

A Dangerous Sunday at Okinawa

These were suicide planes common to this area.

—Lt. Foster William Lamb, USNR, commanding officer of the patrol craft sweeper *USS PCS-1460*, in his report on enemy aircraft attacks made against his ship at Okinawa on 3 June 1945.¹

Map 1-1



Okinawa Island

Building the Navy's Bases in World War II, History of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Civil Engineer Corps 1940-1946 Volume II
(Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947)

2 Chapter 1

In early afternoon on Sunday, 3 June 1945, two naval vessels were present in the Chimu Wan area on the east coast of Okinawa. The first, the U.S. Coast Guard-manned, large infantry landing craft *USS LCI(L)-90*, was at anchor in Chimu Wan Harbor, functioning as the harbor entrance control unit. Her condition of readiness consisted of one man stationed at No. 1 20mm gun at the bow, with the gun uncovered and cocked, and an ammunition ready box opened, but with no magazine in the gun. There was also a lookout positioned at the conning station, who was functioning as signalman and guarding (monitoring) the vessel's SCR 608 and 610 radio circuits.²

Photo 1-1



Large infantry landing craft *USS LCI(L)-87* leading other U.S. Coast Guard-manned LCIs into an American port, after their service in European Waters, circa 1944-45. National Archives photograph #26-G-3507

The patrol craft sweeper *USS PCS-1460* was nearby, outside the harbor and seaward of the landing craft, carrying out her duties as patrol vessel in the bay. Built by the Western Boat Building Company at Tacoma, Washington, she had been commissioned on 28 February 1944. Patrol craft sweepers dispatched to the Western Pacific spent most of their time with the amphibious forces. Some functioned as control vessels, orchestrating the movements of waves of assault craft to hostile beaches. Others were primarily involved in screening (helping protect) transport areas and carrying out anti-submarine patrols.³

During movement to, and following amphibious operations, PCSs shepherded amphibious forces to and from island objectives in forward

areas. In intervening periods, when Allied assault forces were embroiled in combat ashore, PCSs patrolled off the islands to prevent Japanese resupply-by-sea of enemy forces. Patrol craft sweepers, while serving as patrol and escort vessels, were sometimes placed under the command of a mine squadron or division commander, and worked with minecraft tasked with similar duties, after finishing sweeping assault areas clear of mines before landing craft carrying Marines or soldiers hit the beaches.

A first hint of danger came at 1339, when the starboard lookout aboard *PCS-1460*, reported three “Vals” (enemy Navy type 99 dive bombers) coming in from the east, closing the range on a westerly course. Two of the Vals broke formation, as the first plane continued on its original course. The second aircraft crossed well ahead of *PCS-1460*, made a sharp turn to the south, then the east, and headed directly for her. The patrol craft sweeper’s guns opened fire, and the attacker—then about 2,000 yards distant, at an altitude of 3,000 feet—was hit by an exploding 3”/50-gun round, and knocked out of control.⁴

Photo 1-2

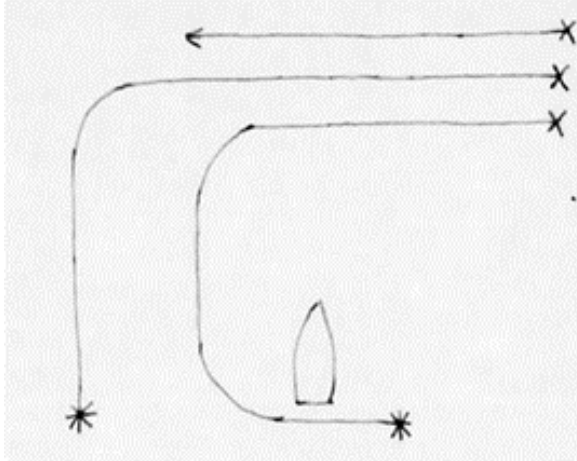


Patrol craft sweeper USS *PCS-1460*, location unknown, circa 1944.
U.S. Navy photograph courtesy of NavSource

Damaged, the dive bomber veered off, unable to reach *PCS-1460* before crashing. *LCI(L)-90*, anchored inshore in the anchorage area, was in a direct line with the plane’s course, which was then to the west. On sighting this new target, the pilot appeared to gain enough control to maneuver, and finally just “dropped” on the landing craft.⁵

4 Chapter 1

Diagram 1-2



Northern dive bomber farthest from *PCS-1460* continued on its original course; the other two broke away, the first to attack (southern one) changed course to the south, then came in from the west.
Commanding Officer, USS *PCS-1460*, report dated 11 June 1945

The third (center) Val, after circling, then began a run from the west. The commanding officer of the patrol craft sweeper, Lt. Foster William Lamb, USNR, initially ordered ship's head shifted to meet the attack head-on, and engines ahead full.⁶

Photo 1-3

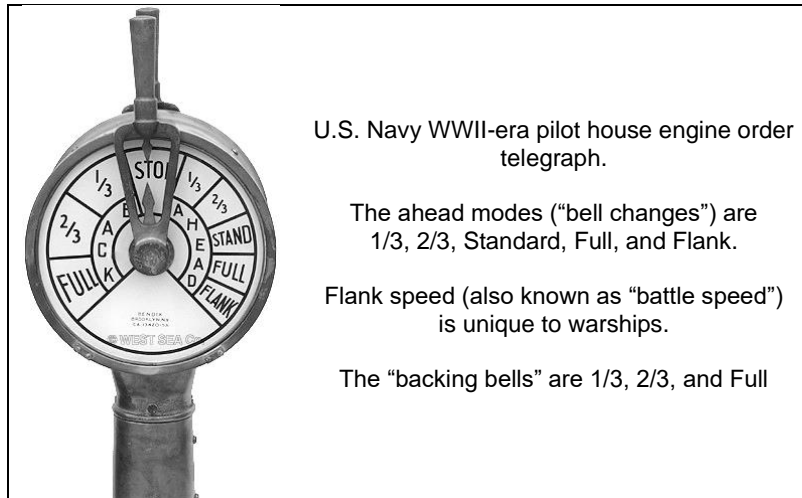
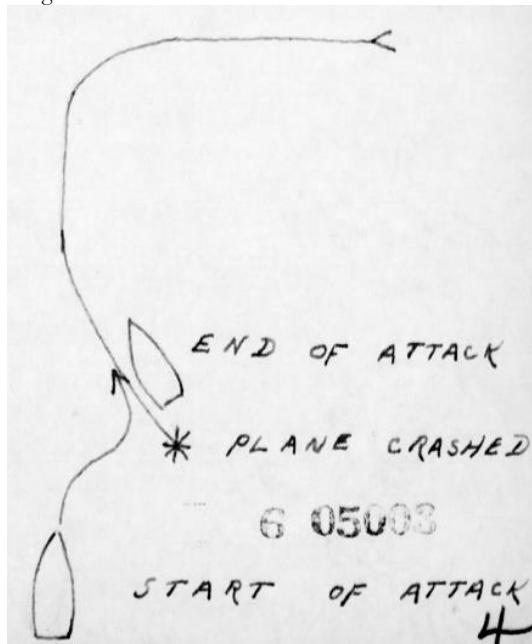


Photo 1-4



Japanese "Val" (Navy Type 99 carrier bomber) in action during Pearl Harbor attack. National Archives photograph #80-G-32908

Diagram 1-3



Flight path of second "Val" to attack *PCS-1460*, and corresponding movements of the ship to best position herself, to bring all guns to bear and counter this attack. Commanding Officer, *USS PCS-1460*, report dated 11 June 1945

When the dive bomber hurling downward toward his ship was only 600 yards distant, Lamb ordered speed increased to “ahead flank” (her maximum of 14 knots), and right full rudder. At 400 yards, a 3”/50 round knocked off the plane’s landing gear, and the ship’s rudder was shifted to left full, because the aircraft appeared to have been veered slightly to port. The pilot of the plane, then only 30 yards distance and 100 feet off the water, “winged over” and, with wings vertical, attempted to bank into the *PCS-1460*’s bridge and pilot house—clearly a Kamikaze action. Maneuvering by the ship then in progress prevented the aircraft—essentially a very “large missile” loaded with explosive-munitions and flammable aviation fuel—from impacting the wooden vessel. Had this occurred, ship loss, and massive casualties were almost a certainty.⁷

At 1347, as the patrol craft sweeper was coming left, the plane missed her, continued down her port side and crashed violently into the water about 20 yards off her port quarter, just as the ship’s stern was swinging away in response to rudder. During the action, all ship’s guns available were trained and firing continuously. A minimum of 400 hits of all caliber were observed made on the aircraft. The plane had strafed the ship without pause from about 500 yards out, but fortunately *PCS-1460* did not suffer any personnel casualties.⁸

***LCI(L)-90* SUFFERS CASUALTIES**

No aircraft were visible to this ship until one plane dived below the low ceiling and descended toward the ship. At this time the [ship’s] general alarm had been sounded, and all hands were proceeding to battle stations except those who were already on station.

—From an action report by Lt.(jg) J. A. Spear, describing the Japanese suicide aircraft attack against *USS LCI(L)-90* on 3 June 1945. Spear was the acting commanding officer, Lt.(jg) William H. Nadon, USCGR, having suffered serious wounds in the attack.⁹

While *PCS-1460* was engaged in combat with the second Val to attack her, the first one as previously mentioned (hit by a 3-inch round that knocked it out of control), had veered off course and crashed on the *LCI(L)-90*. At the time of the attack, the landing craft was lying at anchor about 300 yards from the beach.¹⁰

Large infantry landing craft were designed to transport and deliver fighting troops, typically a company of infantry or Marines, to a hostile shore once a beachhead was secured. Owing to space limitations when troops were embarked, the ship's complement was relatively small: 3 officers and 21 enlisted personnel. *LCI(L)-90*'s armament when commissioned on 6 February 1943, was four 20mm single-barrel, anti-aircraft guns (1 forward, 1 amidships, and 2 aft), and two .50-caliber machine guns.¹¹

The Val, when first sighted by personnel aboard the landing craft, was descending almost vertically. The plane initially appeared to have as its objective, a small Marine camp located on the island of Takahanare-jima. However, upon emerging below the cloud ceiling, the pilot apparently sighted *LCI(L)-90*, then banked, decreased the angle of descent, and came in on the landing craft.¹²

The suicide attack from astern precluded the possibility of getting No. 1 gun on the bow in action against the plane. Two men manned No. 2 gun on the flagdeck, but the aircraft struck the ship before any shots could be fired in defense. The main forces of the impact were taken by the after starboard side of the pilot house and conning station, where the shock wave produced threw the men clear of No. 2 gun tub.¹³

Signalman Third Class John Parcell Jr. was killed, and eight others were wounded, including the commanding officer, who was seriously injured. *USS LCI(L)-90* suffered damage to her bridge, wheelhouse, and officers' quarters, but was able to operate under her own power. She departed the area on 14 June, bound for Saipan, en route to Leyte, Philippines, for more permanent repairs.¹⁴

USS PCS-1460 GARNERS THIRD BATTLE STAR

PCS-1460, only sixteen months old, garnered her third battle star of the Pacific War at Okinawa, for the period 1 April to 27 June 1945 which included the above action. She had earned her first one for the capture and occupation of Saipan, as a member of the initial group of PCSs dispatched to the Western Pacific. Her second battle star was to come at Iwo Jima. (A complete list of all PCS battle stars may be found in Appendix A.)

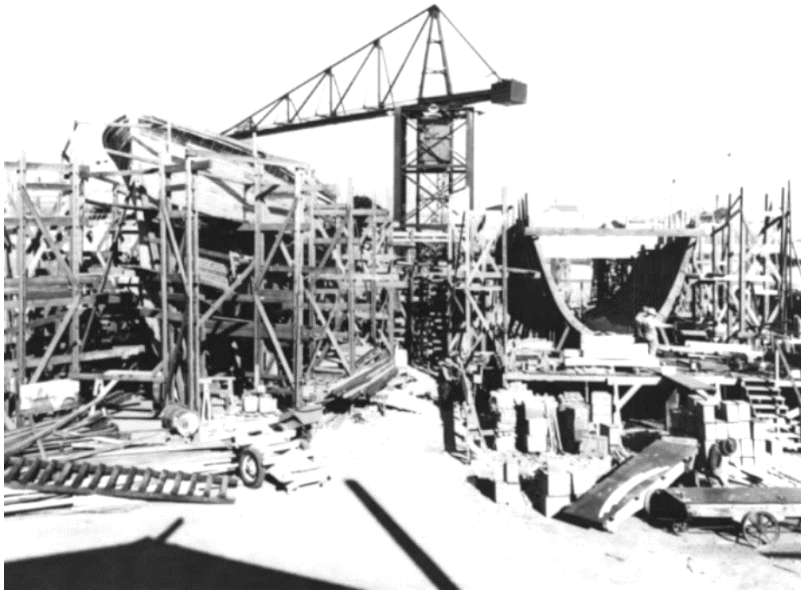
MOBILITY, EXPERIENCE, AND LUCK IMPORTANT

To conclude this short chapter about *PCS-1460*, it is appropriate to contemplate why she survived. Luck was important, but other factors had bearing, as well. Generally, small, slow, lightly-armed wooden vessels had little chance against one or more suicide planes bent on their destruction—particularly since they easily catch fire and burn rapidly.

8 Chapter 1

As noted in the preface, most Kamikaze attacks at Okinawa were against larger, steel-hulled, higher-value ships. Many of these suffered significant damage or were sunk (some only after several aircraft strikes), with associated loss of life. USS *PCS-1460* escaped this fate as a result of adroit gunnery, and shiphandling by her relatively young captain and crew who, had quickly gained hard-won combat experience, following their arrival at Saipan only a year earlier.

Photo 1-5



USS *PCS-1422* (left) and the harbor tug USS *Menatonon* (YTB-254) under construction at the W. F. Stone and Son Shipyard, Alameda, California, on 10 December 1943. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 72394