

## Hell Ship



The Japanese convoy steamed slowly through the flat seas two-to-three miles off Lanboyan Point on the southwest coast of the Philippine Island of Mindanao. The eight-ship group was heading into the Sulu Sea and then north to Manila. Leading the small convoy was an old Greek freighter which had been seized by the Japanese at the fall of Shanghai and renamed *Shinyo Maru*. Huddled in the ship's miserable hold were 750 American, Filipino and Dutch prisoners of war. Lurking beneath the calm sea was the submarine USS *Paddle*.

Martin Crook, Jr. was born in Spartanburg, the son of Dr. and Mrs. Martin Crook. He attended Spartanburg schools and entered Clemson College in 1935. Crook excelled at military drill. During his freshman year, he was selected as a member of the Freshman Platoon, that class's fancy drill unit. Crook continued to march with the elite throughout his four year Clemson career as he was subsequently selected for the Sophomore, Junior and Senior Platoons. Crook also found time to serve on the circulations staff of *The Tiger* campus newspaper and as president of the Spartanburg Clemson Club. As a senior, Cadet Crook commanded A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. Crook graduated in 1939 with a BS in general science.

Following graduation, Crook was assigned to the 41<sup>st</sup> Philippine Division, headquartered in Manila. The division was a regular Army unit the purpose of which was to defend the Philippines. It was composed of mostly American officers and mostly Filipino enlisted troops known as Philippine Scouts.



Following the successive attacks on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, the 41<sup>st</sup> participated in the defense of Luzon, fighting a delaying action against the Japanese invaders down the Bataan Peninsula. With the fall of Bataan in April 1942, most of the 41<sup>st</sup>'s survivors were taken prisoner and began the infamous "death march." Crook was one of these prisoners. Despite brutal treatment at the hands of his captors, Crook survived the forced march and entered a prisoner of war camp.

By 1944, the tide of the war in the Pacific had clearly turned. Allied naval forces led by Admiral Chester Nimitz were slowly advancing toward Japan from the east, while General Douglas MacArthur attacked in the Southwest Pacific to fulfill his pledge to return to the Philippines. With the noose tightening on the Japanese, they began to move prisoners of war from the Philippines to camps in other Japanese-occupied territories as well as the home islands.

While the turning tide of the war may have changed where the Japanese held their prisoners, it didn't change how the prisoners were treated. POWs transported by sea were crammed into cargo holds with little air, food or water on journeys that would last several weeks. Many died due to asphyxia, starvation and disease. Because of the wretched conditions, the transports earned the sobriquet "Hell Ships." One such ship was the *Shinyo Maru*.

On September 7, 1944, the *Shinyo Maru* was leading an eight-vessel convoy along the southwestern point of the Island of Mindanao. First Lieutenant Martin Crook, Jr. was one of the Allied prisoners of war suffering in the intense heat, stale air and filth of the ship's hold.

A few days earlier, American intelligence had intercepted a Japanese radio message indicating that the *Shinyo Maru* was transporting 750 troops to Manila. The USS *Paddle* was ordered to search for the transport. It is unclear whether the Navy knew of the presence aboard of the POWs, but the orders to Captain Byron Nowell of the *Paddle* contained no warning about the human cargo. Nowell first spotted the convoy from a distance of about 10 miles and positioned the *Paddle* for attack. The submarine fired a spread of four torpedoes, two of which struck the *Shinyo Maru*. The *Paddle* then turned its attention to one of the other cargo ships in the convoy, again hitting the target with two torpedoes. The captain of this second ship headed toward shore and beached his vessel to keep it from sinking. Not so with the *Shinyo Maru*. As the desperate prisoners scrambled to escape the flooding cargo hold, Japanese guards gunned them down with captured Thompson sub machine guns. Some prisoners leapt overboard.

The remaining Japanese vessels launched small boats to pick up survivors, pulling Japanese seaman from the water. When they reached a POW, instead of rescuing him, the Japanese shot him. It is believed that 688 of the 750 prisoners onboard the *Shinyo Maru* were killed. Martin Crook, Jr. was one of them.

Following its successful attack, the *Paddle* dived and endured a prolonged counterattack as the surviving Japanese ships fired 45 depth charges. The captain and crew of the *Paddle* did not learn of the presence of the POWs until after the war's end.

It is estimated that more than 20,000 Allied POWs died at sea when the "Hell Ships" on which they were carried were attacked by Allied submarines and aircraft. Although Allied intelligence sometimes knew of the presence of POWs through radio interceptions and code-breaking, the dreadful calculus of war was such that the lives of these POWs were considered less critical than the disruption of the enemy's supply of food, fuel and strategic materials.

First Lieutenant Martin Crook, Jr. was survived by his parents and sister. His name appears on the Tablets of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery. He earned the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

CROMWELL HARLEY JR . . . T SGT . . . 2 QM CO (AVN) . . . KANSAS  
 CRONIN GEORGE E . 2 LT . 823 BOMB SQ 38 BOMB GP (M) . WISCONSIN  
 CROOK MARTIN JR . 1 LT . 42 INF 41 DIV (PA) . SOUTH CAROLINA  
 CROOKS WILLIAM . 2 LT . 53 BOMB SQ 22 BOMB GP (M) . ARKANSAS  
 CROOM CLIFTON A . . . CAPT . . . 45 INF REGT (PS) . . . TEXAS  
 CROSS CHARLES R . S SGT . 531 BOMB SQ 380 BOMB GP (H) . TEXAS  
 CROSS CHARLES W . T SGT . 531 BOMB SQ 380 BOMB GP (H) . MD  
 CROSS CHARLES W . 2 LT . DIV ARTY AMERICAL DIV . ILLINOIS  
 CROSS DANIEL L . S SGT . 26 BOMB SQ 11 BOMB GP (H) . NEW YORK  
 CROSS FRANK T . 1 LT . 9 BOMB SQ 7 BOMB GP (H) . ILLINOIS  
 CROSSWAIT ROBERT L . 1 LT . 431 FTR SQ 475 FTR GP . S DAK  
 CROTHERS RICHARD R . 2 LT . 28 MAT SQ 20 AIR BASE GP . OREGON  
 CROTTEAU DONALD C . S SGT . 521 BOMB SQ 90 BOMB GP (H) . WIS  
 CROUCH MAURICE I . 2 LT . 33 BOMB SQ 22 BOMB GP (H) . INDIANA  
 CROUCH PAUL C . . . 1 LT . . . 68 AACG GP . . . TEXAS  
 CROUCH TUVAL B . TEC 4 . 14 BOMB SQ 19 BOMB GP (H) . ARKANSAS  
 CROUSE DAVID D . 1 SGT . 100 MB CO . NORTH CAROLINA