

There is a limit to the endurance of every ship's crew even when the men have been welded into a tough, efficient fighting team in the hard test of many combats. For the crew of the USS Longshaw, endless days of hard steaming as she fought off countless kamikaze attacks finally took its toll when, war weary, dispirited and totally exhausted, they allowed their ship to drift onto a treacherous reef in full view

DEATH OF A DESTROYER

of Japanese shore-based artillery

BY A.B. BUD FEUER

The USS Longshaw (DD-559) was an island-hopping veteran of the war in the Pacific racking up nine Battle Stars. The tough little destroyer had survived surface actions, kamikazes, suicide boats, and a typhoon. But her luck finally ran out under a bizarre set of circumstances off the coast of Okinawa in May 1945.

After supporting the Iwo Jima operation during February 1945, the Longshaw, skippered by Cmdr. T.R. Voageley, steamed for Ulithi to refuel and load ammunition. She also received orders to join Task Group 54.2 for the assault against Okinawa. The Longshaw was attached to Destroyer Division 110, that also included the Laws, Morrison, and Pritchett.

At 0640, on 21 March, the task group steamed underway. Three-days later Okinawa was sighted, and the Longshaw joined a fire support unit in preparation for the invasion of the heavily fortified Japanese island. The destroyer was assigned a patrol area off the south-eastern tip of Okinawa — protecting mine sweeping vessels and underwater demolition teams.

At 1320 hours, on 25 March, the battleships and cruisers of the task group commenced bombarding the island. That evening, the Longshaw left her screening position and conducted night

harassing fire at random targets near the beach. Two- and three-gun salvos were unleashed at five-minute intervals — along with occasional white phosphorous shells. As the Longshaw sneaked up and down the shore, she blasted gun emplacements, road junctions, towns, and barracks areas.

For the next few nights, the destroyer continued her harassing activities — setting many fires along the coast. About 0600, she would rejoin the fleet, and take her place in the formation screening the heavy ships as they continued the bombardment of enemy shore defenses.

At 0120, on the early morning of 1 April, the Longshaw was attacked by a low-flying Japanese plane that closed undetected off the destroyer's port bow. The enemy aircraft succeeded in launching a torpedo, which crossed within ten-yards of the Longshaw's bow. The plane was driven off by gunfire.

About 0630, the Longshaw hurried to her daytime fire support station. H-hour for landing troops was scheduled for 0830. At 0820, aircraft and LCIs began laying smoke screens between the ships and the beach. A few minutes later, the tremendous cannonading of the

USS LCI(M)-356 alongside the grounded and burning USS Longshaw 18 May 1945. Longshaw had run aground of Napa Airfield at Okinawa and was destroyed by Japanese shore batteries. USS LCI(M)-356 was alongside removing the dead and wounded while fighting the fires. (David M. Nelson RM2/c)



Crewmen aboard another ship watch as Longshaw performs close-in escort duty.

