

World War II History of LST-991 "The Lady Bug"
(from the ship's own newspaper)
"The Ramp News", 25 December 1945

The "991" was built by the Charleston Navy Yard, Boston, Mass. during the latter part of 1943 and the early part of 1944. She was one of the first ships of her class to go into mass production: The previous LST's having been in the evolutionary stage. She was commissioned 6 May 1944.

328 feet long and 50 feet in breadth, displacing about 4,000 tons when loaded, she has two main engines which can deliver 1,000 horsepower each. Her primary mission is to transport and land heavy tanks, vehicles and other equipment on hostile beaches. However, the LST (Landing Ship Tank) is frequently used to transport cargo which is uploaded by "ducks" or other amphibious vehicles without beaching the ship. In addition she may also carry an LCT topside. Pontoons are occasionally carried to the scene of the invasion, secured to the sides. Some models carry as many as six 36 foot LCVP's on their davits in addition to pontoons, LCT, and regular cargo of tanks, vehicles, and troops. The greatest departure from the usual conception of a ship is a stern anchor which is used to assist when retracting from a beach. In addition to the normal crew of 106 men, it is possible to carry from three to five hundred troops, depending on the distance from the staging area to the invasion area. All in all, the LST is one of the most completely versatile vessels ever built.

After commissioning in May, 1944, the 991 made a short shake-down cruise in Chesapeake Bay and immediately there-after shoved off for the west coast via Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and the Panama Canal. As soon as logistics were completed at San Pedro, California she left the states on her great adventure – the conquest of the Pacific. From that date (11 July 1944) to the present, the 991 has been on the "go" continuously; stopping only long enough to complete logistics for the job ahead. Liberty was unknown, there being no place to go on liberty if there had been time. After a brief stay at Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii to unload stateside cargo, proceeded to Mawiliwili Bay, Kauai, Hawaii to load combat troops and equipment. After loading, set sail for Florida Island, British Soloman Island where we engaged in maneuvers preparatory to invading the Palau Islands, then held by the Japs. Staging out of the Solomans the 991 hit Angaur Island, Palau Islands on 4 September, 1944 – her first major invasion.

Following the successful conclusion of the Angaur and Pelelieu campaigns, the thunder of invasion rolled toward the Philippines – months ahead of schedule. After trips to Manus and Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands for logistics, we staged out of Hollandia, New Guinea for the invasion of the Philippines – Leyte Island in particular. We arrived at Leyte 24 October 1944 just in time to catch the full fury of the Jap air force. During our short stay off the Leyte beaches we were under continuous air attack by everything the Japs could throw at us. Luckily, we were faster on the draw than they were and the 991 came through with only a few minor shrapnel hits on the deficit side, which was far over-balanced by two Jap planes definitely knocked down, three assists or probables

and a prisoner-of-war from one of the first two planes. The 991 was now a battle-proven veteran. Leaving Leyte we steered due south for New Guinea.

Between D-Day at Leyte (20 October 1944) and D-Day at Lingayen Gulf, Philippines (13 January 1945) the 991 covered most of the Southwest Pacific, engaging in supply runs – known to the Amphibious Forces as “Milk Runs.” From Leyte on D-Day to Hollandia, New Guinea to Biak Island to Finchaven, New Guinea to Morotai and Halmahara in the Mulukken Islands where the 991 spent Christmas. While at Morotai on Christmas Eve we threw a big party but were interrupted by Japanese bombers. However, a mere thing like an air-raid was not enough to dampen our Christmas spirits which had been bubbling over since chow-down that evening.

Staging out of Morotai we set out for the second and decisive phase of the Philippine operation, the invasion and occupation of Luzon, largest of the Philippines. It was on this invasion that we were destined to have our first brush with the “Kamikazi’s” or suicide bombers. Off Manila on D-I they struck our convoy, scoring direct hits on two ships and narrowly missing three more. One of the suicides started down on the “Lady-Bug” but changed at the last minute to a ship astern with less fire power. Our luck was still with us.

With the exception of a few suicide raids the rest of the invasion went off as per schedule and within 36 hours the 991 was on her way south to Leyte Gulf to load for another invasion – This time at Subic Bay, Luzon. Within fifteen days the “old 991” was back for the second invasion in January. The Japs were completely taken by surprise and the naval base at Subic was taken with comparative ease.

February and the early part of March were spent in Leyte Gulf getting repairs and loading for the invasion to beat all invasions, Okinawa Shima in the Ryukus.

After a stormy voyage, on which all the troops aboard were desperately seasick, we arrived off the west coast of Okinawa at 0600 on 1 April 1945, D-Day. After discharging part of the first wave, we lay off the beach for ten days, waiting to unload our cargo of ammunition and high-test gasoline. Needless to say, we were being raided constantly during this time. A great feeling – sitting on a pile of ammunition while the Nips did their damndest to suicide us. However, Lady Luck was still with us and on 16 April we finished unloading and got underway for Ulithi, Caroline Islands.

Between the latter part of April and the first of July the 991 made three “milk runs” to Okinawa from the Philippines, via Ulithi and Kerama Retto. On the third run up she hit the tail end of a typhoon and on the return trip the convoy was attacked by a submarine wolf pack. Our escorts destroyed three or four submarines, but we lost a DE with half its crew when it attempted to ram one of the Subs. After picking up survivors we continued on what was otherwise an uneventful voyage.

The next big event was the news of the Japanese Surrender which reached us as we lay at anchor in Leyte Gulf. All pyrotechnics aboard were immediately put to use as fireworks.

With the coming of peace to the world there came a new skipper to the 991 – Lt. Schweitzer, the former Executive Officer. The old skipper, Lt. Shake left for the states for leave and a new command. During September the “Lady Bug” was converted to a mail ship, designed to serve as a mobile fleet post office.

On 25 September 1945 we got underway for Okinawa with our ultimate destination the China Coast. However before we could get out of the Ryukus we were caught in one of the worst typhoons ever to hit Okinawa. By the grace of God we managed to stay afloat thru one hundred and forty knot winds and fifty to seventy foot waves, actually passing thru the very “eye” of the typhoon. Everyone agreed that it was much worse than any invasion could possibly have been.

After putting back into Okinawa for repairs and a rest we got underway for Hong Kong, China and our first liberty in 16 months. Wotta liberty!!!

On 21 October Lt. Schweitzer was relieved by Lt(jg) Remick as Commanding Officer. And now to bring this history up to date; The “Lady Bug” will spend her second Christmas overseas, swinging on the hook in Hong Kong, British Crown Colony, giving out with mail and movies to the United States Fleet. If her luck holds, perhaps she will be headed stateside in the not too distant future. Here’s Hoping!