

LCI 618 - Jim E. Talbert: History of LCI Flotilla 22

Notice: Is your ship listed here? If so, then this is part of your history:

Ship No. 62 – 63 – 328 – 333 – 334 – 335 – 357 – 358 – 359 – 360 – 433 – 434 – 435 – 436 – 443 -
444 – 445 – 446 – 518 – 519 – 614 – 615 – 616 – 617 – 618 – 619 – 688 – 689 – 690 – 776 – 777 –
985 – 986 – 987 – 1032 – 1033.

The first 19 of these ships were from the old Flotilla 5. The first flagship was the 433 under the command of Commander Mc D. Smith, then the 618 under the command of Commander Marion M. Byrd and finally the 690 under the command of Commander Philip Porter.

History of LCI Flotilla 22

The USS LCI's (Landing Craft Infantry) was the smallest sea worthy ships of WWII, they had a Hull length of 158 feet, a hull width of 24 feet and a draft of 4 feet forward and 6 feet aft. With a cursing range of 4000 miles, at a standard speed of 12 knots.

It is said, the idea of calling it a Craft was that it was to be sent over seas in three pieces and to be put together over there. However, the Sunday they were to be tested, with Admiral Barbey aboard, he suggested to the builder representative, to run the Ship up on the beach at flank speed. After the Ship ran up on the beach and across a scenic costal highway and needless to say, disrupted traffic the Admiral said, "Put these things together at the Shipyard, if they will do this they will be perfectly safe on their own at sea."

The basic purpose of this small ship was to carry Infantry Troops for a short distance and land them on hostel beaches, all over the world. Each Ship could carry a maximum of a company of 200 fully armed combat ready troops.

However, some of these small ships were converted to do other tasks. Such as Gun Ships, that carried 3 - 40mm single mount guns and 4 - 20mm single mount guns. Also some of them were converted to Rocket Ships that could fire 504 – 4.5 " rockets at a range of 1000 yards also some of them were converted to mortar firing ships. These conversions were made to support the landing of the Infantry. Flotilla 22 was made up of 36 of these small ships, with 3 Groups of 12 each. Group 64, 65 and 66.

Flotilla 22 Staff, for most of WWII was billeted aboard the USS LCI 618(FF)

Flotilla 22 was formed in early August 1944 and Commanded by Commander McD Smith, as a spin off of old Flotilla 5, which was redeployed with new ships.

For the first month of operation we were assigned to transporting troops and supplies of the 6th US Army for reinforcement in and around Finschhafen, Aitape and Biak Island and the New Guinea area.

However, on September 16th we got our first taste of what it was all about, with the invasion of Morotai Island just west of New Guinea.

The LCI Unit of Task Group 77.4 comprised of LCI's 433(Flag), 435, 360, 446, 519, 334, 445, 444, 359, 357, 443, 63, 328, 333, 436,335, 447, 429, 364 and 62.

The convoy proceeded, without incident, west to Morotai Island. At 0532 when the Task Group had reached a point just south of the southern tip of Morotai Island, orders were received by radio from the Task Group Commander in U.S.S. Nicholas (DD 449), directing the LCI's to leave the convoy and proceed independently.

At 0540 antiaircraft fire was observed coming from shore installations on the Dehegila Peninsula and smoke was seen rising from the area of firing.

As the LCI's passed between Mitita Island and Dehegila Peninsula, the U.S.S. PC1133 assumed station as escort, and in reply to a radio message received as to where the LCI's were to beach, said to Command "Follow Me to White Beach." Forming a column behind the Flag Ship, we reached the approach lane at 0642.

Under a lot of pressure from enemy planes and our own nearby fighting, and we were taking fire from shore batteries, we proceeded to White Beach, however we were instructed by the Beachmaster of Red Beach to await an officer to show us the way, as White Beach was not marked. This Officer never did show up, so we were told to "do the best you can."

We got about 50yards from the beach and ran into a reef. None of the LCI's could get any closer, so we were ordered to unload anyway. Here you have to use your imagination as to what happened, While the troops were being unloaded in water almost over their head, we received a radio message from the Beachmaster as to why we were not unloading at the "NEW White Beach."

At this point, needless to say Commander McD Smith, Flotilla 22 Commander was fit to be tied, and remarked that the Beachmaster was not up to date as to what was going on.

Because of the shallowness of the water the 519 and 444 were stranded on the reefs and had to remain behind. The 357 were ordered to stay behind with the two stranded ships and render any assistance it could, and return later with another convoy. This, with the permission of the Task Force Commander.

After putting all the troops ashore we were ordered to return to Hollandia New Guinea where we remained for the next few months.

In late September we had a change of Command of Flotilla 22 and Commander M. M. Byrde assumed command of the Flotilla.

We also received a number of new ships from the States. The 985, 986, 987, 688, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618 and 619. The Flag was transferred from the 433 to the 618. It was a new ship just out from the states and it had all the latest equipment and it was designed to be a Flag Ship. It had the latest Radar

and Radio equipment and the troop compartments were all offices. In fact I had two radio "shacks", eight radiomen and six radarmen.

The months of October, November and December of 1944 were spent doing odd jobs of supplying troops and general supplies to the different combat areas in the region.

On Christmas Day 1944 we left Hollandia and joined a convoy of several hundred ships, at Attape New Guinea.

We all new this was the big one; we were going to the Philippines!

We arrived at Leyte on January 3, 1945 and joined another group of ships, even larger than the one we were in. This convoy was known as Task Force 78, assigned to invade the Island of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf.

The convoy then proceeded through the Surigao Straits where we were attacked daily by aircraft and midget submarines. In fact one Japanese plane came so close along our Starboard side we could see the pilot saluting as he went by and crashed into an LST just behind us.

Later the subs were reported as sunk by our escort and the planes were either shot down or chased away.

On the night of January 7th while passing just west of Manila Bay, there was a running gun battle with an enemy destroyer and some of our escort ships. The enemy was sunk. January 9th we arrived and commenced the invasion of Lingayen Gulf. After the unloading of troops and supplies, our LCI's were assigned to the outer edge of the gulf and to make smoke each morning and evening to cover the entire gulf and to hide all the ships present.

After several days of dodging enemy suicide boats and enemy bombers, things got a little better, as we had sent some of our LCI gunboats up the Lingayen River to seek out enemy suicide boats and destroy anything they could find. I can remember going up river with Commander Byrd on one of these gunboats and we were so close to the shore you could hear the small arms bullets bouncing off the outside of the ship and they would pass the word over the intercom to stay inside. Then you could hear our guns open up and in a few minutes we could go out on deck again. We came to a large opening in the river and there must have been about 50 of these odd looking boats. They were just plywood in the shape of a V with no back on the seat. Some of them had a 1937 Chevy engine and the front end was loaded with TNT. One of the ships had some Army Engineers aboard who destroyed all the boats.

Being on Staff, and the communications supervisor, I was privileged to be "In on the know" of things that the rest of the crew were not privy too.

On January 28th, some of the Staff went aboard the 519 and proceeded in convoy, up the coast, about 50 miles behind enemy lines, to supply the gorilla forces in that area and to pick up the President of the Philippines wife and family and take them out of harms way back to Dagupan. With Mrs. Osmena were five other members of the family, nine servants and two infants. Also with the party were Col. R.W.

Volkman, USAFIP and Capt. Nebres Blenuenido D. PA Chief Surgeon USAFIP. Several wounded gorilla fighters, and several Japanese prisoners of war.

After this some of our LCI's were assigned to supply the gorilla forces in the north on a regular basis. Some of our ships were assigned to riverboat patrol on a regular schedule, flushing out enemy suicide boats up the Lingayen River, and destroying them.

February 21st, Commander Flotilla 22 in 618 with 433, 518, and 690 escorting 60 LCM's, 20 LCVP's and "J" boats of the 594th Engineer Special Brigade and 3 Army Tug Boats and 10 LCT's, proceeded to Subic Bay, Luzon. There we established our base of operations.

March 1st 1945, Commander Flotilla 22 in 618 with 518, 63 and 714 of Flotilla 24, USS Day (DE225) and USS JOY escorting 12 Liberty Ships and LST's 932, 592 and 593 into Manila Bay, Commander Flotilla 22 SOPA (Senior Officer Present Afloat). This was the first merchant shipping in Manila Bay since 1941.

Using Subic Bay as our base of operations, we conducted a number of other hostel combat landings throughout the Philippines. Twenty-two in all. Here are just a few.

April 1st Legaspi, April 17th Parang Mindanao, where we landed the 24th Infantry Division, May 11th Zamboanga, May 13th Basilan and many others in the Mindanao, Mindoro and Panay area, Polloc Harbor was my first observation of just how much destruction our LCI rocket ships could cause. Completely destroying a beautiful beach and everything on the shore, for five hundred yards in. From then on, it was just a matter of moving troops around and supplying them.

On August 15th we received word that President Truman had ordered the cessation of offensive action, because the Japanese were about to surrender. It was suicide to go out on deck that night, because of the gunfire from the fleet being shot up in the air and the shrapnel raining down on us from the celebration.

Commander Flotilla Twenty Two reported to Commander Philippine Sea Frontier for Operational Control.

After this, the Flotilla began to break up. The 614, 616 and the 985 were assigned to Commander Minesweeping and Survey Group of the North China Forces. The 433, 434, 435, 436, 518, 519, 445, 446, 776, 777, 1032 and 1033 were assigned to Commander Yangtze Patrol Force. The 63, 333, 334, 335, 357, 358, 360, 443 and 444 were assigned to Commander Philippine Sea Frontier. The 62 and 328 were assigned to Commander Service Force.

On September 2nd 1945 the rest of Flotilla 22 left Subic Bay enroute to Leyte to join a convoy and proceeded north to Okinawa, arriving at 1430 on 13 September 1945.

September 16th, after two days in Okinawa the convoy left for Jensen Korea as part of the Occupation Forces. The first day of this trip the convoy encountered a severe typhoon, complete with 50-foot seas

and winds of 70 to 90 knots. All ships weathered the storm, even though we were blown within about 20 miles of the China Coast. We were six days late in arriving at Jensen Korea, on September 21st.

On September 26th the convoy sailed for Taku Bar, China, where four days later the 3rd Marine Amphibious Corps was disembarked in an initial occupational landing. We proceeded 36 miles up the river to the city of Tientsin with the Seventh Amphibious Force. We were the first of the American Navy in this Chinese section since the Japanese occupation. October 10th we returned to Jensen Korea at which time Commander M.M. Byrde was transferred from the Staff to the USS Seminole AK104. The Flag was transferred from the 618 to the 690 under the Command of Commander Philip Porter.

In December Flotilla 22 departed for the States where it was decommissioned in January 1946.

Footnote: I would like to say that all the time I spent in the Navy, My life with the LCI's was my best. We take a lot of ribbing from the "Big Ship" sailors, but while they were setting offshore throwing big shells at the beaches, we were approaching those beaches and had to get down and dirty and fight the real war. And I'm proud to have been a part of it.

J.E. "Jim" Talbert

Ex-Chairman of the Board

USS LCI National Association