

# LCI (G) 450 Saga - By Ensign R. C. Haines

## The Saga of LCI 450

*This is the history of one of those many WWII US Navy Amphibious ships that Navy Brass gave numbers instead of names. In voice communications the LCI ships were referred to as "Elsie Items."*

On their arrival at Barber, New Jersey the Captain and the crew of the U.S.S LCI (L) 450 wanted to see their future home right away. They asked for the location of their home, the LCI 450. Following their guide they stopped before a pile of steel sheets, reels of cable and wire, eight brand new diesel engines and two ship anchors. Thirty six hours later, on August 26, 1943, the disappointment of the first look at the ship was changed to amazement, For there on the ways, completed but for the interior painting, was the pile of steel, wire and engines they had seen the day before, Only this time it was a ship.

When the ship was commissioned, Lt.(jg) Thomas Kennedy Jr. USNR of 54 Overhill Road, Cynwid, Penn., was named Captain of the ship. He started off right away with drills, drills and more drills. At the time these drills were very unpopular with all concerned, but later they were thankful they had so many. Each drill that was practiced was used at least once when the chips were down. These drills eventually helped to build the record of the ship to one of the best among Amphibious craft.

The first look the men had of the sea was on the trip from Little Creek, Virginia to San Diego, California. On this trip they found that the water of the Atlantic isn't at all like the mirror smooth water depicted in romantic tales. It is a continually moving mass of hills and valleys. LCI's are not known for their smooth sailing and nearly all the men on board had their first taste of sea-sickness.

The trip through the Panama Canal was uneventful except for some exciting times had on liberty in Coco Solo or Balboa. Trouble began on the way up the coast of lower California. Engines started heating, clutches froze and to top it off, one whole quad was made inoperable. Lt.(jg) Robert V. Main USNR, of 1412 El Camino Real, Burlingame, California, the Engineering Officer did all that was possible to repair the difficulty but it was no use. The group flagship, U.S.S. LCI (L) 457 attempted a tow but the cable parted and the lame 450 proceeded independently. With only three engines operating, a tug was sent out to pick up the ship and tow it into San Diego.

January 6, 1944: The men on the ship begin to realize that the Pacific is a big ocean. Also that at times it could be as mean and unpredictable as the Atlantic only it has more color and is warmer. On arriving at Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands, the men thought they should be all the way to China as it took eleven days to make the trip.

At San Diego the first step in converting the ship into a gunboat was taken. The bow twenty millimeter was replaced by a forty millimeter and ten rocket launchers were placed outboard of the ramps. Another factor in the conversion was the addition of more men in the complement of the ship.

On the last day of January 1944 the ship received her baptism under enemy fire. The first run made by this ship on a enemy beach was at Kwajalein in the Marshalls at 0930. At 1100 on D-Day, orders were received to proceed to another island. The current was treacherous, the wind was strong, and there was a heavy surf. Due to these conditions and the fact that the rudder stuck at four degrees right set the ship aground on a coral reef. While hung up on the reef four amphibious tanks capsized in the heavy surf astern.

Lines were passed from the reef bound ship to the Marines struggling in the surf. Forty eight of the fifty four Marines that were in the tanks managed to work their way aboard with aid of the lines passed to them. Much credit should go to Lt. R. B. Hardy (MC) USMC who was with the Marine force and Sidney C. Baumber PhM/1C, of 89 Faxon Road, North Quincy, Massachusetts, from the 450 for reviving as many nearly-drowned men as they did and patching up many coral cuts. For three days the ship was stuck on the reef and when the tide was out the water was shallow enough to walk in.

On the 2 February the U.S.S. Chickasaw pulled the ship off the reef but not without trouble. Tows broke and chocks were pulled right out of the deck. The ship was in no shape to go anywhere under her own power so the job of being towed was undertaken. The 450 was the second ship in tow by the USS Cape San Martin astern the Destroyer Anderson. (DD411.)

The troubles were great what with parting lines and cables. The cables would part and the ship would either drift away from the tow or drift up on the Anderson and start banging her. After drifting around all night as a result of a parted cable, the U.S.S. LST 43 attempted the job but met with no success. The U.S.S. LST 45 managed to get a line over and the ship arrived in Pearl Harbor with no more mishaps. After repairs were made at Pearl Harbor the ship sailed for Guadalcanal. On 24 April 1944, King Neptune reigned as the ship crossed over the equator. The men were a sorry looking lot with no hair or if they had hair, it was cut to form a V.

At Guadalcanal the final conversion was effected changing the ship from an LCI (L) to an LCI (G). The ramps were removed and in their place forty-two rocket launchers were installed. Two more twenty millimeters guns were replaced by forty millimeters and the ship was ready to go again, only this time as a gunboat.

On the ninth of June Kwajalein was left in the distance. En-route to Saipan there were two events that were exciting if not terrifying for some. The drills given by Captain Kennedy were starting to pay off. Man overboard ! Jack J. Buchanan S/1C USNR, of 37 E. Santa Clara St., San Jose, California in attempting to set up the rocket launchers fell over the side, but was picked up in a very short time.

The second event occurred on the fifteenth of June. Three Japanese Kates attacked the convoy. One plane on releasing its torpedo passed less than a hundred yards of the fantail. The gunners were quick to see their advantage and pumped twenty and forty millimeter shells into the plane sending it crashing

into the sea. The remaining two planes left in a hurry as some of our own Navy planes were bearing down on them.

The ship acted as part of the reserve unit at Saipan and was not called on to do anymore shooting for a while. After spending ten days at Eniwetok for logistics, once more the ship was heading westward. This time it was Guam.

Early in the morning of July 21, 1944 the Japs got a full view of the LCI (G) 's in action. After making a run on the beach, orders were received to knock out gun positions. The three ships preceding the 450 received hits and were pretty badly shot up, but the 450 still had her rabbit's foot and came through unscathed. The remaining time until the Marines had the island secured was spent in patrolling and seeing that no Japanese left the island in an attempt to get to Rota.

When Guam was secured, the ship was sent up to Saipan for patrol duty and mail runs to Tinian. On the 9 November 1944 Lt. Kennedy was sent back to the states and the Captaincy fell to Ensign Wallace A. Brady USNR of Bancroft, Wisconsin. Ensign Walter M. Davis USNR of Petersburg, Virginia was made Executive officer.

After a brief stay at Guam on a smoke station, the ship left for Ulithi and maneuvers for the coming invasion of Iwo Jima. Then up to Saipan for more maneuvers and to take care of logistics.

The first sight of Iwo Jima was early in the morning of the 17 February 1945. and we all watched the large shells from the big ships rain down on the island. At 1030 that morning, our ship made a run on the beach in support of the underwater demolition teams. The ship must have left her rabbit's foot back at Guam because all wasn't serene and the Japs threw us quite a welcome party. The ship was hit with a large caliber projectile on the starboard bow. Two minutes later another hit by a large projectile on the port bow starting a fire in the forward compartment. This last hit gave the ship the distinction of being the first United States ship to drop anchor at Iwo Jima since Perry visited the island in the 1800's. There was only one difference: Perry dropped his anchor voluntarily, and LCI 450 had hers shot off

Our rockets and gunfire all hit on the beach. A lot of the ships on this run didn't even have a chance to get their rockets off. Two more hits were received in quick succession on the forward port side of the deckhouse leaving a great gaping hole. The fire in the forward compartment was gaining due to a lack of water caused by the fact that all the fire hose's had been riddled with shrapnel.

The magazine adjacent to this compartment was ordered flooded due to the threatening fire and its possibility of exploding. At this time the ship was backing full away from the beach when another hit was received on the port twenty millimeter ready area setting it afire and sending twenty millimeter shells flying in all directions. This was quickly extinguished by the damage control officer Ensign (Now Lt. (jg) Charles King, of 1148 5th Ave. New York, NY. Several rockets that had misfired and were still in the launchers exploded when they were hit with a mortar shell ruining several launchers and making

the ship look more like a sieve. Ensign King received the bronze star for jettisoning ammunition and the way he quickly brought the fire under control under adverse conditions.

Thomas W. Elmore SM/2C (Then SM/3C) , of Route # 4, Prescott, Arkansas, John L. Manual Coxswain, (Then S1/C) of 24 Grant St. Milford, Mass. Allen L. Johnson CBM, of Long Beach, California, Neil C. Pinkston F1/C of 3513 Washington St., Vicksburg, Mississippi. (All of these men are USNR) also received the Bronze star for their bravery and devotion to duty in extinguishing the fire and jettisoning the threatened ammunition.

Wilbur L. Nelson BM 1/C USNR, of 737 Magnolia Ave. Long Beach, California, Harry J. Diekow MoMM 1/C USNR, of Route # 4 Longview, Texas and Glenn E. Tripp GM 2/C (Then GM 3/C) USNR of Sunel, California, received a letter of commendation for the work they did during the action. Raymond N. Coggins S2/C USNR of 5349 Lazard St. Chattanooga, Tennessee and Jack H. Musselman S2/C USNR, of 1211 5th Ave. Great Falls, Montana received the Purple Heart for injuries received during the action. Jack Musselman died in a few days from the wound received at Iwo Jima.

After a beautiful patching job, said by Commander M. J. Malanaphy as one of the best damage control jobs he had ever seen, the ship left for Saipan and temporary repairs. With the completion of the temporary repairs came orders to proceed to Leyte, P.I. The month spent in Leyte was uneventful except for trading with the natives and carrying liberty parties. Orders to go to Pearl Harbor for a complete overhaul were received with great rejoicing by every man on the ship.

The first stop was Ulithi. Then in company with the USS LCI (G) 469 and the USS Sc 504 the next stop before Pearl would be Eniwetok. While en-route to Eniwetok a storm was encountered with winds of gale force, gusts up to 65 knots an hour, and waves estimated at twenty five feet. In a storm like that in one of these little ships was like riding an egg shell down the Colorado river. When the third day of no sights, the three ships sighted the USS Alabama. A blinker message was sent asking them their position which they complied with. The remainder of the trip was like riding a luxury liner on a small lake after riding out a storm like that one.

Many changes took place in Pearl Harbor, both in the equipment on the ship and in personnel. On the seventeenth of June 1945 Lt. (jg) W.A. Brady was relieved and Lt. (jg) H. Pillsbury Martin USNR, of Route #1 Pasadena, California, took over command of the ship. Along with the new Captain came almost an entire new crew.

The duty of carrying liberty parties is about the worst and most aggravating duty there is and that is what this ship was assigned to do.

On the fifth of September LCI (G) Group Eight and this ship were greatly honored. Ex Captain Wallace Brady was awarded the Navy Cross for the heroic work he did in the invasion of Iwo Jima. The Group received the Presidential Unit citation for the action at Iwo Jima. The whole Flotilla Three received the

Navy Unit Citation for the job done at the Marshall and the Marianas Islands. Along with this honor the ships duty was changed from hauling liberty parties to being Shore Patrol Headquarters in Tokyo. This ship may not have been the first to reach Japan but it was the first to go farthest up into Tokyo Bay.

While on this duty the ship acted as a hotel and restaurant to the staff of the Tokyo shore patrol. Late in October the ship went back to the task of hauling liberty parties for the big ships. This duty didn't last long as we received orders to go to Saipan.

Saipan turned out to be a hurdle that some of the men couldn't leap. Several of the men were screened off the ship and placed on other amphibious vessels in need of more men. After the departure from Saipan and arrival at Eniwetok, the engines failed. During the past month the engines have been undergoing a complete overhaul and should be finished in a few more days. On the twenty first of December Lt. (jg) H. Pillsbury Martin USNR was relieved of his Captaincy by Ensign Walter M. Davis former Executive Officer. The job of Executive Officer fell on the shoulders of Ensign Miles B. Hirschey USR, of Claris, Minnesota. It is expected and hoped for that the ship will go back to the States soon for decommissioning and all hands will be discharged.

July 26, 1945: It was back to the forward area and the expected attack on Japan. While on the way to Guam rumors that Japan had surrendered came over the radio. Then it came: THE WAR IS OVER!

After picking up the rest of our group, the course was set for Japan arriving in time for the signing of the surrender papers on board the USS Missouri.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Ensign R. C. Haines**