

UNDER FULL SAIL

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The activity in the Gulf of Lingayen was hot and heavy, the cargo was being dug out of the ships almost before they had a chance to settle at anchor. A Naval Task Force was assembling, most likely off to another engagement further north, maybe to Okinawa.

Three days and nights off-loading and the ship was cleared to return to Tacloban and load up again. Hopefully they'd get a chance for liberty in Manila on their way back, as Ol' Betsy was shaking a little too much to do another long trip. Navy divers dove down but couldn't find anything wrong. The prop looked good, no slop in the rudder, but they could still hear a rumble and then feel the vibration. It only seemed to be noticeable at certain R.P.M.s.

They started off with three other ships in a convoy heading South making a slight course adjustment to the West after some ships ahead sighted what they thought was a sub's periscope.

The convoy had been running a false course for some time, then corrected back to the original course when it happened. A loud thump, the engine started revving itself up, then came to an abrupt stop.

The ship had informed the convoy sometime earlier that they'd have to reduce RPM's and drop back after experiencing some engine problems and that they should be able to catch up with them later. The convoy were barely specks on the horizon when the real problem developed.

Word from the Engine room indicated that the tail shaft had broken inside the stern bearing and it took some of the bearing sleeve with it, causing the packing gland to ride off to one side. The Engineers were able to stuff waste into the void and drive it home, like caulking planks on a wooden ship.

"What in the hell do we do now," seemed to be the thought on everybody's mind. Call for help and an enemy sub would surely get to them first. They couldn't just lay there dead in the water. Then, as if everyone's mind was on the same wave length: "LET'S HOIST SOME SAILS!"

Have you ever seen a Liberty ship under full sail? Don't laugh. It really happened.

Off came all the hatch tarps, then all the cargo booms were lifted out of their crutches and rigged. Now please remember, the ship was lying dead in the water, broad side to in the troughs of the large swells and rolling back and forth, dipping at her beam ends. Also, don't forget that they had just unloaded all the cargo and were sailing very light. Some say a Liberty shows such a large slab side of a hull when light that she could sail on her own, but don't you believe it.

While swinging out one of the booms the ship took a quick snap roll and the after-guy parted, allowing the boom to swing free back and forth until she collided with her sister boom, and fouled with that boom's topping-lift block and tackle. After fighting with them for the longest time both booms were lowered together on the hatch top and then freed. Thank God! Fifteen minutes with a free-swinging boom is enough excitement to last anyone a lifetime!

The crew working aft, (including most of the engine room gang) under the direction of the First Mate, had two sails hoisted and were starting on their third sail hoist when everyone noticed she was under way. Not much mind you, but enough for steerage. Most of the afterguard

were sent forward to lend a hand, and eventually seven sails (hatch tarps) hoisted.

The breeze was beautiful but it was from the wrong direction. The Captain kept the crew well informed over the PA system. Unbelievable they were sailing! if it hadn't been for the excitement of the sail raising they'd all would have been shaking in their boots, scared to death waiting to get torpedoed before a tug could reach them.

The Captain announced that they were making three knots, even if it was in the wrong direction, he explained that it was necessary to keep the ship moving and then tack or jibe (letting the wind cross the stern).

During the jibing procedure, every sail was back-winded and flapping, or getting hung up on the masts and booms. It took an hour and the cooperation of every man in the crew before they were underway and sailing again.

Rigging the sails took a lot of trial and error effort. The cargo block, wire and hooks were too heavy to set the tarps to the best angle of the wind. Reeving the boom blocks with manila rope, to use as halyards, then paying it out to set the sail flying at just the right angle and to take full advantage of the breeze meant constant adjusting of the boom for both height and angle, and that kept two men on each winch busy. Of course, a great deal of yelling was absolutely necessary, and everyone was putting in his own two cents worth. Most of it was directed at the bridge to hold a steadier course, and mostly they were good natured comments.

They stayed with it all night, trying to improve on the sail handling and trying different sail patterns. The Captain announced that they were on a good lay course to Manila if the breeze held both its velocity and

direction. The next morning Bataan Peninsula came into view, we were driving along between three to four knots, the crew felt like old salts out of the past.

As Ol' Betsy came between the harbor of Mariveles at the Southern tip of The Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island. Two Army tugs came out, offering to assist her on into Manila. The Captain refused their offer to help. Hell, with only twenty some miles to go, why bother. Anyway, they might make a claim for a portion of salvage rights. The crew worked too hard to get the old gal sailing and he wanted to see it through.

Manila in the distance. Everyone wondered what a sight they must have been.... a giant modern cargo ship under full sail, working her way into port. As she approached the harbor they found the place loaded with ships of every size and shape anchored way offshore from the harbor. Dock space must have been at a premium.

The Harbor Pilot was somewhat reluctant to come aboard, the Captain called out on the PA system as if he were addressing a yacht racing crew. "Be prepared to come about and at my command drop the sails and then the anchor. Let's look lively!" Everyone thought he was getting as much charge out of this as they were. Several boats came out, crisscrossing the bow, and the skipper had to toot the whistle continuously to get them out of the way because he wanted to come up into the wind to drop the hook.

Soon after arriving the crew was paid off and some were reassigned to other ships, as it was going to be sometime before the ship could get into a drydock for repairs....