

Hershberger On PT Boat With Clark

WHEN U. S. GENERAL AND STAFF
HAD NARROW ESCAPE FROM
TORPEDOES OF U. S. MINE
SWEEPER.

Hopes to Study

(By MARY HAUSE)

January 28, 1944 will linger long in the memory of Petty Officer Richard C. Hershberger, then serving as a motor machinist mate on a PT boat, which on that date was carrying General Mark Clark of the United States Fifth army, and his entire staff. While attempting to land the officers behind the German lines in Italy, the 30-foot torpedo boat was shelled by an American mine sweeper. The incident was just revealed last week, and press notices stated that the PT boat had been mistaken for a German boat, flying the American flag.

Petty Officer Hershberger, husband of the former Virginia Long of Sipesville, told the story as he sat in the Long home Monday. He said it was broad daylight, and the boat was moving ahead at full speed, when fired upon by the mine sweeper. Only one of the 40 mm. shells scored a direct hit and Hershberger said it was due to the cool headed thinking of his superior officer, that the general, his men and most of the crew of the PT boat were saved.

Hershberger, who served 14 months of active duty on a PT boat told this story: "We were moving ahead at full speed, when the first shell hit. I was standing on deck, and only the fact that one of the crew members stood in front of me, saved me. He is dead. Two others of the crew are dead, and three were seriously injured. We gave the boat the gun and maneuvered until we outdistanced the sweeper, which continued to fire on us. With General Clark was also General Gunther of the Fifth army.

"It was a tragic thing, and General Clark's face seemed even grimmer than normally. We didn't know what it meant for we were flying the American flag, and the day was bright enough for anyone to see our flag. Our commanding officer was awarded the silver star for his coolness in directing the maneuvers, which put us out of range of the AM120, while the crew of 15 were cited."

On 63 Missions

Petty Officer Hershberger, a son of Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Hershberger of Hooversville R. D. 1 participated in 63 missions behind German lines, and in addition went through 57 air raids and was shelled eight times by German-shore batteries. "It's not all roses, this war, and every time we went out, we never knew if we would get back safely or not. Our work is to fire on enemy positions or craft anywhere from 300 to 500 yards, and being that close you are just practically sitting in the Germans' laps. It's not child's play, and it was up to us to take landing craft (LST and LCM) close to shore to land the troops, after we had made circles around the enemy. Each day there was something new, yet it was all supposed to be routine stuff. Our little boat fired 14 torpedoes in all and we were credited with the sinking of 38,000 tons of enemy craft.

Included were two German destroyers, one corvet (half size destroyer escort) and others. On one occasion we knew we had scored a direct hit, but it was too near daylight, we didn't dare follow the crippled battle wagon, so we communicated with the air corps, and they went out and finished the job in addition to getting another destroyer. That all happened

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Hershberger

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off Elba, in the Mediterranean, where Napoleon was exiled in 1814. He has a formal list of the six major engagements in which he participated in 14 months. They include the Sicilian campaign, leap frog landings on Sicilian coast; the prevention of evacuation by the enemy of Cape Bon, Tunisia; invasion and occupation of Pantalleria, the invasion of Italy and landing operations at Salerno bay and leap frog landings at Anzio. By leap frog landings, Hershberger stated they were the swift dartings to clear the way for landing craft, behind enemy lines.

Petty Officer Hershberger said of General Clark, "He's a fine man. I never saw him smile at any time. But he will talk to you as long as you talk with him. I never heard him start a conversation. But he is ever willing and ready to talk to anyone, no matter of what rank, if they will talk with him." At that point in the conversation Hershberger's wife "Ginny" who had been listening, said, "Maybe I had better tell about that long past date January 28. I remember it vividly. When I awoke in the morning I had a premonition that something was happening to Dick. I even went to the door and looked up and down the highway several times. I just thought I would see him coming by, any minute. Several times I thought I heard him call me and once when I went into the bed room. I thought he was there, for I heard his voice. That night I wrote him and said, 'Dick, something happened you today, I've felt your presence every minute.' It wasn't long after that I received a letter from him in which he wrote, 'I can't tell you now what happened, but when I get home, if I ever do, then I'll tell you the actual facts about January 28. It'll raise your hair on end.'"

In the refrigerator of the Long home was a box of C rations, on which the 26 year old sailor lived so long. Now he says the sight of it almost sickens him, but he recalled the time on Salerno, when C rations would have been like nectar from the Olympian gods. That was a time when the crew of the PT boat ran out of food, including the C rations, (a mixture of meat and vegetables to which water is added, if cooked). "We had nothing to eat, and rather than starve we put ashore and begged what little food we could from the natives. It was better than nothing, but somehow the dirt over there on those Mediterranean islands, sort of takes one's appetite. But we were hungry enough to eat anything that looked like food."

On many occasions when his boat sank German craft, a few survivors would be picked up and taken to a port, where they were turned over to authorities. "You know it's just since I'm home I learned to know what those prisoners always would say to us. Always the first thing was 'Heil Hitler', followed by 'Kopf mit rache schnitten hein'. It's the last one that bothered us and it wasn't until I went to talk with the Rev. Walter Guss here in Sipesville I learned what it meant and was I mad. It means, 'Revenge by cutting off the head.' Wish I had another chance at those Heinies, I'd know what to do the next time."

He said all the prisoners seemed to be well educated, some speaking perfect English, with only a slight guttural accent. Most of the men we picked up seemed like regular fellows. They were grateful for what we did for them. Occasionally we would find the other type of German, the ones which adhered to Hitler's policy. There was only one way to handle them, and that was to beat them until they did what they were told.

First At Naples

Hershberger's PT boat was the first American craft in the bay of Naples, having entered the bay to carry to shore a British admiral. That's when the crew decided to see the town. "We strapped our 45s on, and started through the streets, not knowing what would happen. Pretty soon we knew when German snipers started shooting at us. But we soon got them. They were hiding in a building, where some American Rangers were stopping and after the first shots, the Rangers picked them up and they came out . . . well, I'd better not say how."

"This talk about the ability of the German fighters may be all right, but one time I saw something which would make the fuhrer's face red. We were patrolling the Lapri islands, north of Sicily, where the Germans had a base. We decided to go ashore, and started in rubber boats, easing in, until finally we were at the dock. We tied the boats there and leaped ashore, ready for anything. Heje's what we saw. Ten lone Germans, hands high in the air and their guns lying on the ground. They were all the defense of that one island, and were darned glad to surrender. We searched them for concealed weapons, but they had none. So often when we had searched prisoners before we would find the baby-sized, but deadly revolvers most of them carry. They are half as long as a man's hand, and can be slipped into the clothing anywhere, with scarcely a bump to show. We got lots of them that way, just miniature Lugers. Another thing we liked to do on those little islands in the Med. was starve out the Nazis, so they were easily captured. We would stop all supplies to the islands and when their food ran out there was nothing else for them to do but give up. They kinda liked it too."

HERSHBERGER ON P.T. BOATS WITH CLARK

- 1.. We did not attempt to put them behind enemy lines, we were transporting them to our(U.S.A.) front lines at Anzio. One does not arbitrarily put one's Generals behind enemy lines.
 2. It was not "broad day-light". It was dawn and the sun was Just above the horizon.
 3. Lt. Geo. Patterson, our Skipper, and Lt. J.G. Mr. Benson, the Exec., were wounded in the explosion. Both were down. Lt. Patterson was in no condition to resume command, he had a large chunk torn out of his Gluteus Maximus. Mr. Benson, with a broken leg below the knee, got back to the helm and took us out of there.
 4. A Naval Lieutenant, who was traveling with us to Anzio, and whose name I have never known, was killed, not a crew member. I was bent over very low talking into the ear of the Engr. on duty in the engine room.
 5. What is an AM120 ??? The Crew got no citation.....
 6. Never shelled by shore batteries.
 7. P.T. 201 fired two torpedos while I was aboard.
 8. I never talked directly with General Clark and only slightly with General Grunther.
 9. I did not carry "C" rations home and we ate very little of it. Our gasoline supply on board dictated how long we would be on patrol. Usually just over night. We took the bulk of our meals at the "mess hall" on base.
 10. We were low on food, water and fuel. We got replenished from the Cruiser Philadelphia after it had been bombed. We did not "put ashore" nor did we we beg from natives, Shore was then German held territory. In this paragraph -- sheer artistic license.
 11. Not on " many" occasions, but some or few.
 12. Never said such a thing.
 13. We, I.E., P.T. Boaters, never beat any prisoners. But, Yes, we watched them very closely.
 14. We never carried a British Admiral anywhere at any time. More artistic license.
 15. Where are the Lapri Islands?
 16. No such event with rubber boats nor any other boat.
 17. Man oh man ! I did'nt know we were so good !
 18. See note seven above.
 19. The British Boats carried four torpedos as did we.
 20. A German Trawler has little resemblance to a Destroyer. It is a cross between a barge and a freighter. A Trawler is heavily armed, usually with several 88 mm. guns.
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