



Lipan, 1980

AT / ATF-85; WMEC-85

An Indian tribe of the Apache linguistic stock found in southwestern North America.

Builder: United Engineering Company, Alameda, California

Length: 205' 3"

Beam: 38' 7"

Draft: 16' 10"

Displacement: 1,641 tons

Cost: N/A

Commissioned: 29 April 1943 (USN); 30 September 1980 (USCG)

Decommissioned: 31 March 1988

Disposition:

Machinery: 4 electric motors driven by 4 Allis Chalmers generators driven by 4 General Motors diesel engines; 3,000 BHP; single propeller.

Performance & Endurance:

Max: 16.5 knots; 4,055 mile range

Cruising: 10.1 knots; 13,097 mile range

Complement: 76 (1961)

Armament: 1 x 3"/50 (1980)

Electronics: SPN-25 radar (1961)

History:

The *Lipan* (AT-85) was a *Navajo/Cherokee* class fleet ocean tug that was laid down on 30 May 1942 by United Engineering Company in San Francisco, California. She was launched on 17 September 1942 and was sponsored by Miss Jean Kell. She was commissioned on 29 April 1943 under the command of LT F. W. Beyer. After shakedown in Puget Sound and San Francisco harbor duty, the new oceangoing tug departed with three lighters for the New Hebrides and arrived Espiritu Santo 2 October. She towed war equipment and supplies from Espiritu Santo to the new base at Guadalcanal until 20 November. Transferring to Guadalcanal 6 December, *Lipan* was redesignated ATF-85 (fleet ocean tug) on 13 April and operated in the Solomons during the first half of 1944.

Lipan departed Guadalcanal 4 June with Rear Admiral Riefsnider's Southern Transport Attack Group for the scheduled assault on Guam. When the invasion of Guam was postponed by the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the ship joined Service Squadron 10 at Eniwetok 3 July supporting the invasion of Saipan. Departing 8 July with barge in tow, she arrived Saipan 15 July and remained under constant enemy fire until 20 July, then rejoined Admiral Riefsnider's group at Agat Bay, Guam, on D-Day 21 July. During the 2 weeks of fierce fighting after D-Day, *Lipan* rescued landing craft grounded by the treacherous surf ringing Agat Bay. Once the marines had gained a foothold, the tug towed supply ships bringing in reinforcements to liberate the island and transform Guam into an advanced base for the Philippine campaign.

Returning to Eniwetok 30 September, she sailed for Ulithi with two boats in tow on 12 October, arrived the 20th, and performed ready tow service to aid the ships liberating Leyte. Taking *Houston* (CL-81) in tandem tow with tug *Arapaho* (ATF-68) the ship sailed 14 December for Manus and arrived 21 December. Dropping the tow, she immediately set course for home and made San Francisco 9 January 1945.

After overhaul *Lipan* departed for Okinawa 24 February dropped fuel barges at Pearl Harbor and Guam, and arrived 1 May. Three days later, as the Japanese

intensified the suicide attacks in a costly but futile campaign to hold Okinawa, the tug undertook salvage and firefighting duties. For two and a half months, as the savage attacks continued, *Lipan* salvaged and rescued damaged Navy ships off the beaches of Okinawa. The ship's closest brush with disaster came late afternoon 21 June. While she was towing the already salvaged *Barry* (APD-29) to Ie Shima escorted by *LSM-59*, two suicide aircraft attacked the convoy. One immediately crashed and sank *LSM-59*. The second barely missed *Lipan* and crashed *Barry* which sank the next day. The tug made Ie Shima and returned to Okinawa the 25th.

With Okinawa nearly secure, the ship departed for overhaul at Layte 18 July and arrived 1 August. Overhaul completed after V-J Day, she departed for a supposedly peaceful run to Okinawa, 23 September, with two boats in tow. While *Lipan* was en route 30 September a typhoon with 50-foot seas and winds over 100 knots battered the tug with 55° rolls, snapping the tow, and starting a fire which destroyed the propulsion panel and the lower motor room. After riding out the storm, she made Subic Bay 7 October. Following extensive repairs, *Lipan* sailed for San Francisco 3 December and arrived Christmas Day.

During the postwar years, *Lipan* towed gasoline barges, landing craft, disabled submarines, floating drydocks, and target sleds in operations off the west coast and in the western Pacific. With the outbreak of the Korean war, *Lipan* departed Long Beach for the Orient 20 June 1950. The tug arrived Yokosuka 15 July and shoved off that afternoon to deliver mail and medical supplies to TF 90 in Korean waters. She called at Hoko Ko, Korea (18-24 July) and returned for harbor services at Yokosuka until 5 September. She then steamed with TF 90 for Inchon Harbor for the brilliant flanking amphibious assault. As the landing forces swept ashore and caught the North Koreans completely by surprise, the tug cast off her pontoon tows, and began various towing and salvage assignments. A month later she was relieved at Inchon and steamed for Pusan en route to duty along the east coast of Korea. Arriving Iwon Harbor near Wonsan 1 November *Lipan* planted channel buoys, retracted 23 damaged LTSs from the beach, and recovered lost anchors in Wonsan Harbor, then steamed north and laid buoys at Hungnam Harbor and Songjin Harbor. Returning to Wonsan 26 November, she left the next day for Sasebo, Japan, and arrived the 30th.

For the next two months the tug towed Army pontoon barges from Inchon to Taechon, Korea, or back to Sasebo. She sailed from Sasebo to Yokohama 16 February with SS *Cecil N. Bean* in tow, and steamed independently for Pearl Harbor the 18th, arriving 1 March. After a three-month overhaul and towing missions to the Marshall Islands and Subic Bay, she departed Hawaii 26 November for a 6-month tour of duty at Apra Harbor, Guam, then returned to Pearl Harbor 9 June 1952. For the next 11 months she again operated between

Hawaii and the Marshalls. On 2 May 1953 the tug left Pearl Harbor for towing duty between Sasebo and various Korean ports such as Inchon, Pusan, and Wonsan. She returned to Hawaii 19 November. Based at Pearl Harbor from 1954 on, the tug has continued, into 1969, to meet the towing and salvage needs of the Pacific Fleet from the west coast to the western Pacific.

She was acquired by the Coast Guard in Fiscal Year 1981 due to concerns of not having enough cutters in the 7th District to interdict the large number of illegal immigrants attempting to make it to Florida and the rise in narcotics smuggling. Upon the Coast Guard's request, the Navy transferred both the *Ute* and *Lipan* to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard had been successfully operating four other former Navy *Cherokee* class fleet tugs since the 1940s and 1950s: *Tamaroa*, *Cherokee*, *Chilula*, and *Avoyel*.

Lipan was assigned to the 7th District and was stationed at Key West, Florida and was assigned to law enforcement patrols and SAR when needed. On 28 June 1983 she seized the *Alex* carrying 50-tons of marijuana. On 21 December 1983 she seized the fishing vessel *Julie Jean* carrying 8-tons of marijuana. The next day she seized the motor vessel *Global Charter* carrying 16 tons of marijuana and then, on the same day, she seized the fishing vessel *Victor Y. Jorge* carrying 2 tons of marijuana. On 31 January 1984 she stopped a fishing vessel in the Yucatan Channel after firing two volleys of warning shots and then seized the vessel after her boarding team discovered 20-tons of marijuana on board. On 24 May 1984 she seized the motor vessel *Rosangel* in Providence Channel carrying 5 tons of marijuana. On 3 June 1984 seized the *Mrs. White* carrying 17 tons of marijuana in the Bahamas. On 7 June 1984 she seized the pleasure craft *Blue Jacket* in Providence Channel carrying 470 pounds of marijuana. On 20 July 1984 she sank the burned-out hulk of *Captain Morgan* 50 miles south of Grand Turk Island. On 16 July 1984 she removed 36 Haitians from a sailboat for their return to Haiti. On 13 August 1984 she seized the Panamanian tug *Nora I* with 8 tons of marijuana in a secret compartment. On 25 September 1984 she seized the yacht *Sin Bad* in the Yucatan Channel with 10 tons of marijuana on board.

Growing concerns regarding her deteriorating condition and the high costs involved in repairing her forced the Coast Guard to order her decommissioning. She was decommissioned on 31 March 1988 and returned to the Navy at the Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility in Portsmouth, Virginia. She was sunk as a target by the Navy in October of 1990.

Lipan received two battle stars for World War II service and four battle stars for Korean service.

Sources:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.

Robert Scheina. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946-1990.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.

