The story of 23 terrible minutes on a baby-flat-top after it was torn to pieces by a torpedo from a Japanese sub, and be fore it sunk with the second largest Navy casualty.

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The baby-flat-top Liscombe Bay was sunk by a torpedo from an enemy submarine on the day before Thanksgiving of 1944. The Liscombe Bay was on her first battle assignment, covering the occupation of Makin Thirteenth Island.

The submarine attack was a complete surprise. It was the Liscombe Bay’s third day of the invasion, and her crew had lost the teneness that goes with the beginning of a landing operation. By this time they were relaxed, and only their eyes were as a tower, watching the usual. The scuttlebutt reported that the nearest enemy ships were two days away.

The Liscombe Bay was ads a half-hour before dawn, and it was still dark when the Liscombe Bay sank.

General quarters had sounded at 0545, in keeping with the strict custom of sending men to their battle stations at dawn and dusk in combat to ensure instant and complete reaction. The look-out shouted: “Christ, here comes a torpedo!”

It struck near the stern on the port side, and the havoc was instant and complete. The whole after section broke quickly into flames, and most of the crew stationed there died instantly.

The casualty list for the Liscombe Bay was the second largest of any Navy vessel in the war. The complement for baby-flat-tops has never been revealed, but they probably carry about 4,200 men allotted to big aircraft carriers. Only 260 were saved.

Ironically, many of those men who died in the after end of the Liscombe Bay might have been saved if they had not been called to battle stations before the torpedo struck. They would have been asleep in the crews’ quarters forward.

ROBERT JOSEPH CHARTERS Y1c has been in the Navy for six years. He had hoped to marry his girl before leaving San Diego, but in the hurried days before sailing he never found the time. The weather was hot in the Makin area, and when Charters’ hit the sack at midnight on the Liscombe Bay he simply lay down naked. He awoke when GQ sounded at 0545 and put on his dungarees and the comfortable Marine shoes he had bought before leaving San Diego. Then he left for the office where he stood duty watches and general quarters.

It was the small office of Lt. Comdr. W. W. Carroll, who served the ship as first lieutenant, a detail involving the berthing of the crew and the care of all loose equipment. During battle Mr. Carroll was in the heaving bilges and it was through this post that all damage-control parties were directed. At these times Charters was called a talkative fellow, wearing a dapper tie, and he was invited to the bridge. The three men stationed in the office during the day—Mr. Carroll, his assistant, a jg, and Charters—were torn during battle alerts by a seaman named Galliano. He manned battle phones connected to the bridge circuit.

The others were already in the office when Charters arrived at 0506, five minutes before the torpedoing. He noted with amusement that Mr. Carroll was reading “The Virginian.” Mr.
The Singing of the Locise Bay

Carroll was very fond of the book. He always read it at morning general quarters but never during the day. He knew every word of the book when it was torn from his hand by the explosion at 0313.

The moon was farther aft and on the opposite side of the ship, but the blast was so great that it tore off Carrolls' life jacket, dונגaree shirt, battle dress, and helmet. He could see his right arm flying through the air as the rights went out. He remained in his stocking feet the rest of his time aboard the Locise Bay.

To: Mr. Carroll
From: Mr. Carroll
Subject: Are you all right?

Carroll answered "Yes" and then said to Mr. Carroll: "Are you all right?"

There was a pause, and then the commander said: "I'm all right." Galliano said "I'm okay" with a smile.

Flames from the hangar deck were visible overhead. Mr. Carroll felt for the doorway. "I don't got to get up pressure to fight the fires," he said.

They groped outside to the passage but could not get through the pressure on the hose. Carroll spoke to Mr. Carroll and said: "There's an awful gassy smell down here." The officer, struggling desperately, said: "I don't got to get up pressure to fight the fires." He said.

Three or more men joined them and they were struggling to get over the pressure and collect together again far forward at the base of the burning elevator shaft. There they found a way through by cutting holes in the sides and knees, emptying a portable C02 extinguisher on the flames. Beside him lay three other exting"uished oxygen bottles. By midnight, all was quiet. Mr. Carroll said to Hunt: "Come on, Boats. Get the hell outta here." Without moving, Hunt motioned them to go. The other men glanced at Mr. Carroll to see if he was going to order Hunt out. It was then that they noticed for the first time that Mr. Carroll was covered with blood. He had been hit badly across the face and chest during the first explosion. The doctor was in the group, and he offered to dress Mr. Carroll's wound.

They all went topside, coming out on the walkway around the flight deck. Looking back, they could see the hangar deck and everything in it was almost totally destroyed. All around them 20-mm and 40-mm shells were exploding.

Mr. Carroll told them to jump. Carrolls walked to the side and leaped off, completely unharmed of the great height and anxious only to get away from the burning ammunition. In the water he looked back and saw that everybody had jumped except Mr. Carroll. He was walking up and down the deck, shouting to the others to jump and help"ing some men over the side.

Back inside the ship, Bound Hunt finally gave up trying to escape. He was hit badly across the face and chest. He met Mr. Carroll again. But this time, instead of Mr. Carroll urging Hunt to go, Hunt urged Mr. Carroll to stay.


"I'm not going without you. I'll get you a life preserver."

"No," Mr. Carroll said. "Go home to your wife and kids."

"If you're not going, I'm not," Hunt said. He walked across the flight deck toward the exploding ammunition. He was hit by a shell and died. Carrolls walked to the side and leaped off to retrieve a life raft. When Hunt came back, he asked Mr. Carroll how he was, and the doctor looked down at the man.

"He's dead," he said.

Charters was a survivor of the Locise Bay. He lived the rest of his life and married and married his girl on Christmas Eve. They are living in San Diego now, where he has landed a job as a chief yeoman at Ford.

A Rear admiral and two captains were on the Locise Bay. The rear admiral was Henry M. Mullinix, and he was in charge of the air group among the most famous in the Navy to serve as carriers in the area. One of the two captains was John G. Crommelin Jr., who served as chief of
The Sinking of the Liscome Bay

effort to the admiral. The other was Irving D. Wiltsie, and he was captain of the Liscome Bay.

Rear Adm. Mullinix, a kind, friendly man, was in air plot when the explosion came, and he was badly injured. Several people saw him there with his head on his folded arms, but others reported seeing him later swimming in the flame-swept waters. He did not survive.

Capt. Crommelin, one of five famous brothers who are all Navy officers, had just stepped from the shower when the torpedoes hit. Naked and wet, he was badly burned. Still without clothes, he walked out onto the flight deck and directed the abandoning in his area. Later, he jumped overboard himself, then swam for an hour and 20

Looking up, Roach saw that the man had on a life jacket, grabbed him by the feet and threw him in the water, then he proceeded down.

minutes before a destroyer picked him up.

Capt. Wiltsie survived the original explosion. Concerned by the damage aft and the men who were stationed there, he walked toward the stern on the flight deck to inspect the area. Several officers called to him to come back, but he walked into the exploding ammunition and smoke. He was not seen again.

Covis (C.M.) Roach was a storekeeper first class on the Liscome Bay but, like Yeoman Charters, he has since been promoted to chief. He is a Texan, is slight and wisply in appearance and has thinning blond hair. He looks like Ernie Pyle must have looked when he was 26.

Some months before, Roach had been a member of the crew of the USS San Francisco during her famous battle off Guadalcanal. Standing

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The Sinking of the Liscombe Bay

far below decks, passing ammunition while shells tore into the ship, he learned that battle was a serious business.

The San Francisco was a heavy cruiser, and he liked the security of her thick-skinned sturdiness. Nothing made him nervous or scared him. He decided that he would go below decks only when he had to.

On the 21st he was able to see before the torpedoeing Roach went to sleep on a cot on the fantail as usual. Reveille next morning awakened him 20 minutes before he had breakfast and 28 minutes before the torpedo struck.

Roach went down to the galley and bake shop where the physical fitness of cooks, bakers, and bakers. He munch ed a coffee ring, drank a cup of coffee and shot the breeze about who was upstairs. The cooks and bakers were bitching about the lack of action. "I've seen it calm like this before," said Roach. "Some- thing will happen when it starts." Then GQ sounded, and he headed forward to his battle station. He was wearing dungarees, a hat, a utility neck scarf and carrying his life preserver under his arm.

Roach's battle station was in the forward issue room, and it was his duty to stand out emergency orders. Another gun was followed. But the forward issue room was two decks down, and because of his aversion to being below decks he had to hurry. He ran down the next two decks above the issue room but astride the sole passage leading below. It had become his habit to stay there during GQ unless he spotted something. But this time, he was going to accompany the man below, issue the required material and come back up to sick bay. Roach had one other concern. He was worried about a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead.

As long as it's necessary to stay below, I'll stay there, but if it's not necessary I won't.

Five minelayer battleships in sick bay: the ship's doctor, a chief pharmacist's mate and three other pharmacist's mates. They were there when Roach came in. He remained with them all night, mending and bandaging. Roach was concerned about a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead. While they were talking about their mission against Makin and securitizing the Liscombe, Roach heard a crash against a bulkhead.

The bulkhead behind the treatment table blew inward, striking Roach on the back and knock- ing him 10 feet through the door. He got up and yelled: "There may be another one." Then he hit the deck and another explosion followed. Somewhat less violent than the first, and Roach got to his feet. So did the others, and in a general melee of bandaging and throwing body parts, they were still alive. Roach groped his way back into the treatment room, searching for his life jacket. He didn't find it. He had to swim the 15 feet from where he had laid it beside him on the treatment table.

At the same time the men looked down the passages leading from sick bay. One was on the port side and one was on the starboard, both were damaged. Roach found a damaged hangar deck. As a matter of personal interest, Roach also looked down the hatch leading to the forward issue room. It was utterly impassable. He went back and tried the port and starboard passages again without success.

The first division of the Liscombe Bay, the 2nd division, was on fire. Flames, and the lack of communication made it obvious to everyone that it was time to get out if a way could be found. Roach was thinking of"I'm working my way forward along the port passageway to the first-division compartment," he said to himself as the day's charges came in. He was trying to answer an answer he started forward. He could hear others following him, but he didn't look back to see who or how many there were. The full the bulkheads were blown in. He climbed and crawled around them. He squirmed through a hole so small that he scraped off a shoe. Finally there was only one man left behind him. Together they made it through to the first-division compart- ment. They had not spoken a word. They were empty and knew there must be a way out. To Roach the first clear sign that he was missing was when the smoke in the air he climbed two ladders and came out on the high (starboard) side of the ship.

As if to crown a few deep breaths: Flames and smoke were curling up the flight deck and he knew he couldn't abandon there. He went
down to the port side. By the light of the flames he could see heads bobbing in the water. No rocks or obstacles were visible in the water. There were three rafts and a floater net way out there. Roach was a lone operator. He left the others on the deck and walked forward to the anchor chain. Tightening his life jacket around his chest, he held the anchor chain and let it slowly drop to the bottom so the life raft would slowly drift down the chain. He had descended about 10 feet when another man, with the same in- clination, swam up to him and joined his shoulders. Looking up, Roach saw that the man had on a life jacket, grabbed him by the feet and the anchor chain was still dragging. Then Roach proceeded down the chain to the anchor and dropped six feet into the water. He pulled up the anchor chain, still holding the chain, and let it drop back down the chain, but his life jacket held him back as lashes whipped around the bow. Only a change in the wind moved him on to a drift course. Then he stopped the floater net and climbed on with about 40 others. Someone shouted, "There she goes." He looked back to see the flames persist as the ship rose beneath the waves. He felt no regret at her passing. There was one man on the Liscombe Bay who abandoned ship twice. Gunner's Mate Hubert Bassett crawled down a Jacob's ladder forward on the port side, near where Storekeeper Roach went in via the anchor chain. The wind was un- kind to Bassett, and he soon found himself ringed by flame. He swam back to the Jacob's ladder, tried to climb in and was burnt out. He burned up his shirt and trousers, burned off the surface. And Bassett climbed down again and swam away.

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Dr. Rowe, Mr. Carroll and the nude Capt. Crom- melin were the only others left. They were all head- aft. All around the chaplain 20-mm and 40-mm shells were exploding, but he was so glad to get home from the cruiser that he didn't care. He came upon three men huddled around a machine gun and went up to them. They were dead, burnt, carbonized. A third machine gun was standing by another gun, and he told them to abandon. They went down a rope, and he followed. Later, as he was being hauled onto a destroyer, he heard someone addressing him, "Oh, Padre," said the voice, "I see religion paid off."

Most of the men in the stewaros branch on the Navy are Negroes. They wait on tables, serve OldMagazineArticles.com
The Sinking of the Liscome Bay

as orderlies and work in the officers' galleys. There was an unusual messman on the Liscome Bay. The son of an impoverished farmer near Waco, Tex., he had joined the Navy to help his family earn a living.

It was on the ill-fated Arizona that he became famous. During the Pearl Harbor attack he rushed to the bridge and manned a machine gun, firing it through the explosions and devastation around him.

For this action Dorie Miller won the Navy Cross. In the Negro world Dorie Miller became an idol. There were fan clubs organized for him and songs written about him. His mother was brought up from Waco for a big rally in Harlem. She spoke to the people there.

"I just got a letter from Dorie," she said. "He don't write much. But he said he thought he'd be home around 1945...."

Dorie Miller was in the after section of the Liscome Bay and was not a survivor.