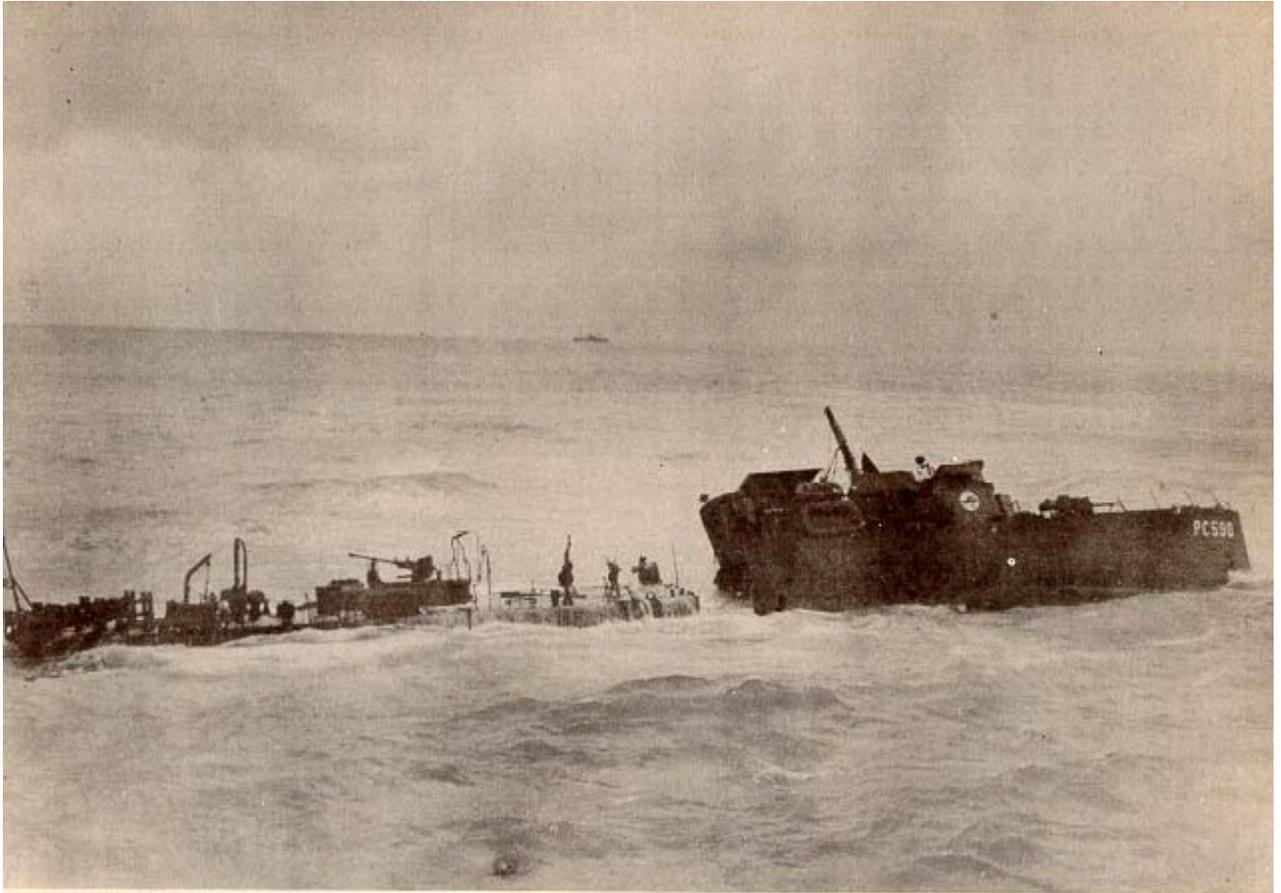


## The Loss of the Coast Guard-manned USS *PC-590*

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USS PC-590 AFTER TYPHOON OF 9 October, 1945, OKINAWA

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The Coast Guard manned USS PC-590 foundered in a typhoon off Okinawa on 9 October, 1945. There was no loss of life. On 28 September 1945, at 1455, while undergoing engine repairs at Buckners Bay, Okinawa, the PC-590 was ordered to proceed to Unten Ko, Okinawa, about 60 miles distant, to escape an approaching typhoon. Proceeding immediately at a speed of 14 knots the ship was forced to anchor south of Ie Shima for the night, proceeding to Unten Ko and thence to Katena Ka the next morning, to an anchorage considered satisfactory for small craft from the average typhoon. This typhoon passed to the west and

the 590 returned to Buckner Bay on the 2nd of October and anchored close to Baten Ko. During the forenoon and afternoon of 4 October 1945, the wind increased in velocity, and heavy swells ran into the harbor. The 590 was forced to move her anchorage into the middle of Buckner Bay. Another typhoon warning was now received, this one reported to be passing eastward. On the 5th the weather calmed down and the 590 made an uneventful passage to Miyako Retto to the south to pick up 'mail for an expeditionary group and then continued on 80 more miles south to deliver the mail. During the morning of the 6th another typhoon warning was received, this one being some 350 miles northwest of Saipan at the time, and advancing on a west northwest track at the rate of about 15 knots per hour. This track showed the possibility of the typhoon passing south of Miyako Retto directly toward Formosa as had the one of 29 September, or by recurving, passing near Okinawa.

Arriving at Ishigaki Haguchi orders were received to proceed to Okinawa to escape this typhoon. On the 7th a dispatch requesting typhoon instructions remained unanswered and the 590 arrived at Buckner Bay at 0721 on the 8th. The wind had lessened considerably, but at 0840 the vessel received a warning that the latest reports indicated the typhoon would pass close to Okinawa and that ships had sortied east to take shelter at Baten Ko. The 590 had on board 15 enlisted men from the DD-461 for transportation to the receiving station at Okinawa and requested boat transportation for them from the receiving station. A landing boat arrived alongside at 1130 and all passenger personnel departed. Meanwhile the wind began to increase to force 6 and the barometer had dropped to 29.14 at 1500. The typhoon was too advanced now to make a night run to Unten Ko, 80 miles north, where only daylight entrance was considered safe. The vessel therefore proceeded at 1530 toward anchorage in the clear area of Baten Ko. Typhoon warnings now began coming on repeatedly, one received at 1845 stating that the typhoon was expected to pass close to Okinawa.

The vessel rode well through the night of the 8th. The anchor was holding, but the winds steadily increased to force 9-10 and the barometer dropped to 29.00. The ship was swinging widely at anchor on tacks up to 50 degrees off the wind. By 1100 on the 9th the wind had increased to force 11 and the barometer had dropped to 28.80, but the ship was still maintaining her position. Eleven vessels were observed to have begun moving and starting for the beach and the PC-469 had broken or dragged free and disappeared down-wind in the storm.

At 1130 the anchor was still holding, but the bow soon drifted off the wind and the ship entered the trough of the sea, rolling badly. All hands were piped to emergency anchoring stations and the ship was maneuvered to port and starboard, 2/3 to standard being required on main engines with full rudders to take in anchor chain and keep bow into seas. In this maneuver a destroyer mooring buoy was narrowly missed, as was a reef to the south and starboard. The electric windlass was not considered satisfactory. The chief carpenter's mate was badly hurt and knocked unconscious by a terrific heave of the bow and

five feet of solid water, which washed the entire anchorage detail 30 feet aft. The windlass continued slowly to bring in the anchor chain until it was discovered that the chain had parted at the 30 fathom connecting shackle. The port anchor was not dropped because under the then violent conditions sixty fathoms of chain would not have been effective.

Various courses were now necessary to avoid other vessels and the great difficulty of heading into the seas. The objective was to proceed eastward as slowly as possible to the lee of Tsuken Shima Island, to ride out the typhoon for the duration of the easterly gales, then to proceed to the west shore of Buckner Bay, to ride out an expected period of westerly gales, and finally to anchor to port chain when the typhoon abated. The radar indicated Tsuken Shima Island with breakers, marking the long reef to its south, plainly visible on scope. After closely avoiding about 12 ships the top of Tsuken Shima Island appeared above the level of the driving salt spray at about 1250, two points off the starboard bow. Simultaneously an APD loomed 100 yards to starboard at anchor, with several net tenders at anchor dead ahead, and a YMS blinking to "stand clear, we are underway." The island was now 800 to 1,200 yards distant. Wind velocity had increased to force 14 at 1330 and the barometer dropped to 28.50. It was decided not to anchor because of the short chain on the port anchor; the impossibility of adding the weakened starboard chain; and the lack of searoom sufficiently close to shore. Instead, tacking procedure from port to starboard was again adopted, requiring full ahead, sometimes on both engines, with full rudder to maintain position the same distance off the island and keep the bow near the wind. Four narrow escapes were experienced in avoiding ships, twice requiring all back full. By this time ships were first visible when their blinker lights were used.

Tacking to and fro continued in between the net tenders and the APD and a certain facility was developed in balancing the angle of the hull with the wind, using lower engine speeds with full rudder and requiring fewer RPM changes. The top of Tsuken Shima hill was visible and the PC-469 was reported seen and signals exchanged. The wind was now about 85-90 knots and the barometer down to 28.42. The port engine had been stopped and when air was injected into it for starting, the port exhaust happened to be underwater. One of the cylinders back-fired through the intake side of the turbocharger into the engine room, in a sheet of blue flame and black smoke. At 1430 PC-590 notified the port director by radio that a tug was required immediately, the ground tackle being useless and the engines overheating from lube oil exhaustion. She gave her estimated position as 500 yards west of Tsuken Shima. There was no "Roger" on this message because CNB, Okinawa, who guarded for the Port Director, was unable to answer, having previously reported transmitter trouble.

By 1440 the situation had changed for the worse. The wind had increased to force 15 - 16 with gusts to force 17. A layer of racing spray existed about a yard above the water, making impossible any abandon-ship intentions. At 1455 a

second message was sent asking the port director for a tug immediately. The barometer was now down to 28.20 and- the visibility down occasionally to 150 feet. Looking to windward was almost literally impossible because of the driving spray. At 1500 the starboard engine developed a loud knock, which seemed to be a connecting rod bearing gone in No. 5 cylinder due to excessive strain. No. 1 auxiliary generator then failed due to a broken fuel line. No. 2 auxiliary generator was started within a few minutes in the light of battle lamps. The situation, with surrounding invisible reefs to east, north and west and with no fix possible, was creating an untenable position. It was decided to get to the southeast to south if possible, regardless of stability or anything else. Some seconds later, the ship in a slow turn with heading about 350 degrees, hit a reef at 1540.

All engines back full was given and the ship answered for some seconds, when the mid and after section of the ship struck another reef. All engines were stopped immediately. No abandon-ship stations were ever called. The port anchor was dropped to its limit of 60 fathoms. Water-tight integrity was checked throughout the ship as well as the ammunition stowage. A final check was made on all hands for life jackets. The ship began to pound throughout her length with a general port list of 5 - 10 degrees with the wind on her starboard bow. A third message was sent the port director at 1542 notifying him that the ship was aground and where; that the anchor was gone and the fuel tank ruptured; and requesting immediate assistance to transfer personnel as they would have to abandon ship within a few hours.

By this time the ship had pounded off the reef into open water, the bow drifting off the wind rapidly in spite of the port anchor and the 60 fathoms of chain which did not hold at all. The ship's head laid off down wind, with the seas immediately becoming higher with green water. The leeway was estimated to be south, with the wind on the starboard quarter. The anchor chain seemed to be tending aft under the ship. After traveling about a mile, the ship hit another reef at about 1600. The mast of a YMS showed occasionally dead ahead. It seemed fast aground. The steering cable now broke and sagged in the engine auxiliary room. The booster pump was still running but a reef head had apparently damaged the sea suction foot valve and it made a grinding noise and could not be primed, even by hand. There was a ripping noise on the port side of the auxiliary engine room stores compartment and what sounded like the first water in the engine spaces began rushing in. At 1625 engine spaces were abandoned and water-tight doors and hatches secured. Thereafter the ship was without power and lights, radio and blinker, except for one Aldis lamp for signaling. The masts of a large ship were visible at intervals through a rift in the storm. She was blowing "not under command" signals at regular intervals, A man was seen drifting [ by ] the starboard bow in a life jacket from the westward, crying for help. An attempt was made to get a line to him but the high seas and winds prevented action in time and he was carried on past the bow and disappeared. A small landing boat appeared on the port side and disappeared rapidly. Another ship

(LSM-143) was then seen coming out of the northwest. She grounded between the PC-590 and the YMS-146 on even keel.

The barometer, for the first time, began to rise slowly. It was later learned, from a radar plot ashore, that the exact eye of the typhoon had passed five miles to the east. The winds continued over 100 knots and the ship made slow movement in the direction of the LSM, rolling against the reef to port. The stern was slowly settling in the water. At 1645 a depth charge broke loose and the executive officer and two crew members secured it with great personal danger. By 1700 the barometer had risen to 28.18 with winds at force 15. At 1710 a large ship on the starboard beam was seen looming larger and moving steadily directly for the PC-590. Collision seemed probable and all hands were ordered out of interior compartments. The large ship (USS MONA ISLAND, ARG-9) blinked over telling the 590 to "stand clear." At this moment a buckling of the deck was appearing on the starboard side at frame 59. The MONA ISLAND moved astern until their stern was some 150 feet from that of the 590 and stopped abruptly. Cargo nets ran down their port side and the possibility was seen of using them to get aboard if the ship drifted against the 590. The stern of the 590 was still settling as the rescue ship again moved astern some 100 feet, finally stopping 50 feet away from the 590's stern shaft. A line gun was fired from the rescue vessel. The crew rushed aft and began hauling on the gun line and brought aboard a 3-inch manila line which was made fast around the stack and taut aboard the rescue ship.

Waves across the after deck were meanwhile increasing in violence and solid water was being thrown up to the signal bridge. In short order a breeches buoy type of bosun's chair was let run down the 3-inch line to the PC-590, with hauling lines rigged at each end. The breeches buoy was found to be too far off the deck to be readily accessible so the line was hauled in farther and made fast around the deck bits on the port side at frame 63. The first man went up the breeches buoy to safety at about 1755, and after a few slow trips the rescue cycle was reduced to 127 seconds per man. By 1800 the force of the typhoon was brought more broadside, the waves, increased alarmingly and the roll and crash of the ship against the reef became more violent. By 1813, ten men had been drawn to safety; by 1836, 19 men. The wind had now backed past northwest and was driving huge waves across the decks. To avoid serious injury and prevent them from washing overboard, the last men were sent forward to the wheelhouse, in spite of the ship's progressive breaking up. By 1845 the line tending position became perilous with the gunnery officer, the executive officer and others nearly washing overboard. Then two ammunition lockers broke loose and charged against the untended bitter and somehow by great good fortune jammed it against further slipping. Officers and men were personally seen completely submerged a dozen times and forcefully hurled against life lines, always somehow to crawling back to temporary safety again.

"The absence of any loss of life is due only to God's will" the commanding officer, Lt. Charles C. Pool, USCGR, later reported. By 1925 forty men were saved. Twenty minutes later the gunnery officer started up the line. Midway in transit the hauling line fouled around the engineering officer's right foot and he was jerked out of the 40 MM gun tub. At the same time his left foot twisted in the drifting gun cover and jammed on the upper gun tub edge. He was badly split apart by the tension and was upside down for a moment, his head under water. He was immediately extricated by the two officers still remaining on board, the commanding officer and executive officer. Meanwhile, the sudden stopping of the breeches buoy caused the gunnery officer to bounce in the catenary and parted the 3-inch line dropping him into the seas. He started to sink at once, but heard a cry to "Hold On!" and was brought like a shot up to the deck on the MONA ISLAND. Within a few minutes the hauling line was pulled back aboard the 590, along with the breeches buoy and the remainder of the 3-inch line was attached. This was made fast around the 40 MM gun foundation and the engineering officer and executive officer went up without mishap. The commanding officer had gone up the line ten feet when the hauling line, now unattended, jammed again. Return to ship was necessary to clear the badly twisted line. After three attempts to clear it, a knife was finally sent down the sloping line, the 590's hauling end was cut, and the trip up made safely. Shortly after this, at about 2015, the PC-590 broke completely in half.

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**Taken from:**

U.S. Coast Guard. *The Coast Guard at War, Volume VII: Lost Cutters*. Washington, DC: Historical Section, Public Information Division, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, July 1, 1947, pp. 26-30.

