

LCI 489 - By Karl J. Bischoff (Machinist Mate)

LCI 489 Machinist Mate

Karl J. Bischoff

I was an 18-year old sailor on the LCI 489. I am now 74 years old. LCI 489 was built in New Jersey. Our captain was Harry Montgomery, a "90-Day Wonder."

"Most of us had been transferred from another LCI skippered by an old-Navy man who reminded us of Humphrey Bogart. "These men aren't even going to get their feet wet when we hit the beach," he used to say. Needless to say, some of us were a little nervous about going from Humphrey Bogart to a young, inexperienced captain.

After a small training cruise, we set sail for England on Christmas Eve, 1943. We arrived in Falmouth, England in January, 1944. We made our way to Weymouth, England which was to be our operating base while we trained for the invasion. During German air raids, our captain sent us below while he steered the ship to safe water. The other guys would look at me (the sailor with a German last name) and say, "Those are Bischoff's relatives up there!" "Let's get that son-of-a-bitch!" I think they were just kidding.

When the time came for the invasion, we went to Weymouth where we took aboard 220 First Division soldiers who had already fought in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. At approximately 0600 on June 5, 1944, we set sail for Omaha Beach. Our ship's mess prepared a meal of roast beef and potatoes for these men, but since most of them knew what they were in for, they didn't eat any of it. We arrived at Omaha Beach at daybreak and started to hit the beach.

One of our sailors was given the job of carrying a long rope to the beach to give the soldiers something to hold onto as they made their way through the water. I believe his name was Allen. He carried wounded men back up the ramp to safety, under enemy fire, the entire day.

It was approximately 1:00 p.m. before we were able to get these men on shore. I was an engineer in the engine room and was unable to see any of the terrible action that these men encountered. At approximately 10 a.m. there was a terrible crash as we hit obstacles on the beach and received large holes in the bottom of the craft.

I had to run from the engine room to the bow to switch the fuel-oil ballast tanks. In doing so, I passed the mess which was turned into a first-aid station. This is where I saw wounded soldiers for the first

time. I had seconds to take this all in. In the engine room we never saw the action that was taking place above us.

At this time, we also had our anchor cable wrap around one of the propellers. Although our ship was in bad shape, we were still able to go alongside a transport and take our second group of men into the beach.

It was just getting dark when we backed off for the last time that day. We then went alongside a big ship and transferred the wounded men who had been on our LCI all day. It was a sad day for all our crew to see these wounded men being hoisted to the big ship. I have often wondered if these brave men survived their wounds.

I eventually got to go topside and see the terrible destruction along the beach. It's a site that I've never forgotten. What I'll also never forget was an LCI burning on the beach. It was the LCI skippered by our former captain, the old navy man. His soldiers didn't get their feet wet. They and the crew got something worse. When we saw that LCI burning and realized that would've been us if we'd stayed with Humphrey Bogart...well that's the day our 90-Day Wonder, went from "Captain" to "Skipper." The second day started at approximately 7 a.m. when the USS Susan B. Anthony (a troop transport) struck a mine just off the beach. We were one of the first craft to reach her and stayed there until she almost sank.

Hundreds of men crossed over our craft to other craft tied alongside us. Many of them didn't make it, as they had to time their jump from the sinking ship's nets to our deck. Those who didn't were crushed between the ships. At approximately 1 p.m. we took these men to the beach. Our deck was littered with men who were hurt during the unloading process and again we went alongside a big ship and transferred these brave men. Later in the afternoon, we put an ammunition barge up on the beach.

On the third day, we were told to anchor out of the way as they didn't want to use our badly damaged craft. We made our way back to England for repairs and then made 21 trips back and forth from England to France. We were successful in transporting hundreds of men to France.

In November, 1944, it was decided we were in pretty bad shape and no longer seaworthy. The craft was decommissioned at Edinburgh, Scotland, and turned over to the Royal Navy. We didn't lose a single man during D-Day. Our crew was broken up and reassigned to new ships. I was going home on leave before going to the Pacific. That was the last I saw of old LCI 489.

While I was home on leave, I woke up one morning and heard...nothing. That could only mean the engines were dead. I didn't realized I was home until I was in the kitchen and saw at my father drinking his morning coffee before going to work. He didn't know what the hell was going on!

I also served on LST 1040 in the Philippines and at Okinawa. I was in Buckner Bay, Okinawa when the atomic bomb ended the war. Later, I served on LSM 60, which was used as the underwater atomic bomb platform during the Crossroads B atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll.

Karl J. Bischoff