

55 YEARS AGO – FRANK KNOX WAS GROUNDED ON PRATAS REEF –

The ship's log of 21 July reports three men in the on-board salvage crew "are with motor whale boat at GRAPPLE. (ARS-7)" At 0800. In the log of 22 July at "1108 – Motor whaleboat crew returned by helo." The motor whale boat was returned likely on the 24th or 25th, because on the 26th all ships were directed to depart the area for typhoon evasion. Then BMSN Richard Swaney recalls, I steaming behind a larger ship during stormy weather for was he said was "a long time". As COX you are responsible for the lives under your care and the motor whaleboat, very seaworthy, but with limits. The three survived, as did the motor whaleboat thanks to Swaney's skill. CDR Price, Swaney's Division Officer aboard recalls Swaney was likely the best small boat handler he experienced in the Navy. BMCS {Picture of Swaney w/ flag and as a Chief.} He recalled the the 38 days on Pratas Reef "taught me almost everything I needed to pass all the rating exams." [If you have a chance to read the upcoming publication STRANDED, you will understand why the many salvage rigs and situations encountered by salvors and crew was an advanced degree in ship handling and salvage operations. ED]

Swaney became a coxswain in an unusual way. He was riding in a boat when the coxswain of the boat made several unsuccessful approaches to the ship. "Let me try", volunteered Swaney. He made the landing the first try. His skill was confirmed when he handled the Frank Knox motor whaleboat during rough weather off Vietnam. He approached a mine sweeper to pick up classified orders; Ens Price was aboard. The mine sweeper was rolling. Close alongside, the mine sweeper rolled and was suddenly above the whale boat, diving down and "grazed the motor whaleboat, cracking the hull" recalls Price. Swaney's quick reactions maneuvered the whaleboat to a safe distance according to Price. Had Swaney not reacted in a timely and proper way "we would have been crushed" recalls Price. Swaney became the coxswain for Frank Knox during the 38 days on the reef and beyond.

