

TYPHOON

A Report from the Pacific

by LEWIS L. GRIMM

Lewis L. Grimm '44 is Executive Officer of the U.S.S. Gloucester, a destroyer escort in the Pacific. The following account is an extract from one of his letters, written while his ship was operating off Sasebo, Japan, in October, 1951.

ON OCTOBER 14TH, when the typhoon was starting to blow, I had no idea what was to happen before the night was over.

I went to bed about 2200 and was just going to sleep when General Quarters sounded and the word was passed over the public address system to "Go to your abandon ship stations. Collision is imminent."

I climbed out of my bed and struggled into my foul weather gear and life jacket. While I was wrestling with my life jacket, word was passed to "Stand by for collision forward. All hands to their abandon ship stations." Of course, my stateroom is the one that is furthest forward.

I hurried outside and up to the bridge, and there about 50 yards in front of us was the *Bryce Canyon*, a large tender who had broken her mooring and was being blown right toward us. The Captain was trying to maneuver the ship by twisting it so that the bow of our ship would be pointed toward the *Bryce Canyon* when she hit us. There was a tug trying to push her, but it wasn't doing too well. When the *Bryce Canyon* was about 30 feet away (which is awfully close for a ship that size) her engines took hold and she slowly pulled away from us. Before long the Captain of the *Canyon* had her anchored near her buoy and everything was calmed down (except the water and wind).

I went back down to the wardroom and was waiting for some of the officers to drink their coffee while we visited, when the word came over the P.A., "Stand by for collision."

I dashed back to the bridge, and there, bearing down on us, was a huge floating crane that had broken loose from the pier at the beach. She had no power and was headed right for us. Fortunately, the tugs that had been there to help the *Bryce Canyon* were only about 100 yards away, and they got the crane under control and back to the pier in short order.

By the time I returned to my room I was soaking wet, for despite the fact that I had on foul weather gear, the 60-80 knot winds had blown the water in around my

neck and sleeves and soaked me. I had just gotten out of my wet clothes and was going to take a warm shower, and then try to get some sleep, when there was a loud snapping noise and a terrific shudder through the ship, and the general alarm started sounding again.

I jumped into some dry clothes, put on my foul weather gear and headed for the bridge. Everything was confusion, for we had broken loose from the buoy and were drifting toward an English destroyer that was anchored astern of us. We managed to get the ship under control and though the space to maneuver was small we soon had our ship back by the buoy.

We dropped the anchor and then the Captain slowed down the engines to see if the anchor would hold. It didn't, and there was an exciting hour while we dragged the anchor all over the harbor, just missing the *Bryce Canyon*, the English destroyer, the floating crane, and the land alongside the channel.

The poor English destroyer was quite upset. She kept thinking we were going to ram her, and I'll admit she had good reason to worry, for at least five times we nearly lost complete control and drifted to within 50 yards of her.

The English "can" sent us quite a few messages by blinker light. The night before, when the wind changed direction, she sent us a message, "Are you drifting?" We sent back "No." The trouble was that when the wind changed direction all the ships in the harbor started to swing around their buoys to line up with the new direction of the wind. The *Gloucester*, however, swings the opposite direction from the way it should, and the English destroyer thought we had broken our moorings.

After we had just missed the English ship for the third time she sent over a message that there was plenty of room to anchor on her port side. I don't know how our message affected their Captain, for we sent back, "We are anchored now." Of course we were still dragging our anchor all over the northwest corner of the bay. Earlier in the evening the strain had broken our anchor windlass and while we could lower the anchors "by gravity" we could not raise them up again. Therefore, we had no choice but to plow up the bottom of the bay. We finally maneuvered the ship into position, and by easing the strain on the anchor by using the ship's engines we were able to stay there.

The Captain wanted to drop the starboard anchor too, but we were in a bit of a bind there. You only have two anchors, and two anchor chains, so when we moored to the buoy we used the starboard anchor chain. This is easy enough to do, for you simply put an iron bar through the anchor chain where it goes through the deck, and then let the anchor out until the bar reaches the hole in the deck. The bar, which reaches across the hole like a cuff link, keeps the chain from going any further. Then you break the chain between the hole in the deck and the windlass and run this piece of the anchor chain that remains on the ship out through the bullnose of the ship to the buoy.

Dropping the anchor

All we had to do now was pull the chain back through the bullnose, fasten it to the starboard anchor, knock the bar out of the chain, and the anchor would drop. Our first problem was the fact that the chain that was hanging through the bullnose—15 fathoms, or 90 feet of it—was wrapped around the port anchor chain, and we couldn't get it loose. Of course the 80-mile-an-hour winds across the deck were no help either. When we saw we couldn't get the chain loose from the port anchor, we broke the chain again and then tried to connect this chain to the starboard anchor.

I went down to the deck where my room was and had just taken off my life jacket when someone said, "Look—there goes that crane again." I looked out the door and there was the crane, gliding by, about 50 yards away. I slipped into my life jacket and headed outside. Then I discovered it wasn't the crane that was moving—it was us.

When I got to the bridge I found we'd lost the anchor and 90 fathoms of chain and now we were steaming around trying to keep in the area of our buoy. Again we steamed close to the British "can" and once when we lost control of the ship, went within about 50 feet of the beach.

We must have steamed around for about an hour when we received another message from the destroyer, "Are you planning to stay underway all night?" The Captain sent back, "I haven't decided yet."

Everyone was dead tired, so the Captain sent a message for assistance. He decided he'd try to get the ship back to the buoy and then run our chain over and shackle it to the buoy.

But the shackle had broken, and we didn't have any on board large enough to hold.

The Captain then sent a message to the Officer in Charge, explaining our situation and asking if he had a shackle. In a few minutes the two tugs came out from the inner harbor and were alongside. I went down to the pilothouse to inform the Captain that the tugs had orders to take us into the inner harbor and tie us up to the dock. The Captain didn't want to do this.

"Mr. Grimm," he said, "take the conn while I go outside and talk to the tugs," and he opened the door and out he went. This was all right, except that I had

never had control of a ship when there wasn't a lot of room in which to maneuver. I looked out and my heart came right up into my throat. We were going straight ahead, and about 200 feet in front of us was the floating crane. Fortunately I recovered rapidly, gave back one-third on the port engine, stopped the starboard engine, then backed two-thirds on the port engine, and when the ship started to swing, I backed two-thirds on all engines and the ship started moving away from the crane.

I was surprised that the ship handled as well as she did, for the wind was doing better than 60 miles per hour. I was starting to steam around in our little circle when the Captain came back into the pilot house and said that the tugs wouldn't try to put the chain over the buoy, and he wasn't going to try to take his ship through the narrow entrance into the inner harbor. He reasoned that since he had been steaming, more or less, for several hours already and hadn't hit anything, he would rather take his chances going ahead.

There was a little confusion by this time, for the two tugs had fastened on to the ship and were trying to push us through the entrance into the inner harbor. The Captain became quite expressive in telling the tugs to get away from his ship.

As soon as the Talker told the Captain that the tugs were clear of the ship—meaning that the lines were cast off—the Captain ordered all engines ahead two-thirds. The wind had blown us around so we were no longer headed toward the entrance to the inner harbor, and one of the tugs was about two feet in front of us on a course perpendicular to ours. Fortunately we were going quite slowly when we hit the tug, so that we didn't do very much damage.

The wind slows down

I was looking forward to a long stay on the bridge when we noticed that the wind was slowing down. It is almost unbelievable, the speed with which the velocity of the wind decreases. The First Lieutenant informed us that he was ready to let go the starboard anchor, so we ran the ship to a favorable position near our buoy and dropped it. The wind had died down enough so the anchor held the ship in position, and we were soon back to near normal.

Of course, it was getting late by this time—about 0600 in the morning. It was a group of soaked and dead-tired officers and men who hit the sack, and we didn't bother to hold reveille for all hands at 0630 as we were supposed to.

The next afternoon they sent a crane out to help us get our starboard anchor up. The crane would fasten on to the anchor near the waterline, and lift it up above our deck, and then the men would pull the chain in a few feet. They kept this process up until 60 fathoms of chain were all on board, and then fastened what was left of our port anchor chain to the buoy.

Early the next morning we were underway to escort a ship up to the battle line near the 38th parallel on the east coast.