

LCI (G) 474 at Iwo Jima - Ensign Robert J. Harker, Engineering Officer

IWO JIMA - 17 FEBRUARY 1945

Ensign Bob Harker was the engineering officer aboard USS LCI (G) 474. His ship was part of the LCI Group 8 that supplied covering fire for the Iwo Jima UDT groups checking Iwo Jima beach conditions on 17 February 1945.

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On this date, February 17, many years ago, LCI (G) GROUP 8, FLOTILLA THREE participated in the Gunfire Support Group Operation covering the Underwater Demolition Teams (Seals) conduct reconnaissance operations of the southeast beaches on D-2. LCI GROUP EIGHT was made up of the following LCI (G)'s 346, 348, 438, 441, 449, 450, 457 (Group Flag), 466, 469, 471, 473, and 474. LCI (FF) 627 carried the Flotilla Commander, Cdr. M.J. Malanaphy, and his staff.

Early in February 1945, the ships of Group 8 assembled at Ulithi Atoll to commence training for this operation. Later in February training was completed at Saipan and Tinian. In the early evening of February 13, 1945, the Gunboat Support Units One and Two departed Saipan enroute to IWO JIMA. Passage to IWO JIMA was uneventful.

Excerpts from the LCI (G) GROUP 8 ACTION REPORT will give a brief story of that morning.

"06:30 - Arrived vicinity of Iwo Jima. 08:00 - Reserve and unassigned LCI (G) s 346, 348, 466, 469, and 471 detached with 466 as the guide. LCI (G) 457(GF) took guide and six LCI (G)'s assigned formed column astern. 10:07 - LCI (G)'s 457(GF), 441, 449, 438, 474, 450, and 473 approached base of Mt. Suribachi on course 325 T., in column, distance five hundred yards, speed nine knots. 10:17 - Reduced speed to six knots. 10:19 - About 3500 yards from beach executed "corpen nine". 10:30 - Each LCI (G) on station on right flank of assigned beach, thirty-five hundred yards to seaward. Executed "nine turn" and "act independently". 10:35 - LCI (G)'s passed through destroyer line. 10:48 - LCI (G) 449 and 474 received near misses; both opened fire with all 20mm and 40mm guns. 10:55 - LCP (R)'s with Underwater Demolition Teams aboard approached astern of LCI (G)'s; enemy shore batteries returned heavy counter battery fire. LCI (G)'s 449, 474, 450, and 473 were hit. 11:00 - Roger-Easy Hour. LCP (R)'s at LCI (G) line. LCI (G)'s underway at six knots to one thousand yard line to fire rockets. 11:01-11:05 - Shore batteries continued intense fire with 197mm, six-inch guns, mortars, 37mm, 20mm and smaller caliber automatic weapons. All seven LCI (G)'s were hit. LCI (G) 449 had all 40 mm guns disabled and two fires caused by three large caliber hits. By 11:03 LCI (G) 474 had received ten hits, which knocked out all guns, flooded four compartments and started three fires. LCI

(G) 469 ordered to relieve LCI (G) 449. LCI (G)'s 441, 450, and 473 each fired rocket salvo on the beach. Underwater damage, flooding, fires and damage to rocket launchers and firing circuits prevented the other four gunboats from firing full rocket salvos. 11:04 - LCI (G) 471 ordered to relieve LCI (G) 438, which had serious underwater damage and flooding. 11:06 - LCI (G) 441 retired from one thousand yard line (after firing full rocket salvo) to extinguish fire in ready ammunition. 11:10 - Fire extinguished, LCI (G) 441 returned to one thousand yard line. LCI (G) s 438 and 457, both having suffered serious underwater damage, were flooding rapidly and maneuvering with difficulty at slow speed. Both were ordered to retire to capital ship line. 11:15 - LCI (G) 473 transferred eleven wounded to TWIGGS. Meanwhile LCI (G) 450 was fighting a stubborn fire in the forecandle, which threatened the forward magazines. Accordingly the magazines were flooded. LCI (G) 450 was ordered to proceed to seaward. 11:21 - LCI (G) 466 took three direct hits on the gun deck and pilothouse, disabling both 40mm guns, demolishing interior of pilothouse and causing heavy casualties. LCI (G) 438 transferred two casualties to BRYANT. 11:25 - LCI (G) 471 extinguished fire and returned to the firing line. LCI (G) 457 began transfer of casualties by boat to GILMER. 11:30 - LCI (G) 466 ordered to retire. LCI (G) 450 transferred her seriously wounded to GILMER. 11:32 - Having received two additional hits which killed nine men, wounded six, disabled the bow 40mm gun and started another fire, LCI (G) 471 was ordered to retire. 11:35 - LCI (G) 469, having been hit repeatedly was ordered to proceed to capital ship line. LCI (FF) 627 went alongside LCI (G) 473 and towed her to seaward. 11:40 - Permission granted LCI (G) 469 to return to the firing line, damage having been brought under control. LCI (G) 474 abandoned, all personnel transferred to CAPPS. 11:52 - LCI (G) 441 ordered to retire, but was hit again, steering Page 2 - engine order telegraph and interior communications being disabled. 11:56 - LCI (G) 441 under control and headed out from beach. 12:00 - LCI (G) 466 alongside TENNESSEE to transfer wounded and dead. 12:04 - LCI (G) 469, the remaining gunboat on the firing line, ordered to go to assistance of LCI (G) 441. 12:08 - LCI (G) 471 went alongside TENNESSEE and transferred wounded. 12:15 - LCI (G) 457 alongside TENNESSEE for assistance with damage control. 12:30 - WILLIAMSON rescue party aboard LCI (G) 449. 12:35 - LCI (G) 441 alongside NEVADA to transferred wounded and dead. 12:50 - LCI (G) 449 alongside TERROR; casualties transferred. LCI (G) s 457, 466, and 471 cleared TENNESSEE. 13:00 - LCI (G) 346 alongside LCI (G) 438; assisted with damage control. 13:30 - LCI (G) 474 (by then capsized) sunk by 40mm fire by CAPPS by order of CTG 52.4. Position: Lat. 24o 44' 30" N, Long. 141o 19' 05" E. 156 fathoms of water. 1445 -1525 - CTF 52s 170525 to CTU 52.5.1 was as follows (in part) - "GREATLY ADMIRE MAGNIFICENT COURAGE YOUR VALIANT PERSONNEL. "

The ten LCI (G)'s supporting the Underwater Demolition Teams suffered a total of 201 casualties or thirty percent. Of this number 47, or seven percent were fatalities.

AWARDS:

There were numerous combat awards presented. This was written in the November 1945 issue of "All Hands" magazine: "The extraordinary heroism of 11 officers and crews of 12 Landing Craft, Infantry (Gunboat) in the pre-invasion days of Iwo Jima was told with the presentation of the Medal of Honor to Lt. Rufus G. Herring, Roseboro, N.C.; Navy Crosses to 10 other officers and the Presidential Unit Citation to LCI (G) Group Eight, to which they were attached.

Navy Crosses were awarded to the following 10 officers who commanded units of LCI (G) Group Eight during the close-in fire support operations against Iwo Jima on 17 Feb 1945 for which Group Eight won the Presidential Unit Citation: Lt.(jg) Forrest W. Bell, CO, LCI (G) 441; Lt.(jg) Wallace A. Brady, CO, LCI (G) 450; Lt.(jg) Gerald M. Connors, CO, LCI (G) 469; Lt. Charles E. Fisher, CO, LCI (G) 473; Lt.(jg) Harry L. Gruver, CO, LCI (G) 346; Lt. James Horovitz, CO, LCI (G) 466; Lt. Jerome J. O'Dowd, CO, LCI (G) 457; Lt. (jg) Bernard J. Powers, CO, LCI (G) 438; Lt.(jg) Matthew J. Reichl, CO, LCI (G) 474; Lt.(jg) Alvin E. Rosenbloom, CO, LCI (G) 348. In addition the Navy Cross was awarded to Lt.(jg) Stanley R. Hudgins, CO, LCI (G) 471 at a later date.

I know of Eight Silver Stars and Eleven Bronze Stars that were awarded. Silver Stars - Ensign L.W. Bedell, Engineering Officer, LCI (G) 449, Ensign R.J. Duvall, USS LCI (G) 449, Ensign Robert J. Harker, Engineering Officer, LCI (G) 474, H.J. Beuchman, PhM1/c, USS LCI (G) 449, Arthur T. Lucas, SM3/c, USS LCI (G) 449, Luther L. Adkins, GM1/c, LCI (G) 474, Orville I. McQuiston, MoMM1c, LCI (G) 474, and J. I. Williams, MoMM3c, LCI (G) 474

Bronze Stars - Lt(jg) William J. Walsh, XO, LCI(G) 474, Ensign Lawrence A. Hermes, Stores Officer, LCI (G) 471 and three crewmembers of USS LCI (G) 449. Ensign Charles King, LCI (G) 450, Thomas W. Elmore, SM3/c, LCI (G) 450, John L. Manuel, S1/c, LCI (G) 450, Allen L. Johnson, CBM, LCI (G) 450, Neil C. Pinkston F1/c, LCI (G) 450. Purple Hearts – USS LCI (G) 474

Ensign Robert J. Harker

Ensign Daryl G. Huish - KIA

Jack E. Dennis, PhM1/c

George B. Dixon, F1/c

John W. Florence, GM3/c

John W. Fullerton, GM3/c

Fred H. Gray, S2/c – KIA

Earl F. Hewitt, S2/c

Arthur L. Harness, S2/c

James A. Laird, S1/c

Harold Mazzan, S2/c

Joseph L. Newcomer, S1/c

Donald S. Rappold, S2/c – Died of Wounds

L. D. Shoppe, S1/c

Walter A. Shields, S1/c

Clyde B. Upton, S1/c

Lester H. Welch, GM3/c – KIA

Samuel H. Wilson, MoMM2/c

Purple Hearts – USS LCI (G) 450

Raymond N. Coggins, S2/c, LCI (G) 450, Jack H. Musselman, S2/c, LCI (G) 450, - Jack Musselman died later from the wound received at Iwo Jima. My apologies to those overlooked and omitted. The information about the Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts awarded is limited to USS LCI 474 and USS LCI 450 as other ships records wasn't found during the research. Vaughn Hampton supplied the LCI (G) 450 awards information.

Captain B. Hall Hanlon, Commander Underwater Demolition Teams, Amphibious Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet made the following comment in his recommendation that the Presidential Unit Citation be awarded to LCI (G) Group Eight: "This command is very conscious of the high value of the Presidential Unit Citation, and realizes that to retain its present high position, this award must only be given under extreme circumstances. However, this command and all of the personnel of the demolition teams feel that Naval tradition of a high order was written by these little gunboats on the morning of 17 February 1945 off the island of IWO JIMA. It feels that the Navy can place the phrase "I REQUEST PERMISSION TO RETURN TO THE LINE" alongside the inspirational phrases of its famous admirals.

Shipmates, I Salute You!

'Nuff said from an old man.

Ensign Robert J. Harker, Engineering Officer

USS LCI (G) 474

February 17, 2003