

Ships Data Section
Public Information Division
Office of Public Relations
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS CABLE (ARS-19)

The keel for a new salvage vessel was laid on 24 November 1942 at the Basalt Rock Company, Napa, California. Launched on 1 April 1943, the ship was sponsored by Mrs. Benjamin Elliot, wife of the assistant officer in charge of civil construction, and was henceforth known as USS CABLE.

CABLE began her career as a rescue and salvage ship at 1400 on 6 March 1944, at commissioning ceremonies along side the Southern Pacific Dock, Vallejo, California.

During the first three days of her naval service CABLE remained at the Southern Pacific Dock while members of the crew filled her innards with fuel oil, food stores, spare parts, and gear from warehouses of the Basalt Rock Company. On 9 March the commanding officer took her down San Francisco Bay to Tiburon for a six-day drydocking period, thence back to Vallejo for additional equipment.

With all details completed in the upper bay area, she sailed to San Francisco on 19 March where she remained until the 26th for calibration of her radio direction finder and magnetic compass, installation of degaussing coils, and requisitioning of additional supplies from the Oakland Naval Supply Depot.

Finally, after receiving orders to depart for San Diego and shakedown exercises on 26 March, the commanding officer set a course for the Southern California seaport. Save for rough seas off Golden Gate and squally weather throughout most of the first night, the two-day trip was uneventful. CABLE arrived in San Diego on the afternoon of 28 March and was moored to one of the West Coast Sound School docks. A complete material inspection was made of the ship the next morning.

Scheduling of shakedown exercises was interrupted on 30 March by orders from the Eleventh Naval District to depart for Cape Lucas, Mexico, to assist a ship, which had suffered a breakdown while enroute from the east to the west coast of the United States. Arriving off Cape San Lucas three days later, CABLE departed the same day with the ship in tow astern and passed through the San Diego anti-submarine net at midnight 7 April.

From 9 April until the final personnel and material inspection on 26 April CABLE spent almost every day at sea going through shakedown exercises prescribed for a rescue-salvage type vessel. The major event, requiring three days, was retraction of an LCI from the beach south of Coronado.

From San Diego CABLE made a daylight trip on 28 April to San Pedro to pick up a tow which every member of the crew thought was bound for San Francisco. They were mistaken. Within 48 hours the ship was underway with the tow (YC-1039 and YF-689), bound for Pearl Harbor.

By this time the crew of CABLE had begun to feel keen affection for her and had begun to use the more personal "we" when discussing her. She was a comfortable ship. Her 2,100 tons rode well through the rolling Pacific, and her 39-foot beam and 214-foot overall length gave everyone freedom of movement for work and recreation.

The trip to Pearl Harbor, all 13 days of it, was uneventful. The crossing, less than a week for many ships, was slow for CABLE because of her tow. The YF broke loose in a heavy ground swell one night and floated over several miles of the Pacific before it could be retrieved in the early daylight hours. Overcast skies during the first week made navigation difficult, but long before Oahu appeared on the horizon the skies had cleared and a successful landfall promised to be a certainty.

Upon arrival in Pearl Harbor on 12 May, CABLE deposited her tow, but not for long. Orders were waiting for her to take both units to Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshalls. From Kwajalein she departed for Milne Bay, New Guinea, and reported to Service Force, Seventh Fleet, for duty.

In company with four fleet tugs, towing floating drydocks and lighters laden with supplies, she left on the morning of 19 May for Kwajalein with her tow. It didn't look much like a convoy, as the ungainly tows developed a habit of drifting from side to side and made it almost impossible for the ships to maintain station. Despite the obstinate tows and slow speed, the ships arrived in Kwajalein on 2 June.

Leaving the northern Marshalls atoll on 4 June, the convoy started a junket down into the Southwest Pacific via Majuro Atoll, Marshall Islands, Tarawa in the Gilberts, and Purvis Bay, Solomon Islands, arriving in Milne Bay on 14 July. CABLE worked in each port recovering barges or setting buoys, and on the last leg from Purvis to Milne, towed the YO-24, but still had plenty of time for the crew to swim, fish, and enjoy the sights on the islands.

The commanding officer requested seven days availability immediately upon arrival in Milne Bay for drydocking and having alterations completed, but before it was granted the ship was sent to Cape Nelson, off the northeast coast of New Guinea, to assist the grounded SS CHIEF JOSEPH. CHIEF JOSEPH freed herself, however, with out assistance, and CABLE was ordered to Kiriwina Island on 23 July to repair a propeller on SS HANYANK. Upon completion of this assignment, which took but a few hours, CABLE got underway for Milne Bay, but during the night she received a dispatch to go to the assistance of the SS MONTEREY, aground on Cape Nelson.

Arriving at Cape Nelson the evening of 24 July, she took soundings before dark and next morning made fast a cable to the transport's stern. In taking up anchor at noon CABLE was tossed onto the reef by ground swells. Retrieving the wire from MONTEREY, CABLE succeeded in getting free of the reef, and, on orders from the senior salvage officer present, went to the starboard bow of the grounded vessel, secured the wire, and took a pull without success. Then just before nightfall she was ordered along with four LCIs, to attempt to push MONTEREY free. The maneuver was successful. About midnight MONTEREY floated free and CABLE returned to Milne Bay on 26 July for a much needed availability.

With the YO-24 and a pontoon causeway in tow astern, the vessel departed on 10 August for Finschhafen, New Guinea, and Manus Island. At Finschhafen she left the causeway two days later and shoved off for Manus, arriving there on 15 August.

Following orders, received prior to arrival in Manus, CABLE got underway on 17 August for Cairns, Australia. The ship arrived in the north Australia port on 21 August, and waited until 4 September before getting orders from Commander Service Force to proceed to Mios Woendi Island off the northwestern coast of New Guinea.

On 3 September CABLE received orders to embark three fire fighting teams with equipment. Shortly after 0800, trucks from the salvage unit began arriving with pumps, foam, gear for the men, and other supplies. Crews from the unit and CABLE had the equipment loaded and secured for sea within three hours, but as orders for the unit had not arrived from Brisbane the ship was ordered to secure until the following day.

The next morning salvage and fire fighting officers reported aboard, and at 1100 CABLE departed, for Milne Bay. Arriving off Gamadodo, Milne Bay on 6 September, officers and men were debarked within a few minutes after the anchor was dropped. They had much to accomplish before nightfall. Ship's officers went to Ladava for further routing while the fire fighters went ashore to obtain additional supplies and equipment.

Early the next morning with all fire fighting equipment and food stores aboard, CABLE weighed anchor and steamed out of the harbor amidst the perennial Milne Bay mist. She arrived at Woendi the morning of 10 September and two days later she proceeded to Maffin Bay to place a fire fighting team on QUAPAW. She arrived at Maffin 14 hours later only to learn that QUAPAW had sailed for Morotai. Returning to Woendi, CABLE stood by awaiting orders and on 24 September she got underway to Alexishafen, New Guinea, where she was to assist Mobile Repair Unit No. 1 in moving to Hollandia. She arrived in Alexishafen on the 27th and during the next few days CABLE made two round trips to Hollandia before completing her assignment.

From 7 to 18 October, when CABLE departed for the Leyte invasion, she made preparations for the invasion and assisted Commander Naval Base as a harbor tug. CABLE departed Hollandia harbor on the 18th in convey with 80 other service force, merchant marine, and amphibious ships, whose purpose it was to furnish logistic support in the Leyte area. This convey was the second and smaller one to leave Hollandia, and others were scheduled to follow as the campaign intensified.

The first three days of the trip were uneventful with the exception of the surprise announcement that only light resistance was encountered on the Leyte beachhead. Explosion of a mine off the convey's left flank created momentary excitement the third morning, but mine warfare tactics had taught CABLE'S crew that it was out of position and possibly the only one in the vicinity.

When word reached the convey of the American blow to the Philippine midriff, the force swung away from Palau toward the Philippines, as deception was no longer necessary.

A speedy fleet tanker, which had been towing a barge of highly inflammable aviation gasoline, broke her tow line on 23 October, and CABLE was ordered to retrieve the barge. By the time she was able to secure a wire to the tow she was ten miles behind the convey and trailed at that distance the remaining 200 miles. She had become, through no fault of her own, the dangerous class of all convoys, the straggler. Three times in the dark waters off Leyte Gulf the vessel was challenged by American patrol ships and had to dodge two huge southbound allied convoys standing out of the gulf.

CABLE'S welcome to San Pedro Bay, Leyte, was a glorious one ---three air raids the first day. In mid-morning as she was snail-pacing her way into the bay with her lethal charge alongside, Jap planes appeared overhead. On all sides of the ship, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and lesser fighting ships of the THIRD and SEVENTH Fleets were laying down a smoke screen, (as was learned later), deploying into battle formation for a fight to the death with three Nipponese task forces which were at the moment steaming toward Leyte Gulf. One helpful destroyer, seeing CABLE in the plight of an unmaneuverable tug, laid a smoke screen about her but not before an enemy plane had straddled the ship and barge with two 100-pound bombs. Again at high noon the Japs appeared, but were beat back by heavy anti-aircraft fire, and at 1700 they made another attempt without results. CABLE'S crew remained at general quarters until almost midnight but the only activity was reflection in the clouds above Surigao Strait from guns of the opposing American and Jap forces that were pounding out the first round of the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

The ship's crew manned their battle stations at 0450 on 25 October and stood by for two hours without firing a shot. The Jap airmen directed their attack at ships in the gulf 20 miles away, but the next attack was much closer. In an effort to knock out the recently captured Tacloban airstrip, where Navy planes from sunken U.S. carriers were landing for fuel and ammunition, the Japs attempted attack after attack. Each time they were met by withering fire from ships anchored along the Leyte beach. All this time CABLE'S guns remained cold, as she still had alongside the barge of gasoline, which was anchored in late afternoon in an isolated part of the bay.

Although the battle had been fought no more than 30 miles away, CABLE knew less about the Surigao Strait engagement than did newspaper readers at home, until the crippled destroyer GRANT limped into the bay alongside the fleet tug CHICKASAW. During the air raid CABLE was requested to help pump out GRANT, as the destroyer was slowly sinking. She proceeded alongside GRANT and put pumps to work immediately in her forward compartments while the fleet tug pumped aft. Although the destroyer had received 19 shell hits, she was made seaworthy in two days.

CABLE had momentary respite from the GRANT repair job the night of 27 October. A Jap plane crashed into the SS BENJAMIN IDE WHEELER and by the time CABLE reached her, flames were raging mast high. However, with the help of her fire-fighting experts and another tug, the blaze was extinguished in an hour and forty-five minutes. Amidst another air raid the ship returned to GRANT next morning and continued efforts to make her ready for sea. The task completed on the 29th, she moved alongside WHEELER to patch up holes caused by the exploding bomber and an unexpended bomb that went off while CABLE was fighting the fire.

The night before the repair ship began salvage operations on WHEELER, she was ordered, in the face of a storm of hurricane proportions, to assist SS CAPE CUMBERLAND in freeing herself from a reef near the entrance to San Pedro Bay. A strain was taken on her stern but no movement being noted within an hour, all work was stopped for the night. The storm, increasing to 80 knots at midnight, placed CABLE in a dangerous position, making it advisable to cast off and anchor in safer waters. Next morning she returned to CAPE CUMBERLAND, but she had slipped off the reef during the storm and needed help only to free a fouled anchor.

Before the morning had aged materially, ARS-19 was alongside WHEELER making preparations to patch a maze of holes, one of which was large enough to drive a jeep through. The same day she patched a small hole in SS DAVID DUDLEY FIELD, the result of being rammed by an LCI.

More in keeping with their method of attrition fighting, the Japs began whittling at our defensive screen of destroyers in Leyte Gulf on 1 November. The new approach, however, proved costly to U.S. forces. In a short tiff, the task forces lost one destroyer and suffered damage to two others. Since the destroyers had higher priority than WHEELER, CABLE proceeded to give first aid to USS CLAXTON and USS KILLEN, to ready them for return to rear area repair bases. Needing only minor welding repairs, CLAXTON was ready on 3 November, and on 16 November extensive hull repairs were completed on KILLEN.

On 12 November CABLE removed bent propellers from two PCEs, both of them casualties of the recent typhoon. Before completing the repairs on the PCEs CABLE was dispatched to Dulag, ten miles away, to extinguish fires on two bombed liberty ships. It was Black Sunday in San Pedro Bay.

Renewing their aerial warfare after a week of virtually no raids, the enemy successfully attacked four U.S. ships, hitting two of them with bombs and the others with plunging planes. Fires broke out on all four ships with a resultant loss of life, but surprisingly enough only minor damage was caused to cargo and the vessels themselves.

As CABLE steamed across the bay toward Dulag, anti-aircraft batteries opened up on two Nip planes, which successfully bombed two ships. CABLE gave full right rudder, heeled over, and started back to assist the nearest of the burning ships, but before she reached her, the fire had been reduced to hot steam. The vessel then proceeded to the repair ship ACHILLES, where her fire-fighters had smoldering, but persistent fires to check, and had debris, dead and injured to remove.

Blood flowed for the first time amongst CABLE'S crew, when five men suffered superficial cuts from a stray shell fired by a nearby ship, ostensibly at an enemy plane overhead.

Toward mid-week, activity in the air dwindled, but on Leyte fighting grew more brutal. The Japanese were able to get reinforcements ashore at Ormoc, and the U.S. forces continued to land troops on the opposite side of the island.

As the week waned the pernicious enemy in arms, apparently hoping to check the American advances and wipe out the expanding beachhead, reappeared in force. Two unloaded liberty ships, GILBERT STEWART and ALCOA PIONEER, were hit on successive mornings and CABLE went to their assistance each time, finding few casualties and only perfunctory damage.

Between 20 and 23 November CABLE pulled LST-909 off a Leyte landing beach, repaired propellers on the LST-169, and raised an LSM that had sunk off the bombed out town of Dulag. On Thanksgiving Day at dusk, the ship began the most gruelling part of her work at Leyte.

A Jap plane, slipping in over Samar Island, brought the repair-ship out of her turkey-day lethargy by dropping a torpedo into the side of SS GUS DARNELL and started a fire that took CABLE 16 hours to extinguish. With the help of the fleet tugs HIDATSA and QUAPAW, approximately five million gallons of water were pumped into the DARNELL before the conflagration flickered and died at noon 24 November. CABLE'S fire fighters were so intent on saving the ship that a Jap bomber almost dropped a string of bombs on her before a gunners' mate spied him sneaking in over Samar Island and clipped him with a burst of shells. The plane swerved, harmlessly dropping the bombs 50 yards astern, and began gliding toward the Samar hills trailing smoke all the way.

CABLE then steamed to the aid of a PC, which had been hit by a bomb. The ship had the PC alongside for 12 days, repairing damage and getting her ready for towing to a southern repair base. In the meantime, she administered repairs to the destroyers AULICK and SUMNER, gave medical aid to another destroyer and a floating drydock, changed bent propellers on seven landing ships, raided a sunken landing craft, and made minor repairs to other vessels.

The December offensive of Ormoc Bay, the last major enemy supply port on Leyte's west coast, gave the Japs a better opportunity to strike telling blows at U. S. warships and small transports. A majority of the ships hit at Ormoc were either towed back or returned under their own power to San Pedro Bay for emergency repairs.

In the first 15 days of the month CABLE, in addition to repairing AULICK, SUMNER, and a PC, made repairs to the destroyers MUGFORD, LAMSON and CALDWELL and three LSMs, all of which suffered damage in Ormoc Bay battles. The three LSMs were returned to duty after having numerous holes patched, and the other ships were patched and made ready for return to repair bases. Minor repairs were made also to two LCTs.

With the Ormoc beachhead secured by forces of General MacArthur's Sixth Army, the Japs ceased their raids on shipping in San Pedro harbor and made only weak attacks on convoys making the end-around sweep to Ormoc. CABLE'S work on damaged ships came to an end with the CALDWELL job, but was intensified on LSMs, which damaged their propellers each time they landed on the hard beach at Ormoc. In the latter half of the month 11 LSMs were alongside for propeller repairs.

The ship steamed out of San Pedro Bay on 4 January 1945 into becalmed Leyte Gulf, joined a small convoy of 50 ships, and with it moved southeastward into the Pacific until she formed in convoy with the first echelon of the Luzon attack force. This convoy of transports and amphibious craft was immense, presenting a three-mile front and extending in column for ten miles. Directly astern of it was another convoy of like size, and while steaming into Surigao Strait, 50 more ships from Leyte fell in behind the second convoy.

The convoy's escort of destroyers, cruisers, carriers, and land-based aircraft was gargantuan, but still extensive enemy opposition was expected. Upon passing through Surigao Strait the force left the protection of American held territory, except for the few hours it steamed westward of Mindoro. As the convoy's route often came within ten miles and seldom out of sight of Jap-infested islands, both sky and sea were constantly scanned for enemy craft. Each day was a repetition of the previous one, until 7 January, when the convoy was raided by two light bombers, which were shot down by ~~the~~ a screening cruiser. In the evening a suicide plane sneaked out of a cloud bank directly over the rear of the convoy and dived toward an LST, attempting to bomb it and then crash into another LST. The pilot missed both targets and went to a watery grave with cold steel from CABLE and half a dozen other ships in his plane. Aerial activity ended the next morning when a Jap plane spotted a fleet tug in early twilight and ineffectually dropped a bomb between her and ARS-19. The previous night as the convoy steamed a bare 40 miles off Manila, a Jap destroyer came out to harass the force but was quickly sunk by an American destroyer.

At dusk on 8-Day-minus-one another convoy appeared on the horizon and a task force of battleships, cruisers, and aircraft carriers took shape on the left flank. The invasion force was beginning to assemble, extending south more than 40 miles and presenting a solid front of 20 miles.

The convoy methodically moved down Lingayen Gulf, took stations at 0700, 9 January and waited for the fireworks. Heavyweights opened fire on beach installations and continued for two and a half hours their task of reducing them to rubble. The Japs did not retaliate and troops landed easily and started their long but speedy march toward Manila.

On invasion day two enemy planes were observed over the gulf, one the next day, and from then on, until 14 February, only occasional alerts reminded CABLE of their presence. The ship was kept cognizant, nevertheless, that a war was in progress ashore by the incessant pounding of the hillsides to the east of San Fabian by big guns of American warships, and by a first rate artillery duel north of Zamortis.

CABLE'S first salvage assignment took her to Blue Beach, midway between San Fabian and Lingayen, where for three days she removed beached pontoon causeways and two LSTs. The assignment was a sunrise to sunset one, its importance was measured by the fact that the whole Blue Beach unloading schedule was being delayed. The last half of the month CABLE'S work, although extensive, was more or less routine, save for the raising of a Jap submarine. The sub, laying in the shallow water of Damortis, was a 280-ton cargo vessel, the largest enemy submarine the U. S. Navy had at that time recovered.

Steaming for Subic Bay on 14 February with two pontoon causeways in tow, CABLE arrived there the morning of 16 February.

On 4 March CABLE was ordered to survey ravaged North Harbor where sunken enemy vessels blocked the unloading of American cargo ships, waiting in the outer harbor to disgorge their implements of war. This was the biggest harbor clearance job of the war, and before America's strategic Philippine seaport could be used, some 60-odd Japanese fighting, cargo, and amphibious derelicts had to be raised or blasted into towable junk. Preliminary estimates revealed the whole operation totalling 300 ships would require two years, but unless the main channels and wharf areas were swept clear of debris in three months the monsoons over the South China Sea would make large scale salvage operations difficult.

Dividing into three parties to more speedily complete the North Harbor inspection, salvage officers toured every slip and jetty to get a comprehensive picture of the overall situation. Although they discovered many more vessels partially or wholly submerged inside the breakwater than pre-liberation photographs had revealed, they found most of them to be of wooden construction and easily removable. North Harbor, however, was not the only area packed with wrecks. As the salvage unit, composed of two repair ships, a TP, and four LSTs, had steamed into the bay salvage men had seen many large wrecks in South Harbor and contiguous to the seaward side of the breakwater. CABLE was assigned the task of removing four scuttled ships from the entrance to South Harbor.

By the process of patching holes, pumping out water and forcing in air, on 15 March CABLE raised and towed away the first of the wrecks, a 600-ton Jap tanker. It was the first large wreck removed from a strategic area. Then she was given the task of making underwater surveys on wrecks inside South Harbor, working at this until mid-May.

On 10 May, towing a salvaged Japanese hulk, CABLE got underway for Subic Bay, and a week later she returned to Manila with a 75-ton crane. Immediately after her return, she was ordered back to Subic with a salvaged Jap tugboat, and from there proceeded to the mouth of the Pampal River, 50 miles north of Subic on the west coast of Luzon, to recover from a sandbar a small Philippine freight vessel.

The freighter had been so badly battered in the surf that she could not be kept afloat and she was rebeached at the river's mouth.

CABLE returned to Manila and on 30 May she proceeded to Morotai Island. While in Morotai she made repairs to numerous ships and then loaded supplies for her forthcoming third invasion.

On 26 June CABLE, steaming as a member of the invasion task group, stood out of Morotai, bound for Balikpapan, Boreno, the East's biggest outlet for the precious ingredient of war --- oil. The force was a hodgepodge convoy of transports, various-sized landing craft, service vessels, warships, and cargo carriers. Fighting men from the four corners were represented---Dutch, Australians, New Zealanders, British, and Americans.

Little or no opposition was expected on the 800-mile trip to Balikpapan and none was encountered.

CABLE'S position as usual was at the tailend of the convoy where she, the only fully equipped towing vessel in the formation, could give assistance to stragglers. Another possibility was fire, and lines were laid out for just such an emergency.

After a slow, cautious approach the preceeding night and early morning, on July 1 the warships opened up on Jap beach defenses, then wave after wave of bombers flew over Balikpapan dropping bombs in the same areas. At 0900 the first wave of Australian troops hit the beach and met only slight resistance, and there was little enemy opposition during the whole Balikpapan operation.

Leaving there on 22 July with 29 other ships, CABLE arrived in Morotai five days later without suffering mishap. After spending almost a week in Morotai awaiting orders to sail, on 3 August she got underway for Subic Bay with a 400-ton pontoon drydock and a water barge in tow astern. The trip, which was completed without incident on 12 August, took ARS-19 into the Philippine Archipelago at Zamboanga, Mindanao Island, northward into Verde Island Passage, thence to Subic.

When President Truman announced on 15 August 1945, that "the emperor of Japan has ordered a cessation of military activities", CABLE was beginning a 15-day availability period, the first in a year.

CABLE continued operating in the Philippines until 6 March 1946, when she steamed out of Leyte Gulf, bound for Pearl Harbor, via Okinawa and Eniwetok. The ship arrived at Pearl Harbor on 18 June and a month later with APL-18 in tow, she set sail for San Diego, arriving there on 28 July.

CABLE operated out of San Diego until 28 January 1947, when she got underway for Charlestown, South Carolina, via the Panama Canal. On 22 March she arrived in Charlestown where she underwent a period of yard availability. Leaving there on 10 April CABLE then operated out of East Coast ports, including: Newport, R.I.; Boston, Mass.; Portsmouth, N.H.; Portland, Me.; Davisville, R.I.; New London, Conn.; and Provincetown, Mass.

On 14 July CABLE dropped anchor at Boston and a month later, on 15 September 1947, she was decommissioned.

* * *

LIST OF SUCCESSIVE COMMANDING OFFICERS

Lieut. Comdr. H. Pond, USNR	- 6 March 1944 to August 1945
Lieut. Comdr. T. F. Strafford	- August 1945 to January 1946
Lieut. Comdr. F. W. Beyer, USN	- January 1946 to August 1947
Chief Boatswain A. O. Monslee	- August 1947 to 15 September 1947

* * *

USS CABLE AFS-19 earned three battle stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre service ribbon for participation in the following campaigns:

1 star/Leyte Operation	-- 10 October to 16 December 1944
Leyte Landings	-- 10 October to 29 November 1944
1 star/Luzon Operation	-- 12 December 1944 to 1 April 1945
Lingayen Gulf Landings	-- 4 to 18 January 1945
1 star/Borneo Operations	-- 27 April to 20 July 1945
Balikpapan Operation	-- 15 June to 20 July 1945

* * *

STATISTICS

TRIAL DISPLACEMENT	- 1,897 tons	ARMAMENT	- Two twin 40 MM AA batteries.
LENGTH	- 213 feet 6 inches	COMPLEMENT	- 120 plus
BEAM	- 39 feet		
TRIAL SPEED	- 14.8 knots		

* * *

Stencilled 4 June 1948