

OPERATION BOSTON: AN OSS COMBINED OPERATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

by Troy J. Sacquety



*Illustration by
Mariano Santillan*

At 1025 hours on 20 February 1945, two high-powered Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Air-Sea Rescue boats eased out of Kyaukpyu harbor on the Arakan Coast of Burma to begin Operation BOSTON. Overloaded with men, equipment, and gasoline to the point of nearly sinking they headed south to go deep into Japanese-controlled waters. The boats carried a multi-service complement from two branches of the OSS. They had been tasked to reconnoiter Foul Island. Eight hours later, the forty-nine man force arrived at

their destination at sunset. After circumnavigating the small island for a quick reconnaissance, the boats anchored. Twenty minutes later, four kayaks manned by eight OSS Maritime Unit (MU) swimmers cast off from P-564, commanded by U.S. Army First Lieutenant (1LT) Walter L. Mess. After silently paddling close to shore, Lieutenant Junior Grade (Lt (jg)) John P. Booth and Chief Boatswain's Mate (CBM) James R. Eubank of the U.S. Coast Guard slipped out of their kayaks into the water. They swam to the beach. Seeing no enemy, they signaled their two kayaks to come ashore. The "safe landing" signal, a flashing red light, was sent to P-564. Then, they split into two reconnaissance parties that moved in opposite directions along the beach, a kayak trailing each from the water. They were to determine if there were any hidden enemy positions along the beach before the OSS Operational Group (OG) landed.¹ It was a unique mission in an unheralded theater.

The South East Asia Command (SEAC) was perhaps the least understood theater in WWII. British Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten had operational responsibility for an area that encompassed today's India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Southern Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and parts of Vietnam. The only American combat troops in SEAC were two small contingents of the OSS; Detachment 404 and the Detachment 101 Arakan Field Unit (AFU). Because of their small size these OSS units had to be innovative. This article explains a reconnaissance mission conducted by the AFU OG and MU in February 1945. It is relevant today because it shows how integrated operational



Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was the commander of the South East Asia Command (SEAC). Here he is talking with the OSS Detachment 404 Operational Group (OG) in late 1944 in Teknaf, India.



Like all OSS OGs, those in the Detachment 404/101 Arakan Field Unit were cross-trained in special warfare skills. However, they did not have an indigenous language capability.

elements from separate military services could accomplish a Coalition objective, much like ARSOF does today. But first, who these operators were is important.

The OSS OG was originally part of the OSS Special Operations (SO) Branch. They became an exclusively military branch in the paramilitary OSS on 4 May 1943. The OGs only recruited Army personnel. Their mission was to infiltrate enemy occupied territory and assist guerrilla movements.² In general, an OG operative was a bilingual parachutist, in top physical condition, cross-trained in weapons, explosives, and communications, and always operated in uniform. Separate ethnic OGs had already served in France, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Greece. The Burma OG was different because its members did not speak any of the numerous languages in the region.³ Like the OGs, the MU branch also had its origins in SO.

Originating in April 1942 as SO's amphibious training component, MU became a separate branch on 9 June 1943 when it was apparent that the OSS needed a larger amphibious capability.⁴ Composed of personnel detailed from the U.S. Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Navy, and Army, it was chartered to infiltrate agents or supplies by sea, conduct maritime sabotage, and to develop special equipment.⁵ The pioneer of underwater warfare capabilities in the MU was Dr. Christian J. Lambertsen.



The multi-service MU Swimming Group #2 was involved in SEAC operations along the Arakan Coast of Burma. Pictured: Cox Reeves, CPhM Becker, Sp(X) 3/c Abbott, Sp(X) 3/c Priano, Sgt Halbarrow, LT (jg) Booth, Lt Babb, MoMM 1/c MacDonald, Cox Thorigal, Sgt Rief, Lt.Cdr Lee, MoMM 1/c Carroll, Cox Fulton, Cpl Kniest, WO Medicott, Sgt Morrissey, Cpl Smith, CBM Eubank.

During WWII, the U.S. and Great Britain divided the globe into operational "spheres of influence" that determined which Ally commanded a particular theater; Burma, India, and that region's ocean areas were British, while China was relegated to the Americans. The British wanted control of the entire China-Burma-India (CBI) area, as well as the American-led fighting elements in the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) assigned to open a supply corridor to China from north Burma. However, NCAC commander, Lieutenant General (LTG) Joseph W. Stilwell, the overall American commander of the CBI, and the commanding general of the Chinese



XV Indian Corps.
(UK) SSI



China-Burma-India
Theater SSI



Unofficial Detachment 101 patch worn by U.S. personnel. The term "Jinghpaw," misspelled on the patch, is another name for Kachin.



Southeast Asia
Command SSI



A typical mangrove-covered *chaung* in which the MU carried out nighttime operations.



Both the MU and the OG of the Arakan Field Unit trained extensively in the use of LCRs (Landing Craft, Rubber). The waters of the mangrove-infested *chaungs* (tidal creeks) were often too murky for the MU swimmers to use the LARU rebreathers.

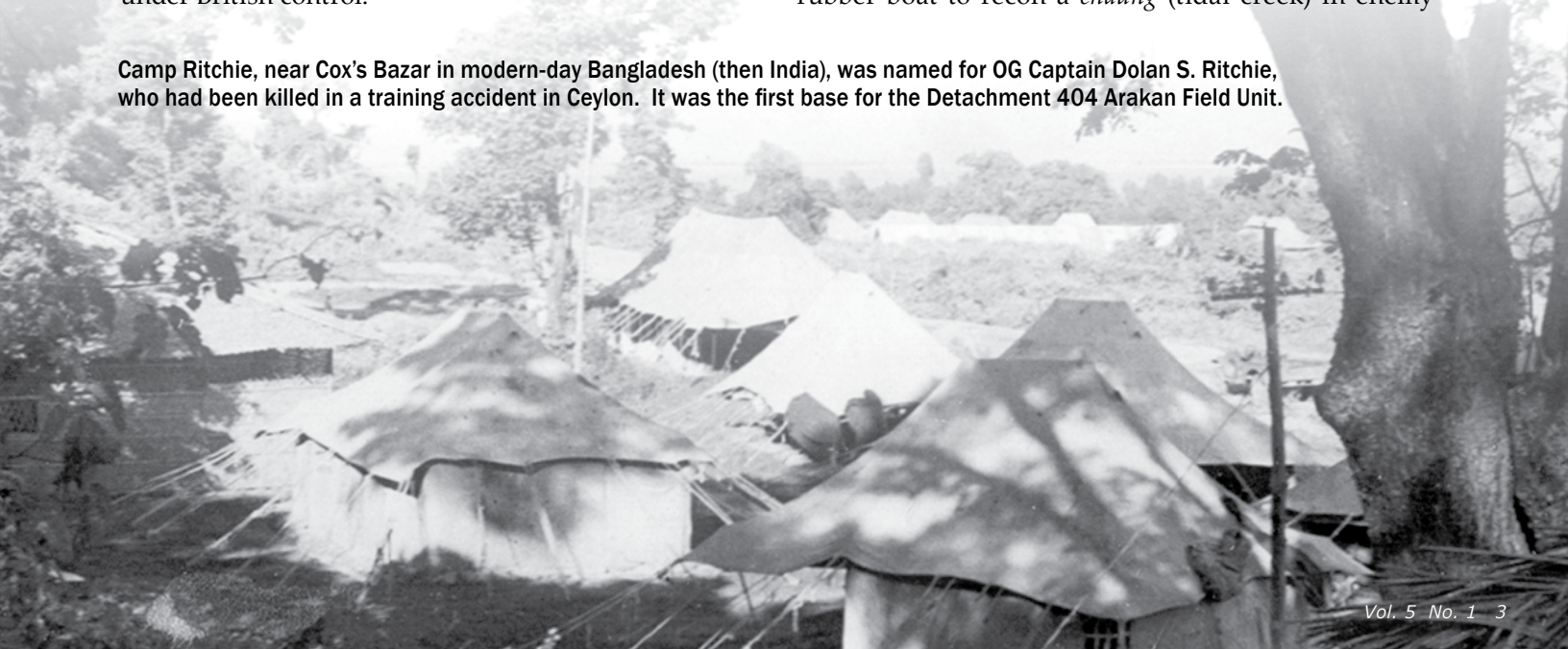
Army in India, as well as Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek's nominal Chief of Staff, would have none of it. Neither he nor OSS chief, Major General (MG) William J. Donovan, wanted Detachment 101—the paramilitary force given operational responsibility for all of Burma—under British control.

Camp Ritchie, near Cox's Bazar in modern-day Bangladesh (then India), was named for OG Captain Dolan S. Ritchie, who had been killed in a training accident in Ceylon. It was the first base for the Detachment 404 Arakan Field Unit.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill tried to solve this conundrum by creating the SEAC in June 1943. However, this only complicated the situation in an area already divided into one operational and three geographic theaters.⁶ But, SEAC proved beneficial to the OSS. In return for British acquiescence to Detachment 101 retaining control over its clandestine operations, OSS/SEAC was created. Based at Kandy, Ceylon, its operational unit—Detachment 404—was under British supervision. The OSS post-war history explained that “had inter-Allied relationships been harmonious in the China-Burma-India Theater, it is probable that Detachment 404 would never have been created.”⁷ Because it was the smallest OSS paramilitary unit in the Far East with the largest operational environment, unique assets were required; the MU and the OGs. They were employed together along with other OSS elements in late 1944 along the Arakan Coast of Burma. The MU and OG worked so well together that years later, Dr. Lambertsen described it as “absolute.”⁸

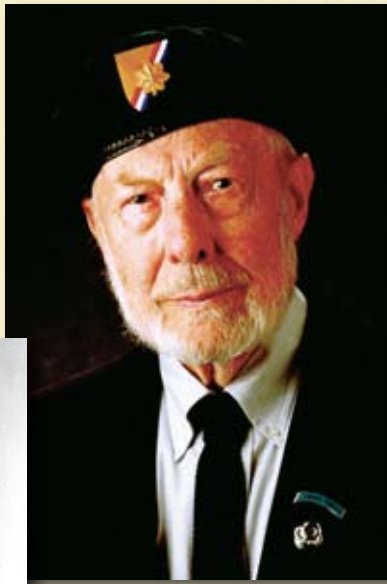
The Detachment 404 Arakan Field Unit (DET 404 AFU) began reconnaissance operations from Cox's Bazar in India (now Bangladesh) to assist the Indian XV Corps in its drive south to secure the Burmese capital, Rangoon.⁹ The AFU also gathered full-spectrum tactical and strategic intelligence while conducting a propaganda campaign to destabilize the Japanese. But, the DET 404 AFU still had to react to Allied political changes. In October 1944, the American CBI Theater was dissolved. The new command structure, the India-Burma Theater (IBT) and the China Theater, caused the OSS to mirror the change.¹⁰ OSS/SEAC was replaced by OSS/IBT in mid-February 1945.¹¹ The OSS administratively moved the AFU under Detachment 101 (DET 101 AFU).¹² The reassignment did not change the AFU mission nor reduce its operational area.

The Arakan Coast was predominately a mosquito-infested mangrove swamp with poisonous snakes and other dangers. MU swimmer CBM James R. Eubank recalled one operation when his team was paddling a rubber boat to recon a *chaung* (tidal creek) in enemy-



Aquatic Pioneer: Dr. Christian Lambertsen

As a member of the OSS Maritime Unit, Dr. Lambertsen, seen here in this 1996 photo, was retroactively awarded the Green Beret, the Special Forces tab, and the U.S. Army SCUBA Diver Badge.



Dr. Lambertsen was detailed to the OSS from the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He served overseas in Ceylon and Burma.



Dr. Christian J. Lambertsen pioneered military underwater operations during WWII. Today, they are important capabilities of Army Special Operations. In the late 1930s, Lambertsen became interested in developing equipment that would enable a swimmer to breathe while swimming underwater. He invented a rebreathing device, to "scrub" carbon dioxide from exhaled breath, which allowed the swimmer to stay underwater for long periods of time. Since the air was recycled internally, no tell-tale exhaust bubbles were emitted. While still a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania, he demonstrated his device for the U.S. Navy Experimental Diving Unit and to staff members of the Coordinator of Information, the predecessor of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). After he was awarded his Doctor of Medicine (MD) in 1943, Lambertsen joined the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He was forthwith detailed to the OSS, and then assigned to the Maritime Unit (MU). There, Lambertsen perfected his rebreather, the Lambertsen Unit (LARU), an early form of SCUBA, and proceeded to train OSS operatives on the system. He was assigned to Ceylon and Burma with the MU. OSS Chief Major General William J. Donovan awarded Captain Lambertsen the Legion of Merit in 1945. Dr. Lambertsen left the U.S. Army in 1946 as a Major.

Since 1946, Dr. Lambertsen has worked in the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine. He founded the Institute for Environmental Medicine in 1968 to determine the benefits of combining various gas mixtures at varying atmospheric pressures. One

benefit he discovered was that at several atmospheres of pressure, pure oxygen will significantly speed healing for burn patients and help people with breathing problems. Lambertsen holds several patents for underwater breathing devices and has written or co-written over a hundred scientific articles. His atmospheric pressure research has allowed man to expand his frontiers underwater and in space.

Dr. Lambertsen continued to help both the Army and Navy expand their underwater operational capabilities with improved equipment. He worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on the Mercury, Gemini, and Skylab space programs, as well as the undersea Tektite habitat. He has received lifetime achievement awards from the U.S. Army Special Forces Underwater Operations School and the UDT-SEAL Association, been awarded the U.S. Army Special Forces Green Beret, the U.S. Special Operations Command Medal, and a Department of Defense Citation. The U.S. Coast Guard presented him with their Distinguished Public Service Award. For these and other achievements that date to WWII, Dr. Lambertsen is considered to be the father of military underwater operations. ▲

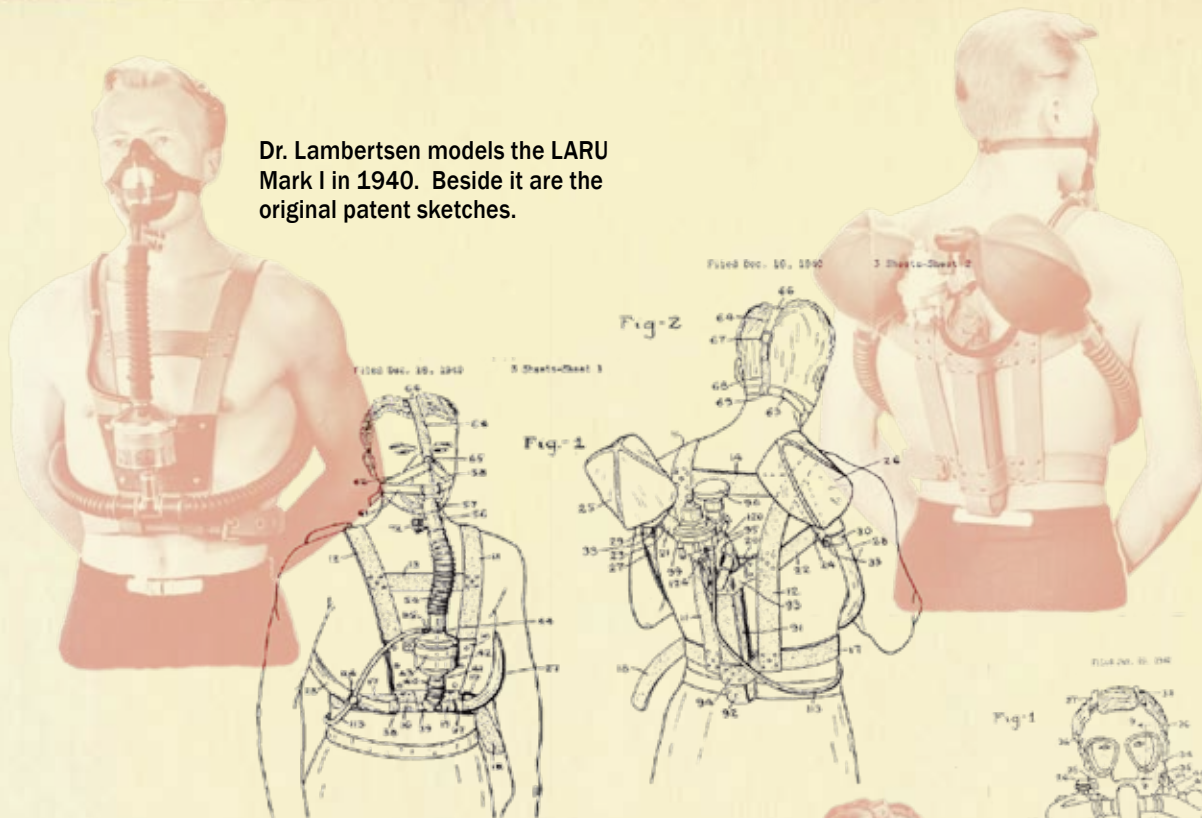


This brochure, co-authored by Dr. Lambertsen in 1952, is the first published reference to Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA).

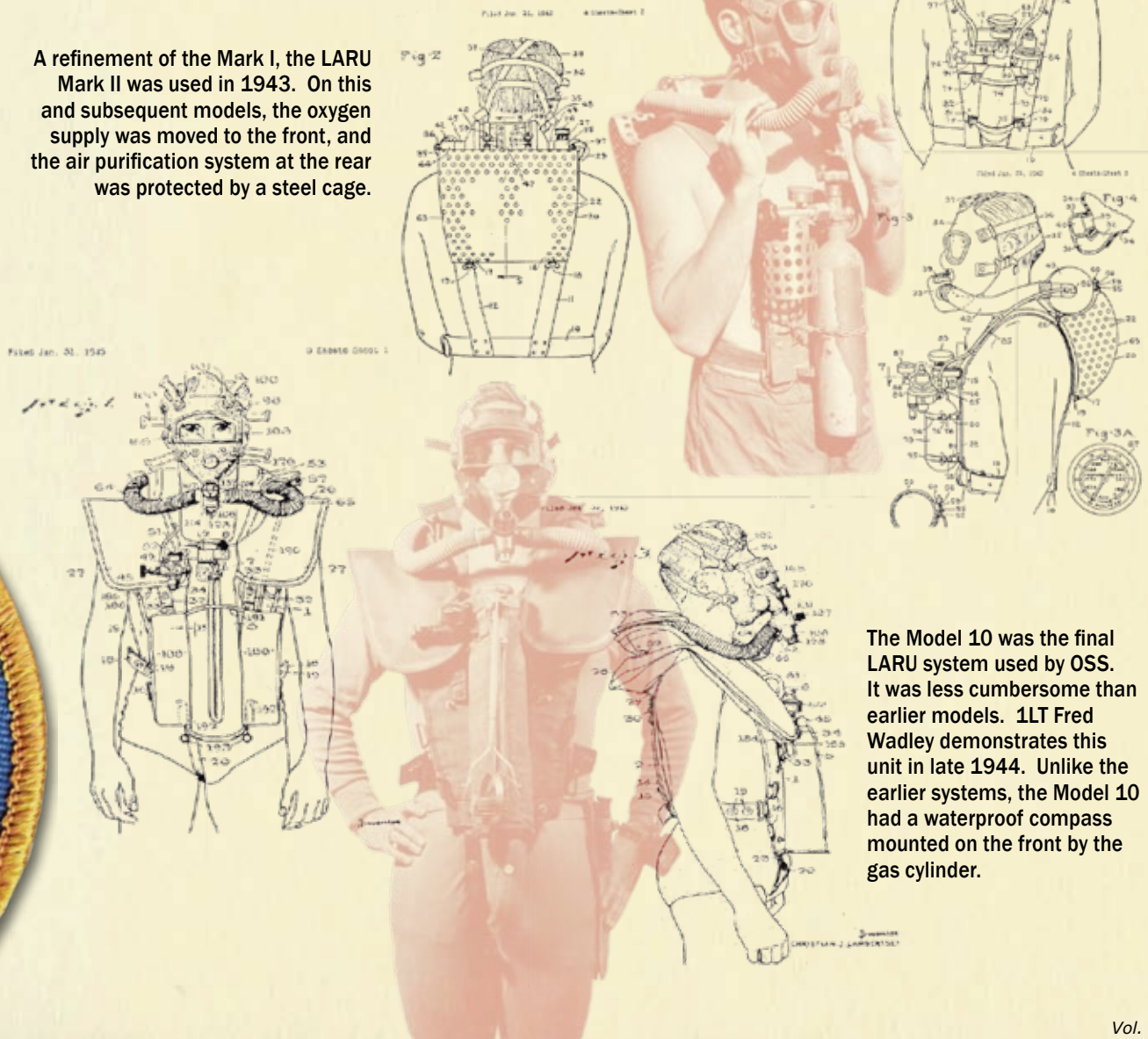
Patch for ODA 15 Company A, 8th Special Forces Group, circa 1971. Dr. Lambertsen's legacy is reflected in U.S. Army underwater swimmers.



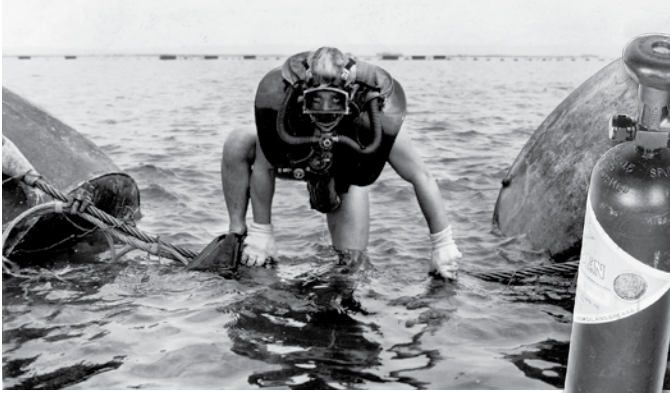
Dr. Lambertsen models the LARU Mark I in 1940. Beside it are the original patent sketches.



A refinement of the Mark I, the LARU Mark II was used in 1943. On this and subsequent models, the oxygen supply was moved to the front, and the air purification system at the rear was protected by a steel cage.

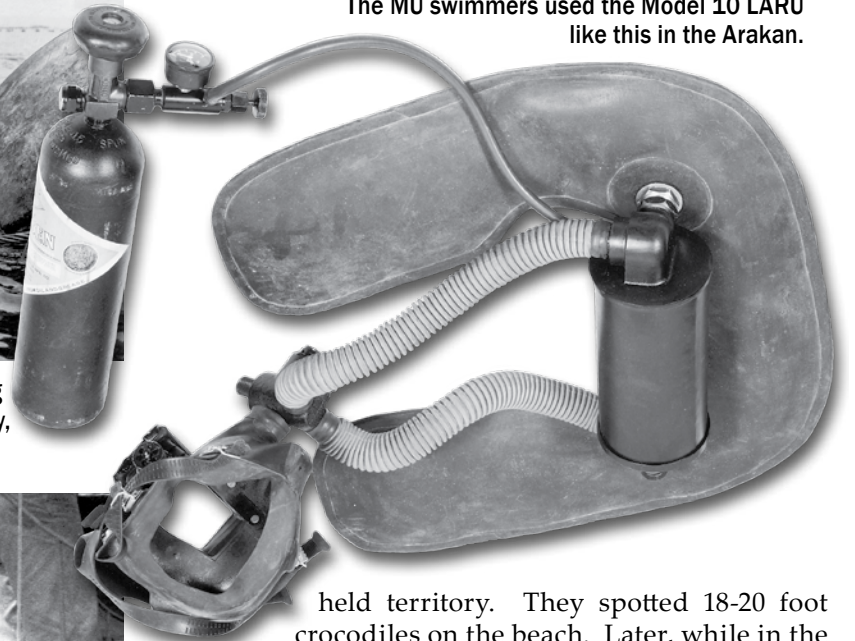


The Model 10 was the final LARU system used by OSS. It was less cumbersome than earlier models. 1LT Fred Wadley demonstrates this unit in late 1944. Unlike the earlier systems, the Model 10 had a waterproof compass mounted on the front by the gas cylinder.



A MU swimmer wearing a Model 10 LARU, training to breach anti-submarine nets at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1944.

The MU swimmers used the Model 10 LARU like this in the Arakan.



1LT Walter L. Mess on the bridge of P-564.

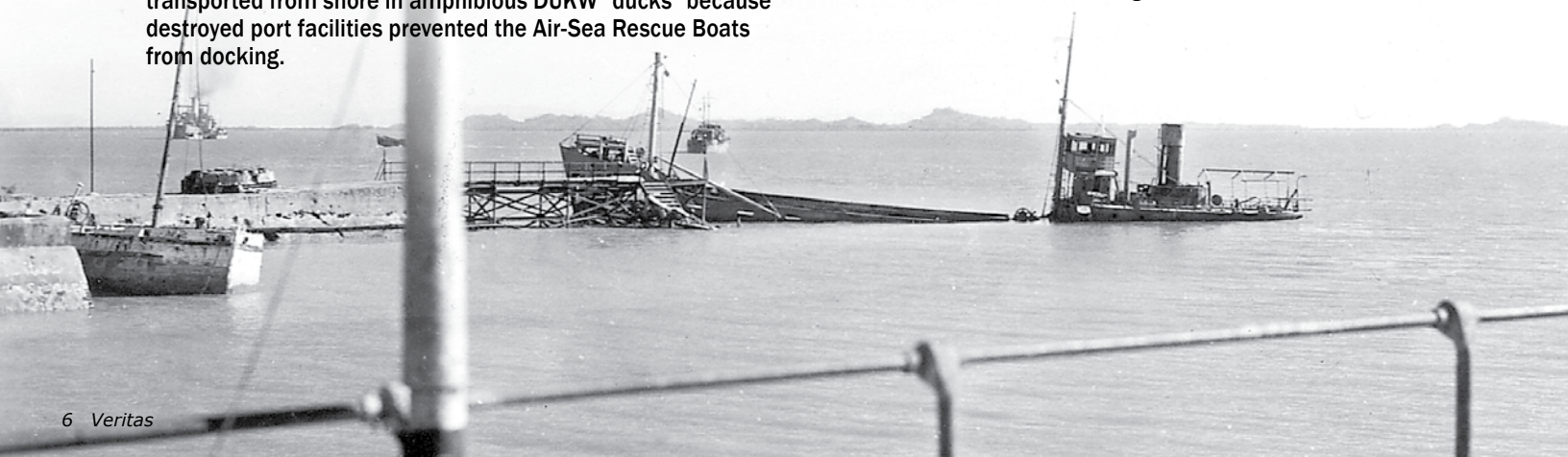
held territory. They spotted 18-20 foot crocodiles on the beach. Later, while in the water, "all of a sudden, a school of fish hit me, just all over, and I thought that one of those crocs got me. Those salt-water crocs are the most vicious in the world . . . I kind of sweated that one out."¹³ The AFU leapfrogged down the coast against a stubbornly withdrawing enemy. It was mid-February 1945 when they reached Kyaukpyu, Burma. By then however, better equipment had finally reached the theater.



At Kyaukpyu, P-564 had to be refueled from 55-gallon drums transported from shore in amphibious DUKW "ducks" because destroyed port facilities prevented the Air-Sea Rescue Boats from docking.

When the first MU boats arrived, they found Kyaukpyu's harbor conditions far from ideal. Several Coast Guard MU swimmers donned Lambertsen Units (LARUs) to search for Japanese mines and underwater obstacles. The port facilities had been destroyed. Underwater debris was everywhere. There were no docks from which to fuel the MU's Air-Sea-Rescue "P-Boats." That was accomplished by a dangerous procedure. Highly volatile aviation gasoline that had been transported from shore was hand-pumped from 55-gallon drums aboard amphibious trucks (DUKWs). It was a tedious but critical process. The boats had to be kept operational to assist the British.

When SEAC secured port areas previously held by the Japanese, they often found them unusable. Sunken craft and debris, the result of the effectiveness of Allied bombing, blocked access to the docks.



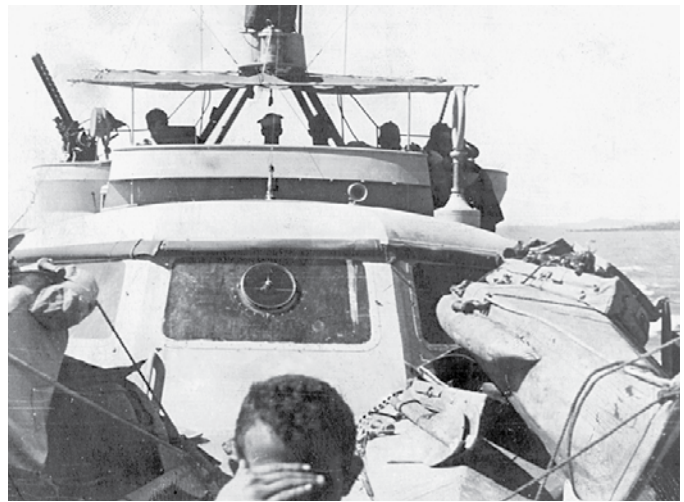
The plan for Operation BOSTON, a combined MU and OG operation, was finalized on 19 February 1945.¹⁴ The British wanted a reconnaissance of Foul Island, located about 20 miles off the coast “because it was in the shipping lane,” said CBM Eubank.¹⁵ Because the P-boats always operated in pairs in enemy waters, P-101, under U.S. Navy LT(jg) Ralph N. Hubbard, and P-564, commanded by Army 1LT Walter L. Mess, were assigned to the mission.¹⁶

Older and better educated than most of the servicemen, Virginian Walter Mess possessed critical skills that served him well. He grew up sailing, earned several college degrees, and was an entrepreneur during the Depression who managed foreclosed properties in Washington DC.¹⁷ That’s where he learned leadership and personnel management and why he was made the Senior Officer Afloat of the MU’s flotilla in the Arakan. Five combat missions before Operation BOSTON gave him and the P-564 crew time to develop standing operating procedures.¹⁸

A pre-operational checklist was mandatory. First, the twelve-man crew ventilated volatile aviation gasoline fumes from P-564. Then, they got the motors running. That was a chore “because the oil was so heavy that it had to be electrically heated for fifteen minutes before you could start the engines,” said Mess.¹⁹ Simultaneously, a crewman briefed the passengers. “We got them settled and put their stuff away below decks. We did not allow them (in) the engine room or the deck. They had to go below . . . and keep their mouths shut . . . They did not like it and wanted to wander around, but we could not contend with that,” said Mess.²⁰ The P-564’s crew was told not to talk to the passengers. “You have your job to do. You do it . . . we stayed away from them . . . There were no questions, ever. You did not know who they were, except to get their names into the log.”²¹ The P-564’s medic treated the new arrivals differently.

He examined them all. “He’d want to know if anyone had any diseases . . . crabs or anything else. He did not want that on the boat.” Once the passengers left, the crew had to contend with whatever diseases or infection the passengers might have brought aboard. He also issued a bucket to everyone. Mess preferred this way to handle seasickness because the buckets could be dropped overboard to be emptied and retrieved by their attached lanyard. “We did not want those unaccustomed to the rolling decks up top,” Mess said. “One of our people would handle the bucket when it was brought up . . . It got to be routine once [the passengers] got used to the idea.”²² While the crew still had a lot to do, it proved to be the best solution.

P-564 was the most heavily-laden boat of the two on Operation BOSTON. It carried four kayaks, one LCR (Landing Craft, Rubber), and 18 additional OSSers, while the 63-foot P-101 carried 11 men and its crew.²³ P-564’s crew stored the OG equipment forward, next to the two spare propeller shafts that weighed a ton apiece. Their relative immobility made them ideal stanchions to secure the equipment. “When you are running into the wind



On Operation BOSTON, the crew of P-564 stored the MU’s British kayakers at the bow of the boat, as shown here on Operation SOUTH DAKOTA.



The crew of P-564 ate, slept, and lived on the boat. Because of the close quarters, they had to screen any passenger for illness or “critters” lest the crew succumb to the same ailment.



Sgt Willard R. Floyd, a mechanic in P-564’s engine room, cleans out one of the courtesy “comfort” buckets provided to the boat’s passengers.

and going about 14 knots, you had a pretty good breeze. Things had to be tied down,” said Mess.²⁴ The OGs were put in the larger crew’s quarters in the forecabin, while the MU swimmers occupied the mate’s quarters. Mess told them, “Go below decks and stay there until I allow

The OSS "Navy" in Burma

In April 1943, COL Carl F. Eifler, a former U.S. Customs Service officer commanding OSS Detachment 101, requested a fast speedboat like those used by liquor smugglers during Prohibition. It was to conduct reconnaissance and to insert and recover small contingents of OSS swimmers, operators, and agents.¹ The solution to OSS Washington was the U.S. Army Air Force's Air-Sea Rescue or "crash" Boats that came in several lengths. P-564 was one of five 85-foot OSS boats used in the Far East.² The boat was nicknamed the *Jeanie* for the wife of its captain, First Lieutenant (ILT) Walter L. Mess. Although the OSS boat crews came from all services, those on P-564 were all Army.³ The boat had four men in the engine room: a Chief Engineer, Assistant Engineer, and two Sergeants. There were three below decks: a medic, cook, and radioman. On deck there was a deckhand, a boatswain's mate, and the captain. Every crewman was cross-trained, but also part of a well-integrated team. "Everyone had a job to do," said Mess.⁴

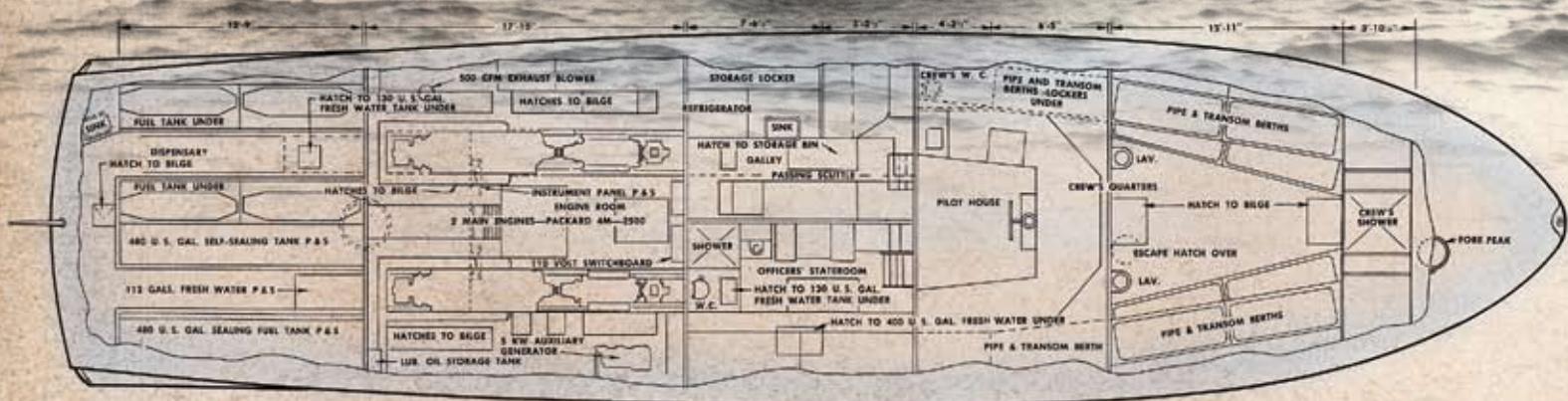
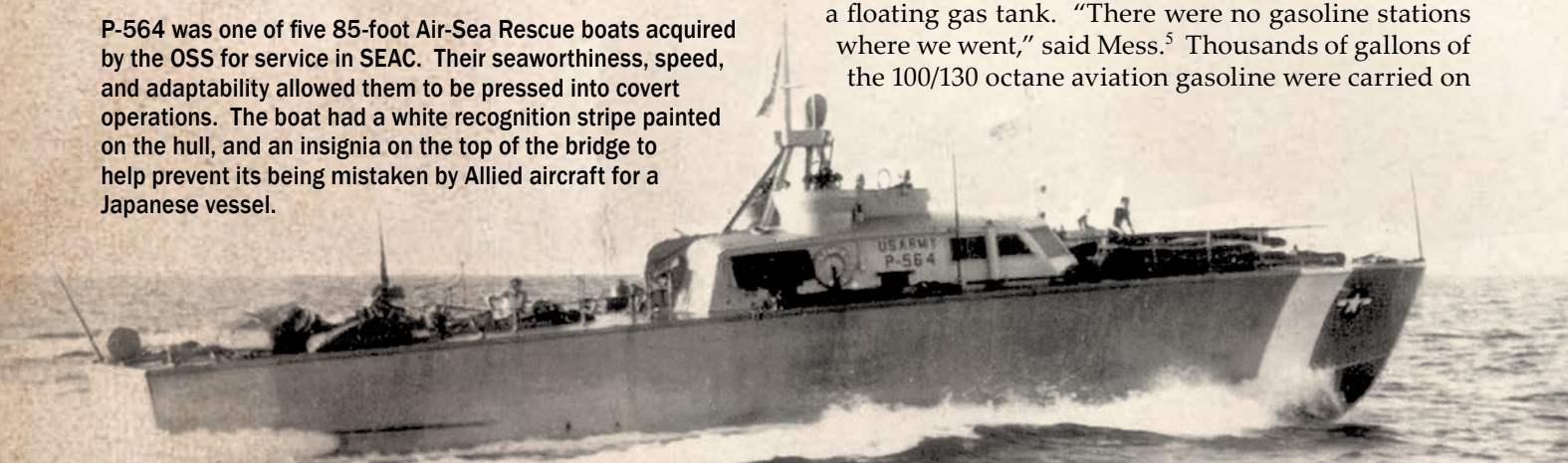
Coded orders were received on P-564's Hallicrafters radios. They were powered by a separate 10kw generator, but could also operate off a bank of batteries for 14 hours if necessary. The crew tried to keep the batteries fully charged at all times. The radio was a navigation tool as well, augmenting the sextant and stars. The radioman monitored a frequency that beeped at exactly 1600 hours. Everyone's watches were synchronized to the beep, critical when navigating by compass, speed and time alone. Most importantly, P-564 was designed to be fast.

P-564 was one of five 85-foot Air-Sea Rescue boats acquired by the OSS for service in SEAC. Their seaworthiness, speed, and adaptability allowed them to be pressed into covert operations. The boat had a white recognition stripe painted on the hull, and an insignia on the top of the bridge to help prevent its being mistaken by Allied aircraft for a Japanese vessel.



Skipper Walter L. Mess named P-564 after his wife, Jeanie, holding their daughter, Jean.

It had twin supercharged 1550 horsepower Rolls Royce engines license-built by Packard. Each engine burned 110 gallons per hour at the 14-15 knots cruising speed [17 miles per hour]. Consumption was exponentially higher at "full bore." "I once clocked P-564 at 52-53 knots [62 miles per hour]," recalled Mess. The boat carried less than 4,000 gallons in its internal tanks, limiting its "official range" to 600 nautical miles. By using the wind and currents, and occasionally running on one motor to conserve fuel, Mess could extend the range to 800 miles. Often, this was not enough for a round trip. On long-range operations, P-564 was little more than a floating gas tank. "There were no gasoline stations where we went," said Mess.⁵ Thousands of gallons of the 100/130 octane aviation gasoline were carried on



U.S. Army Air Force Air-Sea Rescue Boat Inboard Plan and Profile: Weight - 102,000 pounds,



The crew of P-564. Back, from left to right: M/Sgt Earl L. Williams, Cpl Joseph P. Jones, S/Sgt Lester H. Linville, T/5 Joseph E. Viola. Front, left to right: Sgt Willard R. Floyd, T/Sgt Harry F. Johnson, 2LT John A. Swayze, 1LT Walter L. Mess, WOJG James H. Flynn, Sgt Benjamin W. Brunaugh, T/Sgt Louis K. Woodland, and Cpl Robert L. Philpott.



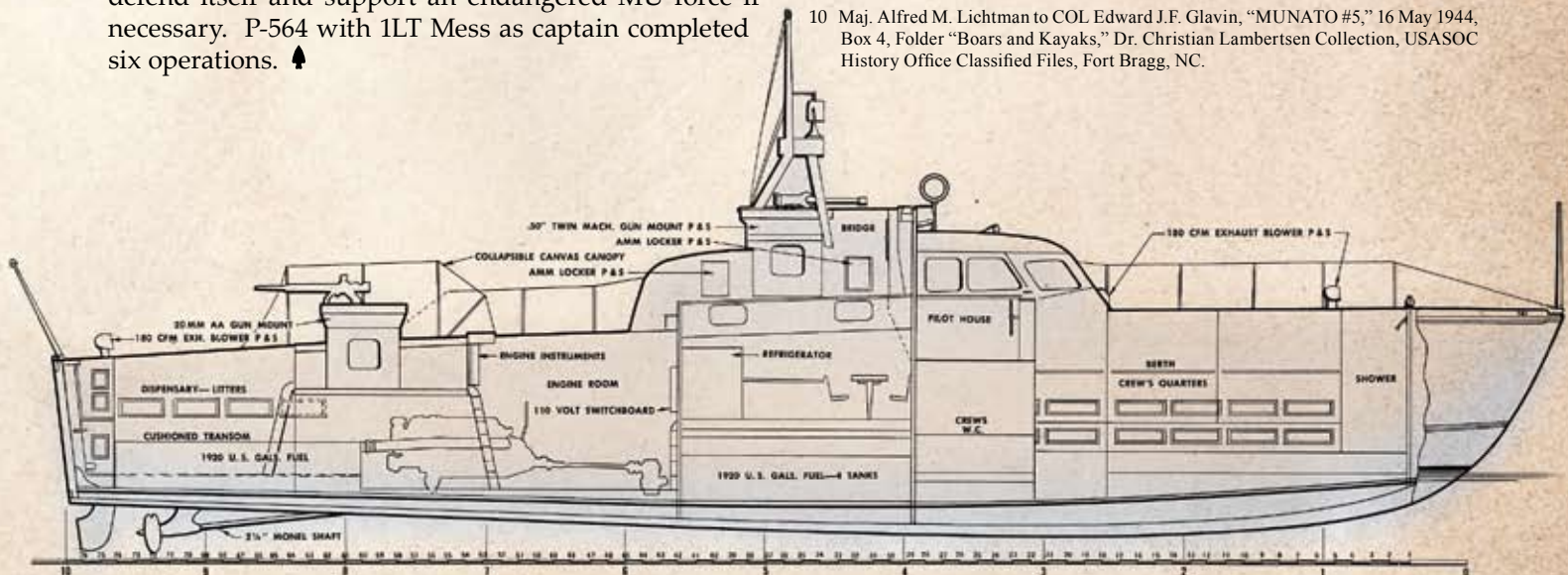
P-564's main armament was a 20 mm Oerlikon cannon, mounted at the stern. Operational equipment, such as the LCR in this photograph, was also stowed there.

deck in 55-gallon drums. "We would load up the boat just about to the point that she would sink," chuckled Mess. "And, no one smoked on my boat."⁶ The reality was that "a single incendiary bullet would convert one of these craft into a 70-ton funeral pyre for all hands on board."⁷ The boat also had other special modifications for clandestine missions.

Since its high performance motors were loud, special valves routed the exhaust underwater and the engine compartment was enclosed in eight inches of insulation. Although not completely silent, these modifications muffled the sound considerably. "At night a person would have to be within 10 feet of the boat to hear it," reflected Mess.⁸ The boat had another surprise. Although not designed for combat—the boat's hull was only 1 1/2 inch plywood—P-564 had several crew-served weapons. The heaviest was a 20 mm Oerlikon automatic cannon mounted on the stern. Each side of P-564 had a gun tub with twin .50 caliber M2 machineguns. P-564 could defend itself and support an endangered MU force if necessary. P-564 with 1LT Mess as captain completed six operations. ⬆

Endnotes

- 1 COL Carl F. Eifler to BG William J. Donovan, "Detailed Report of My Activities Covering the Period December 26, 1942 to Date," 6 April 1943, F 49, B 39, E 190, RG 226, NARA. For more on the 85-foot boats, see the original manual, T.O. NO. 19-85AB-1, "Handbook of Instructions for 85-Foot AAF Rescue Boats," 1 February 1945.
- 2 LCDR Kenneth M. Pier to LT Guy Martin, "Maritime Capabilities and Requirements," 6 December 1944, Box 1, Folder "Arakan Operation," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Until established as a separate service by the National Defense Act of 1947, the Air Force belonged to the Army. This meant that in WWII, the Army had part responsibility for rescuing pilots that were downed at sea. The P-564 started its journey from New York in September 1944. Maj. Alfred M. Lichtman to LTC Richard P. Heppner, "MUSEAC #12," 13 September 1944, B91, E 133, RG 226, NARA.
- 4 Walter Mess, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 March 2008, Falls Church, VA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Walter Mess, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, Fort Bragg, NC, notes, 5 January 2009.
- 6 Walter Mess, interview, 24 March 2008.
- 7 "AFU DET 101 and the Arakan Campaign," [May 1945], F 76, B 43, E 190, RG 226, National Archives and Records Administration.
- 8 Mess interview, 5 January 2009.
- 9 LCDR Kenneth M. Pier to LT Guy Martin, "Maritime Capabilities and Requirements," 6 December 1944, Box 1, Folder "Arakan Operation," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 10 Maj. Alfred M. Lichtman to COL Edward J.F. Glavin, "MUNATO #5," 16 May 1944, Box 4, Folder "Boats and Kayaks," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



Length - 85 feet, Beam - 20 feet, Draft - 6 feet, Internal Fuel Capacity - 3840 gallons, Cost - \$200,000.



When allowed on deck of P-564, non-crew members were to stay in the small area behind the bridge. On the bridge, one man is at the wheel while another keeps watch.

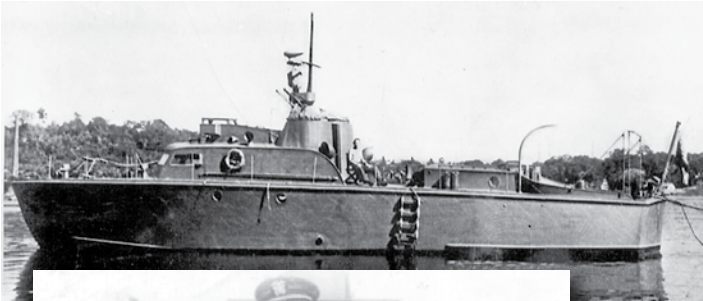
you to come up and eat." When up on deck, they were confined to the open area amidships behind the bridge. "They could visit, get some air, (and) see what was going on. It might be night; it might be day, depending on what I thought was best," said Mess. The only rules were: "No smoking;" and to "stay away from us," chuckled Mess.²⁵ Often passengers outranked Mess and "misunderstood who was going to be the boss" on the boat. Just like an airplane or helicopter pilot today, he was in charge onboard the vessel. All passengers obeyed the ship

captain's orders.²⁶ The passengers had to follow orders because the crew was fully engaged operating the boat.

Managing fuel consumption was a critical task. "The object was to save gas so we could make it back home," related Mess. Sometimes the boat was run on one engine. Gasoline from the 55-gallon drums on deck was used first. A garden hose was used to siphon the gas into the internal tanks. Empty drums were thrown overboard and a crewman shot them full of holes. "Every one of those things that we put overboard, we sank," said Mess.²⁷ "We had to take advantage of the wind and tides . . . That's why the tide tables were so important," the P-564 captain explained.²⁸ Crewmen always had to be alert.

Although the voyages were stressful, the "crew did things automatically without a lot of yelling or talking. They knew what their jobs were. We [were] a team, and that's what made it successful." said Mess.²⁹ To keep alert and the boat safe, helmsmen rotated every three hours and a lookout was continuously posted to watch for obstacles forward. The hatch to the engine room in the stern, was always open for the wind to "cool the (crewmen) and keep them happy."³⁰ Then the crew tried to ensure that their passengers were comfortable. "The whole idea was to handle them, keep them in order, keep them fresh with plenty of sleep, food, water and everything else . . . all this time they are preparing weapons or whatever they had to do," remembered Mess.³¹ Coordinating the effort required the full attention of Mess. "I might nap in the chartroom . . . but that would be it. When she was underway, I would be there all the time. You get used to it."³² Eight hours later, the two boats had Foul Island on the horizon.

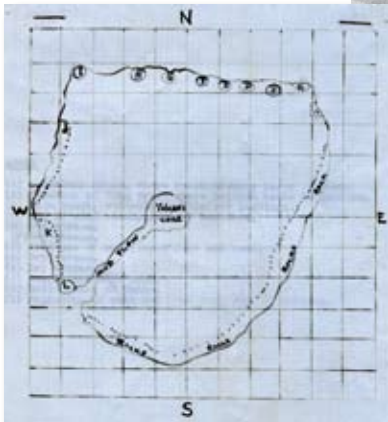
Although aerial photographs indicated that the island was unoccupied, P-564 and P-101 waited until dark to approach.³³ P-564's crew readied the swimmers' four kayaks. With an A-frame on the stern, they "swung the [boat] up on it, brought it overboard, and brought it around the side," said Mess.³⁴ Then they waited until 0045 for the swimmers to return. When they did, the men reported having seen no sign of the Japanese.³⁵ It was time for the OGs to go in for a more thorough reconnaissance.



The P-101 was only 63 feet long. Being smaller than P-564, it could carry fewer additional personnel and equipment. P-101 was commanded by Lt (jg) Ralph N. Hubbard. On its crew were Sgt Ingolv Nelson, EM 2/c Wellman Page, MoMM 1/c Clarence H. Stanford, MoMM 1/c JAMES P. Mann, and Pfc George Vuletic.



The landing beach at Foul Island. Barely visible are range markers laid out by the MU swimmers.



The environmental and cartographic intelligence of Foul Island gathered by Operation BOSTON was disseminated by the OSS to SEAC. Aerial reconnaissance photos indicated that Foul Island was unoccupied. The OSS mission on Operation BOSTON was to verify that assumption.



Area of Operations of the Arakan Field Unit.

The OG force was led by Army 1LT Louis A. O’Jibway. They left the P-boats at 5 a.m. in three rubber boats: two 7-man LCRs and a 2-man LCR.³⁶ O’Jibway’s 7-man LCR landed first and provided security while the others came ashore. Then, O’Jibway divided his force. Sergeant (Sgt) Thompson, Corporals (Cpls) Starkey, Armer, Devereaux, and Private First Class (Pfc) Kostrevic and Hess, stayed on the beach under the command of Master Sergeant (M/Sgt) Zimmerman. They had an SCR-300 radio to contact P-564. 1LT O’Jibway and his team headed to the north, but after 400 yards, they stopped to wait for daylight because it was so dark. At 6 a.m., 1LT O’Jibway sent Staff Sergeant (S/Sgt) Krueger and four men to reconnoiter the island’s north side. O’Jibway and two men returned to the beachhead for two others, and then checked the south



1LT Louis A. O’Jibway, on right, led the OG mission to Foul Island. A native American, he was known to many simply as “Jib.”

side. They climbed the volcano on Foul Island and noted its geologic features.

While the OGs reconnoitered the interior, Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade John E. Babb and Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Herman L. Becker kayaked to shore to take beach sand samples.³⁷ Everyone was back aboard the P-boats by 0935.³⁸ Mess gave the swimmers and OGs freshwater to clean their weapons afterwards.³⁹ One of the most memorable aspects of the operation was the panoramic photography of the island taken from the deck of P-564.

Mess described how that was accomplished: “We practiced on Ceylon . . . to figure out how to get photographs of shorelines.” The best way was to take the charts and figure out where there was enough water depth to allow circumnavigation of an island from a similar distance without running aground. The photographers steadied the cameras on the boat’s .50 caliber “gun tubs.” P-564 idled at 6 to 8 knots. Cruising at the same speed and distance from Foul Island, it was a simple matter for the photographers to periodically snap their Leica cameras.⁴⁰ The only trick was it had to be done at “slack tide” because P-564 would have been pushed around by the incoming or outgoing tides. A slack tide at either flood or ebb allowed the boat to remain relatively stationary with the currents around the island.⁴¹ Mission accomplished, the two boats headed back to Kyaukpyu, eight hours away. But what had the MU and OG teams found out?



U.S. Coastguardmen LT (jg) John P. Booth and CBM James R. Eubank had been the first OSS personnel on Foul Island. They returned to the island the next day by donning fins and swimming to the island.



Lieutenant John E. Babb, USN, and Chief Petty Officer Herman J. Becker, USCG, kayaked to the island after the OGs landed to gather beach samples. Seen here returning to P-564, they are using a British kayak because the OSS versions failed to arrive in the Arakan.



First Mate WOJG Flynn and 1LT Mess relax as they wait for the shore parties to return.





Once the mission was complete, the boats left at top speed. The cameraman on board P-564 captured P-101 in his last shot of the island.



The primary signs of human life that the MU and OG teams found on Foul Island were not Japanese, but British. At the base of this tree was an emergency cache of supplies for downed pilots.

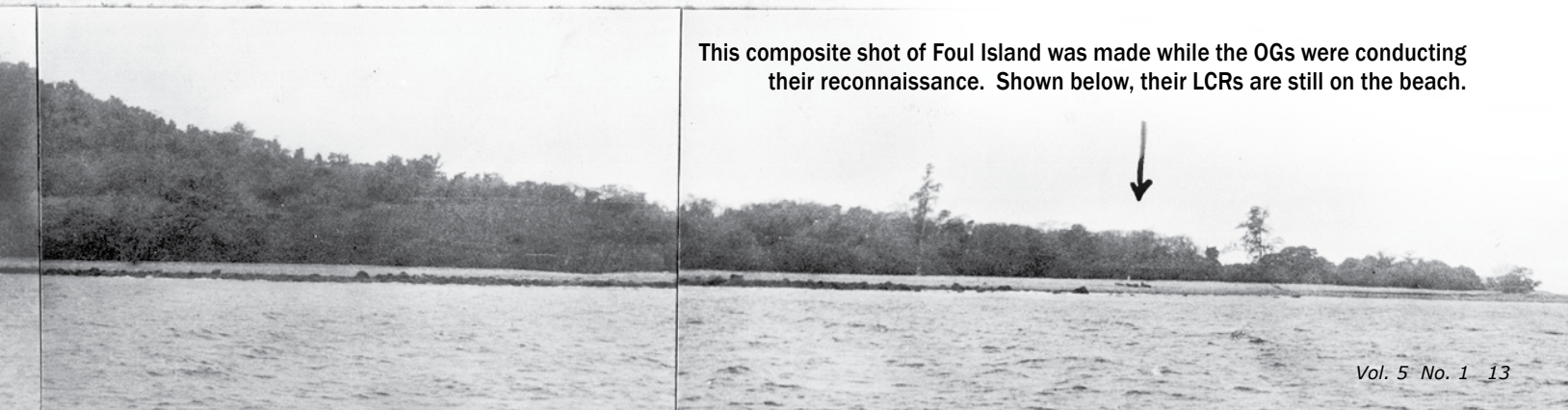
The mission confirmed that the island was not in enemy hands. This was vital to the SEAC's invasion plan for Rangoon in May. The OSS mission explained why the Japanese were not on Foul Island; it had little military value other than as a temporary coast watching station. There were no food sources other than a few coconut palms and fish, and no fresh water. An outpost would have to be resupplied regularly, which was difficult for the Japanese then. Geographic and hydrologic data was reported to SEAC.⁴² The only evidence of the Japanese were several old ship mines that had washed up on shore, and an abandoned Burmese fishing camp. Interestingly, the most visible sign of human activity was British. They found an emergency British supply cache buried at the base of a tree. Booth said, "apparently the British had to know about [it] but they never told us. That's how good the communication was."⁴³

But, the mission was a success. As Booth recalled years later, "We weren't there to start a firefight, we were there to get information."⁴⁴ Now, MU boats did not have to avoid Foul Island on future missions.⁴⁵ Operation BOSTON was Mess's and P-564's last. Because additional OSS P-Boats had arrived in SEAC, P-564 was ordered to Calcutta to undergo maintenance. Soon however, the entire P-Boat fleet was withdrawn from the Arakan Coast in anticipation of the upcoming monsoon season, and returned to their permanent base at "Dead Man's Cove" outside Trincomalee Harbor, Ceylon.⁴⁶ The success of Allied operations in Burma meant that the fleet was disbanded in mid-June after Rangoon's liberation.⁴⁷ As for his experiences as the skipper of P-564, Mess shrugs it off by saying "I was just a taxi driver."⁴⁸ †

1LT O'Jibway and his party surveyed the south side of the island by crossing the flow of the island's mud volcano, shown below.



This composite shot of Foul Island was made while the OGs were conducting their reconnaissance. Shown below, their LCRs are still on the beach.





After the SEAC-based Maritime Unit was dissolved in mid-June, 1LT Mess was assigned as a door “kicker.” He helped supply a budding OSS-trained guerrilla movement in Thailand.

Thank You

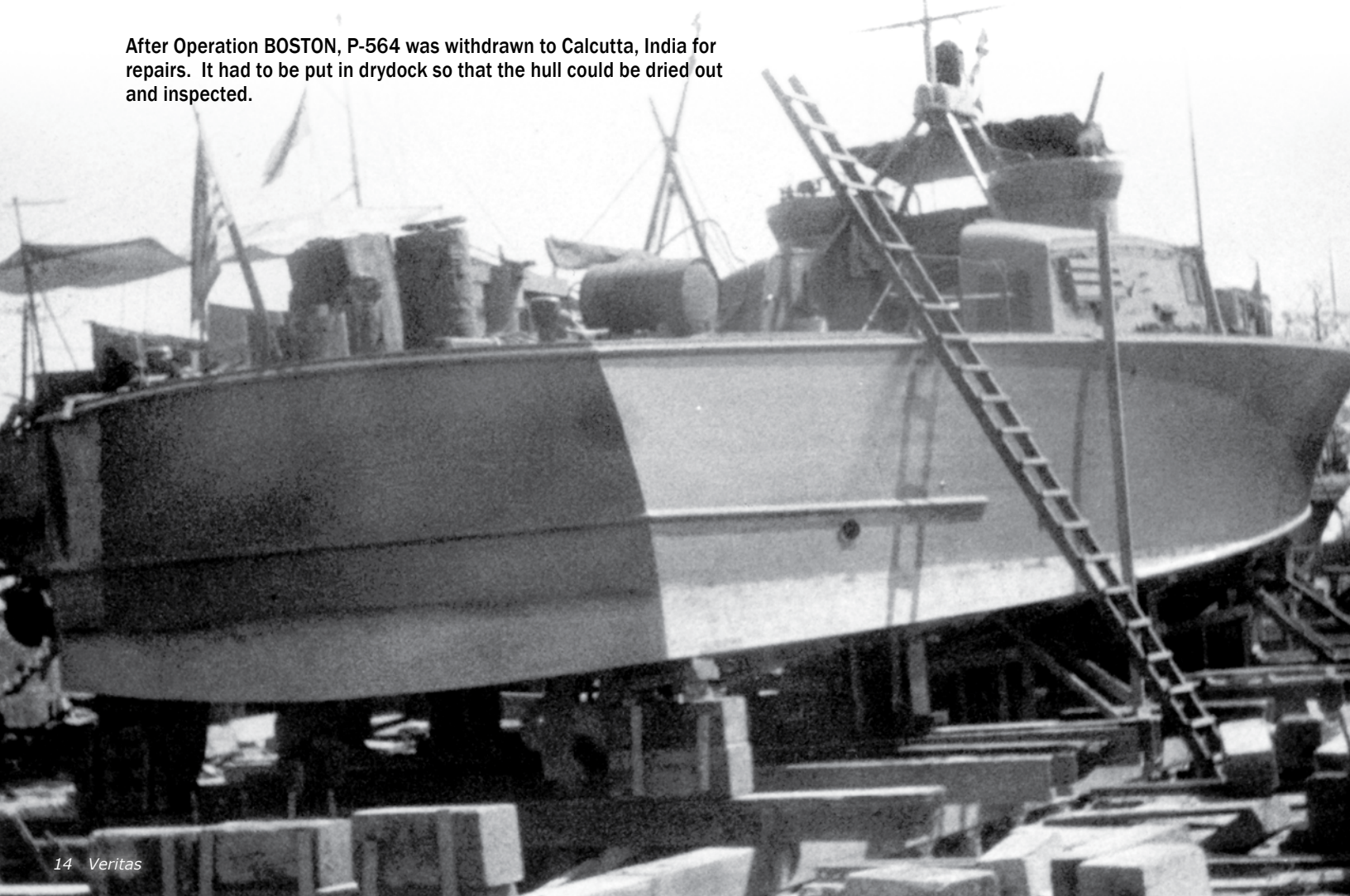
I would like to thank OSS MU veterans Walter Mess and Dr. Christian Lambertsen for their extensive help with this article. A thank you is also extended to Ms. Virginia Stanford, widow of P-101 veteran Clarence Stanford, and LCDR Michael E. Bennett, USCG. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues Pedro Felliciano, Earl Moniz, Laura Goddard, and Alejandro Lujan, Chief Archivist at the USAJFKSWCS Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, for going out of their way to provide assistance.

After Operation BOSTON, P-564 was withdrawn to Calcutta, India for repairs. It had to be put in drydock so that the hull could be dried out and inspected.

Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Special Operations units in Vietnam.

Endnotes

- 1 LCDR Derek Lee and LT John E. Babb to LTC Harry Berno, “Report on Operation “BOSTON” (Reconnaissance of Foul Island), 21 February 1945, F 2141, B 118, E 154, RG 226, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA);also in Box 1, Folder “Maritime Units in the Arakan,” LCDR Derek A. Lee “Report of Proceeding,” [late February 1945], Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Also see Box 1, Folder “Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia,” Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Kermit Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS* (New York: Walker and Company, 1976), 223-224.
- 3 **Unlike what would be done for the Norwegian, Italian, French, Greek, German or Yugoslav OGS, there was no Burmese community in the United States to speak of to provide a pool of recruits.**
- 4 “Office of Strategic Services Maritime Unit: A History,” (*The Blast*, 1st Quarter 2000), 16-17.
- 5 Roosevelt, *The War Report*, 81; 226.
- 6 Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1970), 364.
- 7 Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets: The War Report of the OSS Volume II* (Washington DC: Carrollton Press, 1976), 393.



- 8 Dr. Christian Lambertsen interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, Philadelphia, PA, 25 September 2007, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files.
- 9 Maritime Unit Arakan, [June 1945], F 13, B 549, E 92, RG 226, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
- 10 Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1987), 468-469.
- 11 Kermit Roosevelt, *The Overseas Targets: The War Report of the OSS Volume II* (Washington DC: Carrollton Press, 1976), 364.
- 12 LTC William R. Peers to MG William J. Donovan, "Report Covering Period 1 February to 29 February, 1944, inclusive," 29 February 1944, F 52, B 39, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 13 John P. Booth and James R. Eubank interview by Dr. Joseph Fischer, March 1998, ARSOF Archives, JFK Special Warfare Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 14 **The OSS created a new command structure for SEAC when MG Donovan flew to New Delhi, India, in November 1943 to meet with Vice Admiral Mountbatten. They set up "P" Division, a joint supervisory panel that deconflicted both British and American clandestine operations in the region. As the P Division coordinator for north Burma, Colonel (COL) William R. Peers retained autonomy of Detachment 101's operations. Operation BOSTON was cleared by P Division on 16 February.** Moscrip to Farr, Priority Cable, 16 February 1945, F 2482, B 141, E 154, RG 226, NARA.
- 15 Booth and Eubank interview, March 1998; Operation "BOSTON" Operation Order and "Questionnaire No. 20 Foul Island, [19 February 1945], Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 16 Maritime Unit Arakan, [June 1945], F 13, B 549, E 92, RG 226, NARA.
- 17 **Mess earned a BA from George Washington University, MBA from Temple University, and a LLB, MA, and Doctor of Laws from Catholic University.**
- 18 Maritime Unit Arakan, [June 1945], F 13, B 549, E 92, RG 226, NARA. **The P-564 had been involved in Operations CLEVELAND (25-26 January 1945), TARGET (1-2 February), SNATCH (6 February), NORTH CAROLINA (11-13 February), and SOUTH DAKOTA (16 February). It is a testament to the crew that the boat was able to function reliably throughout the entire period.**
- 19 Walter Mess part I, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 March 2008, Falls Church, VA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008.
- 21 Walter Mess part II, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 March 2008, Falls Church, VA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 22 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008.
- 23 Operation "Boston" Operation Order, 19 February 1945, Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 25 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 26 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008.
- 27 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 28 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008.
- 29 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 30 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 31 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 32 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 33 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008.
- 34 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 35 LCDR Derek A. Lee "Report of Proceeding," [late February 1945], Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Also see Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 LT Louis A. O'Jibway, "Operation "RUGBY," [22 February 1945], Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **Operation RUGBY was the OG part of Operation BOSTON.**
- 37 LCDR Derek A. Lee "Report of Proceeding," [late February 1945], Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Also see Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 38 LT Louis A. O'Jibway, "Operation "RUGBY," [22 February 1945], Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 39 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 40 Mess part I interview, 24 March 2008; **The photographers were Captain T. Johnson (Army-OG), Lieutenant John E. Babb (MU-USN) and Lieutenant Commander Derek A. Lee (MU-Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve). The OSS Field Photo Branch opted not to cooperate.** LCDR Derek A. Lee "Report of Proceeding," [late February 1945], Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 41 Mess part II interview, 24 March 2008.
- 42 LT John E. Babb, "Answers to Questionnaire No. 20 on Foul Island," 22 February 1945, Box 1, Folder "Maritime Units in the Arakan," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 43 Booth and Eubank interview, March 1998.
- 44 Booth and Eubank interview, March 1998.
- 45 **MU used Foul Island as a temporary "harbor" when they dropped off indigenous agents in Operations AKRON I-III on 21-22 March 1945.**
- 46 LCDR Kenneth M. Pier, "M.U. Plans," 10 May 1945, Box 3, Folder Misc Notes on Use of MU in Arakan," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Also see Box 1, Folder "Misc Mission Reports from SE Asia," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 47 Coughlin to Hunter, radio transcript 140, 11 June 1945, Box 5, Folder "MU Program," Dr. Christian Lambertsen Collection, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **The entire MU in SEAC was also disbanded at the same time.**
- 48 Mess part I interview, 5 January 2009.

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