, although two other people were now on the boat. Joe McAleer and Warren Breneman were now working on another boat. All the cans of dehydrated food, lard, the two burner stove, and the fresh water tank were filled. We also got hold of a gallon can of fruit cocktail. One soldier (I cannot remember his full name), I believe his last name was **Kershner**, was older than most of the other soldiers and had been a professional baseball player. The other soldier was a young fellow, like me, he was a very likeable person and a pleasant person to be with (and I am sorry to say I can't remember his name). **Corporal Willie Little** had also been assigned to our boat recently. Willie had built us a portable toilet, which would hang from the side railing. It was made from a wide board, with a hole cut into the end of the board the same size as a regular toilet seat. When mounted onto the side railing it would put the person sitting on it about eighteen inches off the side rail and high enough off the water that ones' feet would not touch the water. He had also made it so that it would hook under the side rail when placed on correctly. To remove it, one would have to raise up the outer end of the board. It could then be lifted off the side rail and placed back on deck. A person would not have any privacy, but it looked better than a bucket.

This trip would be far more worse than the previous trip. While at Leyte Gulf, Sgt. Bryant had picked up a **monkey** somewhere on the island and he brought it with us. This trip would take us through the **Sula Sea**, the **Mindora Straights** and into the **Lingayen Gulf**. Things went pretty well the first day, we had used the little stove of which one would practically have to pump on it constantly to keep it burning well enough to boil the water and dry food mixture. We opened a can of the fruit cocktail for dessert. One or two of us had used the makeshift toilet. That was alright because there was no cleaning up later. I believe it was the second day when the weather turned windy and the swells started getting larger and larger. Someone had used the portable toilet and failed to remove it from the side rail. Some of us were lying down in our bunks. All of a sudden someone yelled, "the toilet is floating away!" It was probably fifty feet from the boat, riding high on a large swell. The swell would carry it up and down, each time carrying it further and further away. All we could do was stand there and wave goodbye to it. From that day forward we would have to go back to the bucket as we had used on the trip from New Guinea to Leyte. This was worse than watching your Sunday hat floating away.

The weather would continue to get more rough each day and night. I believe it was the third or maybe the fourth day when water started coming over the bow and side railings each time a swell would catch the boat right. I was getting sicker and sicker each day. I remember one swell so large it flooded the deck. The boat leaned so much the stove was swept off the mounting we had put it on and was carried right off the fantail. Without the stove there was only one thing left to eat. The remaining gallon can of **fruit cocktail** had been carried below deck, thank God it was still there.

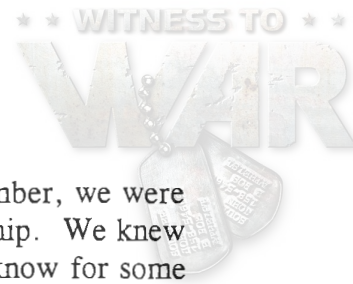


The stormy weather would get worse and worse. For the next five days we would have only the one can of fruit cocktail left to eat from. I remember one night we were lying in our bunk with our arms locked around one of the posts, right next to our bunks. (This post was part of the engine house structure, it extended on up vertical, beside our bunks to support the open roof). There was a large mask pole right behind the wheel house which carried our Company Flag and the U. S. Flag. Sgt. Bryant lay and slept in the wheel house. His bunk was cross-ways, so when the boat would lay over on its side, he would be nearly standing up, or nearly standing on his head according to which way he lay, or which way the boat was leaning to. This night being exceptionally bad, the boat had rolled so far over that I would see the flag pole looking as though it was going to touch the water. As soon as it straightened up and stayed upright a minute or two, Sgt. Bryant opened the boat and said, "I was standing upright on my feet during the last one"! By now we were not lying down any more, we were sitting up with our legs and arms wrapped around these posts. **I think this was the most frightening night I would spend aboard the boat.**

I remember it was the next morning when we noticed how low the bow was running. We had noticed it by the boat wanting to go from side to side and the line was much closer to the water, where it left the bow to enter the water. I think it was Sgt. Bryant who climbed down the ladder going down into the engine room. He came back up and said the forward hole was full of water and the engine room was nearly as bad. At that time I was so sick I could hardly walk. Sgt. Kershner went down to look also. They decided to start the engine up so the bilge pump could pump the water out. They did this and were able to pump the engine room dry, but the water in the forward hole was getting deeper, with no way for it to enter the engine room except probably a leak, between the forward hole and the engine room. It was decided that a hole between the forward hole and the engine room would have to be made providing more water from the forward hole to enter the engine room, so it could be pumped out, using the engine room bilge pump. I had tried to go down with them, though when I entered the engine room with diesel fuel and oil sloshing around, the smell from this made me even more sick. I told them I was too sick, and could not help.

It was Sgt. Kershner who came up, broke the glass entrance to the emergency fire kit and took the fire ax into the engine room. He started hacking a hole through the bulkhead, which separated the forward hole from the engine room. The more he cut the faster the water flowed from the forward hole to the engine room. We were now running the engine to operate the bilge pump. As we could see the bow of the boat slowly rising higher out of the water, and the forward hole water level coming down we began to smile again. **Sgt. Kershner had performed a great job! He probably saved our lives!** We would have to run this pump for a couple of hours each day to evacuate what water entered the bottom due to this leak. We were now worried that the leak could get worse and that we might not have enough fuel to last through the trip.

When reading the above paragraph, you may not see the reason why we were so



frightened while having the problems mentioned above. Although remember, we were in the middle of the ocean with no way of communicating with another ship. We knew the Navy sea-going tug which was pulling our tow probably would not know for some time if something went wrong. Any number of us could have fell off, or even if the boat sank and with the weather so rough the Navy tug probably would not have known for some time. All these things were running through our heads and we felt like the odds were stacked against us.

For two or three nights an escort ship would come up behind our boat (we were not allowed to have any lights on at night). Neither would the escort ship, which was getting very close to us. He would get so close to us that we were afraid he would not see us and run over us. Sgt. Bryant would sit on the fan tail and would holler as loud as he could, "get back you damn fool!" He would strike matches and wave at them, trying to wave the ship back. I know they could not hear him and probably did not see him either. We had no way of communicating with this ship.

One night before we got to **Luzon** a big **Navy battle** took place, the ships were probably twenty-five miles or more from us. The sky was completely lit up, all we could hear were large guns, the shells were lighting the sky as they were streaking in every direction. We could have read a book with all the light from the large projectiles going through the sky. Then about two days later, as we were nearing the Lingayon Gulf, we were now seeing a lot of ships in the distance. We would see about a half dozen **Japanese Kamikaze planes** coming in from the sky. We would then hear the guns from many ships firing at them. The Japanese pilots were trying to dive their planes into the ships. One was coming for the gasoline barges ahead of us. All the planes but one were hit, probably killing the pilots before they could control their planes long enough to hit their targets. The one plane took off low, nearly skimming the water. We could see that he probably got away. We just knew that many more would come back for the kill. Although after this plane left we would see no more until we arrived in Lingayon Gulf. We had eaten so little and what I had eaten I had thrown up. I remember being so weak and sick that they would send me to the hospital. This would be our last and final invasion.