

## **View from the salvage fleet -**

If you are one you know it. If not, few remain who remember the 38-day struggle named the “most dramatic and successful ship salvage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. Kelly Goddard’s Navy salvage ship USS GRAPPLE ARS7 was first to arrive to lend assistance. They served as on scene commander during the initial salvage phase. Goddard was the 2012 WV State Commander. He traveled to Wilmington NC “because I wanted to meet and talk with the men who lived aboard that stranded ship. It was rough on us; the typhoons were scary. It must have been hell on them for 38 days.”

The destroyer USS FRANK KNOX was the Navy’s Ship of the Year in 1964. It ran aground July 18, 1965, at 0230 in the morning, setting in motion a massive effort to save the ship, refloat it and return it to the closest shipyard for repair. Goddard’s ship, USS GRAPPLE was the first salvage/rescue ship to arrive on scene. Towing three barges, GRAPPLE laid a salvage anchor and mooring cable, passing the cable to the KNOX. This prevented the KNOX from moving parallel to the reef, also called broaching, a fatal event for the ship. GRAPPLE then directed a tug to place one of the barges at the starboard quarter of KNOX, then ordered ammunition and fuel unloading to lighten the stranded ship. The work began immediately as a Typhoon Gilda threatened.

The barge eventually held about 10 tons of ammunition and around 41,000 gallons of Navy Special Fuel. As Gilda approached rain and wind rose and the barge started smashing at the side of the KNOX, splitting seams and damaging the ship’s side. The current was 5-6 knots pushing the KNOX sideways into danger. Shells, explosives and powder casings on the barge started falling off into the shallow water and between the ship and the barge. A small group of KNOX volunteers including ENS. Price, Marshall and Patterson dragged cargo netting over the load. GRAPPLE directed the tug COCOPA to pass a line to the bucking barge. They did so under very hazardous conditions while Patterson and the ship’s weapons officer, Roggencamp secured the tow line. The barge was towed away easing this crisis. Current across the reef was pushing on the KNOX. Winds continued to build to 30 knots, swells to 10-12 feet. GRAPPLE heaved on her mooring and the KNOX advanced to full power to avoid falling further into danger. The KNOX continued to sustain a terrific beating, pounding up and down, side to side on the reef. Goddard was with the captain on the bridge, relaying his orders to save both ships. He received a number of “Don’t relay that!” orders from his captain to avoid his unplanned comments.

Goddard and his CO were amazed to see the 22-foot motor whaleboat round the stern of the KNOX and head for GRAPPLE to shelter from the weather. The boat was skillfully tended by Rick Swaney BM3. The motor whale boat continued to shelter behind GRAPPLE. they were considering putting further to sea because wind and waves were moving the 3400-ton KNOX 75 feet along the reef, entrenching it on the reef. Just before midnight, GRAPPLE slipped her beach gear, letting the tow wire to the KNOX run free. No one could brave the open decks on the KNOX to assist. The KNOX

suffered great buffeting during the night of July 20. The worst of the storm passed, and USS MIDWAY arrived on scene to evacuate 155 nonessential personnel, leaving 95 volunteers aboard KNOX. GRAPPLE had to lay two new sets of beach gear to survive the weather and help the KNOX. Taken day by day, the saga seems like an endless series of weather and operational challenges.

The next day Swabey and his 2-person crew were reported at GRAPPLE. The following day Swabey and crew were returned to the KNOX by helicopter. As soon as sea conditions smoothed out the motor whale boat was returned. Swaney's skill with the whaleboat was the ride of his life.

GRAPPLE's best time to try to pull the KNOX off the reef was at high tide. There was only one high tide per day, often at night. About 4 hours of preparation preceded high tide for the KNOX crew and 2-3 hours for GRAPPLE and additional tugs. The work was stressful because of the constant danger of equipment failure or breakage under the extreme stress of powerful forces. On August 11, GRAPPLE was not available to assist. Her screw was entangled in a beach gear wire while laying the first of two new beach gear anchors. Fortunately, seas were calm when this occurred. There were other dangers. The use of explosives.

Blasting coral to improve the path required by KNOX to reach open water was an initiative started August 1. On the 9<sup>th</sup> divers mistakenly laid a 50-pound hose charge too close to the KNOX. The explosion opened a 12 ft by 8 ft hole in the bow, three ft deep in many places. Personnel were cleared from the forward portion of the KNOX before avoiding injuries. EM Bob Harp was directed away from running the emergency diesel. "Suddenly, the front hall of the rose up, followed by a sharp crack. Then, the bow slammed down on the reef. Everyone was shook up." A ruptured gasoline line sparked a fire. It was quickly put out. Blasting resumed the next day with lots of new rules and continued until the last day. The head of the EOD team earned the nickname "Boom-Boom". From the KNOX crew. Goddard watched the KNOX lift then slam down on the reef. The blast is still clear in his mind 62 years later.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> just before midnight, another salvage vessel the CONSERVER, was pushed far out of position by the current of 5 knots. A 5/8' line parted, knocking down a dozen men on the ship. None were hurt seriously. Miraculously, in the 38 days of operations no one was killed or seriously hurt. Everyone, including those in charge wanted to be done with the salvage.

A few hours later just before high tide on August 24<sup>th</sup>, the KNOX lunged and was suddenly free of the reef. Not only that but the KNOX floated and was stable. The combined crews lustily cheered. Ships horns and whistles sounded. After preparations, the KNOX was towed stern first to Kaohsiung Taiwan for temporary repairs. Goddard and GRAPPLE were ordered to stay behind and retrieve anchors and beach gear from the salvage. After 38 days of effort more work for the faithful companion to the grounded destroyer. Speed was essential as a 10<sup>th</sup> typhoon was forming, soon to join the 9 typhoons that harassed the salvage fleet and the KNOX since mid-July. The

salvage/rescue vessels GRAPPLE, GREENLET and CONSERVER performed sensational work in storms up close to the reef. The companion tugs MUNSEE, MAHOPAC, COCOPA and SOUIX were in constant motion laying beach gear, pulling on the KNOX and weathering storms.

Larger ships like the TALLAGEDA, PRAIRIE, POINT DEFIANCE, MARS, and CARTER HALL stood off providing direct support at a respectful distance from Pratas Reef. The connection from large ships to the KNOX were smaller utility craft and LCU 1495 skippered by a BMC making endless trips loaded with equipment and supplies certainly equaled the work of salvage vessels and tugs.

Goddard's memories include the fierce weather, the constant danger near the reef and 23 nights of rigging and work to be ready for high tide usually well before dawn. He was elated at the success of the salvage.