



Dan Friend February 9, 2014

Was a US Army ST Tugboat Lost at Normandy?

Commander A. B. Stanford, USNR, was in charge of Task Force 128 as it left England for D-Day early on the morning of June 6th, 1944. Stanford wrote a book about the trip: *“Force Mulberry: - The Planning And Installation Of Artificial Harbor Off U.S. Normandy Beaches In World War II”* which provides several interesting new “ST” D-Day details.

His group which included transports, escort vessels and 9 US Army small tugs was due to arrive the next morning at 7 AM to begin work on blockship sinking and the construction of the Mulberry Piers. Convoy EWC1A, which included the tugboat group, was headed for the American sector (Omaha); Convoy EWC1B went to the British sector (Arromanches) at the same time. Sadly, no list has yet been found of the ST’s that probably were in EWC1B. As far as I can tell, no ST was working at Normandy earlier than about 7 AM on D-Day plus one.

As the convoy moves ahead, the convoy commander notices a strange situation with the group of tugs in EWC1A. Instead of the 9 tugboats ordered to participate, he has 10. As it turns out, the officer running the operation, Lieutenant Fred Barton, USNR; had agreed to allow an unidentified ST to come along...they had creatively changed the numbers on the boat to confuse the Army. At this point no one knows *which* ST just came along for the ride to D-Day!

Stanford also reveals that as he was arriving at Omaha Beach, several of the tugs were commandeered for beach work without his permission, and that one was damaged, probably **ST 798**. Most importantly, early in the morning on 6/7/44, Stanford indicates that ***one was sunk***. Yet no other official source anywhere mentions that an ST was sunk at Normandy anywhere close to D-Day!

Might this be because the unknown ST lost at Normandy was the one with an invalid number, one created to confuse the Army brass? It's possible but difficult to prove.

Of the nine known ST's in Convoy EWC1A, only two have unknown fates after their work at Normandy: **ST 759** and **ST 770**. Either of them might have been the boat sunk on June 7th. Or it might have been one of the many ST's that were there that we have not yet identified by ST number as being present.

It is also possible that the boat was quickly raised and thus not recorded, but it does seem odd that Commander Stanford clearly remembers it happening but no other record exists. Perhaps the tugboat lost really was run by the courageous and spunky tugboat crew with a will to participate in D-Day...even without orders.

Or there is one very good last possibility. **ST 247** hit an underwater obstacle while lining up the blockships at Omaha Beach. Peter Dilullo in the book "Little Ships- Tugboats at D-Day, Normandy" indicates the boat was beached to prevent sinking, and in fact a photo of the ST on the beach is in the book. No exact date for this is given, but blockship work was the first task the tugs undertook at Normandy and it could have happened on June 7. It took three days to make repairs.

Was an ST lost at Normandy? This is just one more fascinating mystery amidst the dozens surrounding the history of the US Army Small Tugs.