

Di Donato, Charles

Bethlehem Navy Men Hit Saipan In Role Of Sea Going Hack Drivers

JUL 13 1944

ABOARD A COAST GUARD-MANNED ATTACK TRANSPORT AT SAIPAN, (Delayed)—This story is about the boys in the landing barges... boys like Coast Guardsmen Charles DiDonato and Joseph Thoder, both first class seamen from Bethlehem, Pa. DiDonato lives at 639 Hayes Street, and Thoder at 909 East Ninth Street.

Without their services an operation like the invasion of Saipan would die on first base.

They are the sea-going cab drivers of modern amphibious warfare, but unlike the taxi men back home, they cannot reserve the right to refuse customers in matters of destination, nor do they have a choice of working hours; the shift is continual. Barge crews must be on call at any hour of the day or night to keep supplies or troops moving. It is not unusual for any crew to work 48 hours without any sleep.

Once the assault begins, their barge becomes their home where they eat, sleep and toil. Their life becomes one great cycle between debarkation ladders, unloading booms and the beach.

When zero hour arrived at this embattled island, the two boys and

their mates found themselves working in the face of a heavy mortar barrage.

"We had different assignments", they explained. "Some of us had to take troops in through the thick of it; some of us were put on unloading details. Practically all of us were assigned to transporting the wounded back to relief ships."

"It was ticklish business bringing in supplies through the one narrow channel in the coral reef". If you missed it you got hung up and put the whole program behind schedule."

The beach is secured now and the troops have moved inland, but the great battle of supply goes on, and the two Coast Guardsmen are doing their part to keep it moving.

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