

The Story of the LCI 93 and LCI 487 at Normandy

Six US Navy Landing Craft Infantry (LCIs) formed in columns off the Virginia coast on December 24th, 1943 for their journey to England – LCI(L)s 487, 488, 489, 490, 491 and 492. They were followed in January by LCIs 493, 494, 495, 496, 497 and 498. Their adventure into war had begun. Miraculously, all of the crewmen would survive the upcoming combat even though LCI(L) 497 would be destroyed by German teller mines at Omaha Beach. However, the experience of War would leave both vivid and haunting memories for all of them.

LCI 487(L) was typical in this Group of LCIs. It was newly built and the crew was young and inexperienced. The skipper – Lt. Stewart F. Lovell was the “Old Man” on board. Born in Manchester, N. H. on May 26, 1907, he was 36 years old when he set sail on LCI(L) 487. However, most of his crew was eighteen and nineteen year olds. His young crew gave their Skipper the nick name “Baggy Pants” because he did not acquire a proper fitting uniform after initially losing a lot of weight while onboard. The Executive Officer – Ensign James T. Clinton was nicknamed “Boy Scout” because he was pale, clean cut and did not drink or smoke.

As LCI(L) 487 sailed into the Atlantic on Christmas Day, Boatswains Mate 2nd Class Kennedy Coulter celebrated his 19th birthday. Born on Christmas Day, 1924 in Sumter, South Carolina, he wanted to be in the Army Air Corps but was drafted into the Navy. Originally trained in LCVPs at Solomons, Maryland, he was transferred to LCI(L) 487 in New York at Pier 42. He did not experience sea sickness during the upcoming voyage but he was concerned for the ship’s cook, Seaman 1st Class Thomas Scarmalis who got sea sick with any sniff of diesel fuel – “Not a good thing having your cook sea sick”. BM2c Coulter was not the only “Holiday Baby” on board LCI 487(L). “Motor Mac” J.W. “Dub” Brown celebrated his 19th birthday on New Years Day, 1944 during a stopover at the Azores. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, he was raised on a farm and was mechanically inclined. He joined the Navy after receiving his draft notice. He was sworn in on March 25, 1943 and married his wife Doris on that same day. He went on to attend Diesel Schools in both Richmond and Detroit where he received his Motor Machinist Mate 2nd Class rating. Upon arriving at the Azores, LCI(L) 487’s Chief Motor Mac disembarked and returned to the States to attend Officer Candidate School. Consequently, “Dub” Brown received his 1st Class rating and became the boss of the “Black Gang” for the duration.

Coxswain Edward Siecienski of LCI(L) 487 was born in Masteth, Long Island, New York on June 6, 1926. Other than being his birthday, June 6 held no historical significance for this seventeen year old – yet. At age sixteen he altered a copy of his birth certificate and lied about his age to enlist in the Navy. His older sister Anna reported him and he had to wait another year to enlist again with his mother signing for him in July, 1943. He labored through Boot Camp in Sampson, New York and was then sent to Solomons, Maryland by train. He had no idea where he was going or what the “Amphibs” were. At Solomons he was a “Poacher of Crabs & Fish”. He “acquired” some screening from underneath the

barracks, attached a handle to it and used his new device to scoop up Blue Crabs. He shared his booty with cooks on the base who served up crab feasts. He joined LCI 487(L) in New York with the rest of the crew. They slept in barracks on the pier with the exception of one night when they sought refuge on the Battleship USS Texas because the barracks were full.

Gunners Mate 2nd Class Patrick O'Donnell was born in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania on April 19, 1924. He was working in a cigar factory when he received his draft notice. He quickly volunteered for the Navy, hoping to get an assignment on a Battleship. To his dismay he was sent to Little Creek after graduating from boot camp. He was on his way to the "Amphibs" and LCI(L) 487. His battle station was with his friend Kennedy Coulter at # 1 Gun - 20MM on the bow. They would have a front row seat of things to come.

Seaman 1st Class Carl E. Spahr was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on May 21, 1924. Upon receiving his draft notice after graduating high school, he volunteered for the Navy. His brother Lloyd followed his foot steps a year later, also serving on an LCI but worlds apart in the Pacific. Carl successfully completed boot camp in Sampson, New York then proceeded to Pier 42 in New York where he met his shipmates and his new home – LCI(L) 487.

One of the most entertaining crewmembers of LCI(L) 487 was Seaman 1st Class Robert St. John who was born in Germantown near Philadelphia on October 25, 1925. After an unsuccessful attempt to enlist at age 16, he managed to enlist in the Navy with the signature of his father at age 17 on July 10, 1943. He graduated from "Boots" at Sampson, New York and was assigned to the "Amphibs" after declining an offer to attend "Deep Sea Diving School". He had a great sense of humor and was often singing "I want to buy a paper doll to call my own". He sang so often that others would plead for him to stop. Now he was on his way to Falmouth, England – the land of Shore Leave, Fish & Chips, USO, warm beer and Spuds. They arrived January 19, 1944.

After arriving in England, the twelve Navy "Round Conn" LCIs merged with twenty-four older "Square Conn" Coast Guard LCIs of Flotilla Four to form the new Flotilla Ten for the invasion of Normandy. The newer Navy LCIs bristled with five 20MM guns as compared to the Square Conns with their compliment of four 20MM guns. Unlike the untested Navy LCIs of this new Flotilla, the "Coasties" from Flotilla Four were combat veterans. LCI(L)s 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 349 and 350 of Flotilla Four first arrived in Port Lyautey, French Morocco, on April 29, 1943. During the next few months they performed duties along the French African Coast and on July 9, 1943 they loaded troops at Bizerte, Tunisia and sailed for Sicily. They made their initial landings on the south coast of Sicily near Licata and Gela and were subjected to many bombings from the German Luftwaffe. After General Patton captured Palermo, the Coasties moved into that harbor and transported troops of the Seventh Army to parts along the north Coast of Sicily in an attempt to block the retreating Germans from reaching Messina. In September, Flotilla Four

transported troops from Bizerte to landing sites at Salerno, Italy and later rescued soldiers from those beaches after a vicious German counterattack. Flotilla Four's operations and heroics in the Mediterranean require volumes of documentation to do them justice. They even fought as they left that region when half of the LCI crews were granted Liberty at Gibraltar and sustained casualties in brawls with British Sailors. That ended any chance of the other half of "The Fighting Flotilla Four" to enjoy the hospitality of the "Rock". Bruised and certainly tested, Flotilla Four sailed towards England and sighted Lands End on October 28, 1943.

One of the crewmen of LCI(L) 93 of Flotilla Four was Seaman 1st Class Robert McCrory who was born near Prairieville, Louisiana on February 1, 1923. In October, 1942 he and his friend contemplated what to do regards to military service. His friend was one year older than Robert and he was expecting to be drafted soon. He definitely did not want to go into the Army. Robert was interested in joining the Navy and suggested that to his friend. They agreed to sign up in New Orleans but soon met another friend who had just graduated from Coast Guard boot camp. That buddy insisted that they would serve in the Caribbean on a Submarine Chaser if they enlisted in the Coast Guard. That sounded good to them so off they went to the Coast Guard recruiter. After completing boot Camp Harahan near New Orleans, they were asked to be "Volunteers" for the Amphibs; so much for Submarine Chasers in balmy waters. Seaman McCrory was off to LCI(L) 93 and parts unknown.

After completing training and practice landings on the Virginia coastline, the young Skipper of LCI(L) 93 gathered his crew for the "big speech". He informed them that the LCI was designed for only one operation and that only twenty percent of the crew was expected to survive. This left a lasting impression on McCrory and his shipmates. Shortly thereafter, LCIsers Sam Hale and Frank Seth secretly painted "20%" on the side of the bridge and LCI(L) 93 sailed towards Africa. It did not take long for the Skipper to find out about the artwork and he was not amused. He quickly ordered Navy gray to be painted over the bright white numbers. This young, cigar chomping officer Skippered LCI(L) 93 until shortly before the Normandy invasion when he was reassigned to another LCI. At that time, the Executive Officer of LCI(L) 93, Lt. (jg) Budd B. Bornhoft assumed command as Skipper. This was welcome news for McCrory who was not a proponent of the "20 Percent" theory.

In England, Headquarters for the newly formed Flotilla 10 was established at "Greenway House", the summer home of the writer Agatha Christie. Carl Spahr of LCI(L) 487 had the fortune of attending meetings at Greenway House and was impressed by the extensive flower gardens on the estate. Otherwise, he lived on LCI(L) 487 and had little interaction with other LCI crews. Most LCIsers lived in their own little world aboard ship and tended to keep with their fellow shipmates while on Liberty in places such as Torquay. A few of the LCIsers including Robert McCrory of LCI(L) 93 and Robert St. John of LCI(L) 487 dated English maidens, much to the chagrin of the male British populace. LCIsers enjoyed USO entertainment and local theatric performances. English cuisine was scarce except for fish and chips and the ever present "spuds".

On April 16, 1944 Stewards Mate John N. Roberts transferred from LCI(L) 91 to LCI(L) 93. He was pleased with his new shipmates and they liked him in return. Seaman 1st Class McCrory described Roberts as “a really nice guy who would engage you in conversation when you were willing and would leave you alone when it looked like you needed some privacy”. It is hard to imagine in this day and age the segregated military of the 1940s. There were few black combat units. Most blacks served in supporting roles as did John Roberts. However, on D Day, he would share the same dangers as his white shipmates and German gunners would not discriminate.

Born in Natchitoches Parrish, Louisiana on November 1, 1924, John Roberts was working as a waiter in a night club in Alexandria when he was drafted. He attended basic training at Curtis Bay, Maryland from June 25, 1943 to July 29, 1943 and then proceeded to St. Augustine, Florida for Stewards training. He traveled to England on a transport and arrived there on January 27, 1944. He was assigned to LCI(L) 91 for the next two months.

While in England, LCers endured V-1 “Buzz Bomb” attacks and bombings from the German Luftwaffe. Nearby Anti Aircraft Artillery were fired by British female gunners who unwittingly caused injuries to sailors on LCI(L) 487. What goes up, must come down. During one air raid in Weymouth, Robert St. John and fellow LCI(L) 487 shipmates Yokum and Scarmalis huddled in gun tub # 4 as they watched the fireworks of the British AA gunners who attempted to shoot down attacking German bombers. Suddenly, both Yokum and Scarmalis were struck by shrapnel in the face and neck and St. John froze in disbelief that he too was not injured. Fortunately, the injuries to Yokum and Scarmalis were not life threatening.

During the few months before the invasion, the LCers engaged in training and practice beachings. One such exercise was “Operation Tiger” at Slapton Sands. On board LCI(L) 495 were VIPs including General Eisenhower, Admiral Wiltz and British Air Marshall Tedder. A bold MoMM2c Anthony Pelle got all their autographs. Then events turned tragic. The LCers were horrified when German E Boats audaciously slipped through the flotilla and torpedoed LSTs killing more than 700 American soldiers and sailors. The tragedy was kept from the American public for many years.

During the training exercises, some of the LCers befriended the soldiers on board. Coxswain Ed Siecienski felt sorry for the soldiers. Although the Big Red One swelled with new replacements, its core consisted of many veterans of the North Africa and Sicily campaigns. Many had already been awarded Purple Hearts for wounds received, some more than one. Siecienski would share with them the perils of the beaching, but the soldiers would have to endure countless more dangers as they fought their way towards Germany. Siecienski stole food for some of the Sergeants from the food locker of his officers. He had the key and perhaps “Baggy Pants” would not notice anything missing.

One of the new replacements for the 1st Infantry Division was William Heyward Messer of Florida. He was in Company K, 18th Regiment. LCI(L) 487 would carry him to Omaha Beach. Shortly before the invasion, he would celebrate the birth of his daughter with his fellow soldiers aboard LCI(L)487.

Sergeant Roland Ehlers was also aboard LCI(L)487 with his comrades of Company K. He had enlisted in the Army with his younger brother Walter on October 4, 1940. They had served together in Company K throughout North Africa and Sicily where Roland was wounded. After arriving in England to prepare for the Normandy invasion they were told that they would have to be assigned to separate units for the first time. The War Department was reluctant to have brothers serve together after the five Sullivan brothers were killed when their ship was torpedoed in the Pacific. Walter and Roland were told that the Army expected 50 percent casualties on the Normandy beaches. Roland remained in Company K and Walter was reassigned to Company L. Walter would sail to Normandy on another LCI(L).

On June 2, approximately 200 troops began boarding each of the LCIs of Flotilla 10 including the familiar Company K, 18th RCT of the 1st ID that climbed onto LCI(L) 487. In the past these soldiers had entertained Carl Spahr by stripping off their shirts and wailing at each other in no holds barred boxing matches. Now Spahr and his shipmates noted that the soldiers were quiet and busied themselves with cleaning weapons, checking gear and reading paperback books. For the most part, the soldiers gave no indication that they were nervous or fearful of what was to come. However, one familiar Army cook approached S1c St. John and offered him an ornate plate that he had been carrying since the North African Campaign. The soldier told St. John that he wanted him to have the plate because he believed that he was not going to survive the invasion. St. John argued with the soldier telling him his premonition was nonsense and that he should keep his plate. However, the soldier insisted that St. John take it and the LCIs finally relented.

The soldiers endured horrible weather and rough seas onboard the LCIs for several days including the aborted invasion on June 5. Seasickness was rampant and many soldiers suffered greatly. Finally, General Eisenhower gave the order to proceed with the invasion after meteorologists advised him of a likely short break in the foul weather. Thus the great armada of thousands of ships of all sizes sailed for the French Coast on the evening of June 5, 1944. Flotilla Ten, thirty-six LCIs strong sailed together in columns towards Normandy until a designated place where one column of twelve "Coastie" LCIs split from the rest of the Flotilla and joined other LCIs sailing for Utah beach. The unlucky remainder of Flotilla Ten consisting of twelve "Coastie" LCIs and twelve Navy LCIs continued towards Omaha Beach where they would face extreme violence from the German defenders.

The first LCI(L)s to land troops on Omaha Beach were Navy LCI(L) 493 and Coast Guard LCI(L) 88 from Flotilla Ten at 0735 hours. Within the hour, Coast Guard LCI(L)s 90, 91, 94, 92, 83, 85 and 89 of Flotilla Ten would also land troops under withering artillery and small arms fire. In addition some would strike mines as they plowed through the beach obstacles. LCI(L)s 91 and 92 would be so damaged

that they could not be retracted from the beach and LCI(L) 85 would sink after carrying casualties off shore to an awaiting ship. The destruction of these three LCIs came with great loss of life.

Waiting for her turn to enter the maelstrom was "Coastie" LCI(L) 93 of Flotilla Ten. At approximately 0945 hours, she plowed through the obstacles of Easy Red Sector of Omaha Beach and dropped her ramps. Soldiers of the veteran 1st Infantry Division including 166 from Company I, and 37 from Company M of the 18th Regiment began to scramble down into the waist deep water. Manning the starboard ramp winch, Seaman 1st Class Robert McCrory observed that there was no artillery fire directed at LCI(L) 93 but several soldiers descending the ramps were struck down by small arms fire. During this calamity, a soldier approached McCrory at the ramp and asked him if he had seen his rifle. Seaman McCrory was puzzled by the ridiculous question and answered "no". He then saw the soldier disappear aft into the crowd of awaiting soldiers. Shortly thereafter, one of the LCIs found that same soldier hiding below deck in the crew quarters. Stewards Mate John Roberts who was standing on the Well Deck was instructed to bring the name of the soldier to the Skipper. When Lt.(jg) Budd B. Bornhoft was presented with the hapless soldier, Seaman First Class McCrory was amazed at what he overheard. The soldier refused to get off the ship and fight with his comrades. McCrory had landed countless soldiers on many beaches in the Mediterranean but had never witnessed a soldier refuse to fight. The soldier was unmoved by the warnings of the LCI Skipper and insisted that he would not get off the ship. Lt. (jg) Bornhoft was a very busy man at the time. He asked for volunteers to retrieve the brave wounded soldiers at the base of his ramps. Seaman 1st Class McCrory, Boatswains Mate 2nd Class Glenn Nichols and other shipmates answered the call and carried several soldiers to safety. Bornhoft then retracted LCI(L) 93 off the beach and headed for the transport Samuel B. Chase to pick up another load of soldiers and deliver his mutinous soldier to proper authority.

Upon arriving at the Samuel B. Chase, LCI(L) 93 picked up a double load of soldiers – standing room only including members of the 453rd Amphibious Truck Company, 5th Special Brigade. The mutinous soldier was presented to an Army Colonel who told him that he would have to return to the beach with LCI(L) 93, find his unit and fight with them. Once again, the soldier insisted that he would not go to the beach and the Colonel could do anything he wanted to do with him. The soldier was finally taken aboard the transport ship to an awaiting unknown destiny. In the meantime, thousands of brave men advanced towards the beach. Scared or not, they would prevail that day.

LCI(L) 93 was held up temporarily on her return trip to the beach to watch five Navy Destroyers line up bow to stern and deliver a rapid fire broadside to the German fortifications above Omaha. After the impressive fireworks, one of the recently boarded Army Engineers asked Seaman 1st Class McCrory about the conditions on the beach. McCrory responded that it "was hot" on the beach. The Engineer assured McCrory that according to the plan, the beach would be under control by the time they landed. Amazed, McCrory told the soldier that "It was not going according to plan".

In the meantime, LCI(L) 487 made their run to the Easy Red Sector of Omaha Beach with 36 soldiers of Company M and 167 soldiers of Company K, 18th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, including the replacement officer - 1st Lt. William Messer and the combat veteran Sgt. Roland Ehlers. On the way to the beach, a critical error was made when the stern anchor was dropped too late; it dragged mere yards behind the LCI. There would be no way to winch off the beach.

When the ramps were dropped, Coxswain Class Edward Sciecienski ran forward from his station at #2 Gun and descended the ramp with the "Man Rope" that would assist the heavily laden soldiers. He was concentrating on stretching the line to the beach and falling on the small anchor to draw the line tight so that the soldiers would have something to hold on to as they struggled through the surf. As he pushed through the cold waves, he quickly discarded the Thompson .45 caliber Sub Machinegun that was impeding his forward motion. Amidst the thunder of artillery and mortar rounds he threw himself onto the anchor on the beach. He was not thinking that June 6 was his eighteenth birthday. His thoughts were whether he would survive the day.

Behind him huddled around #1 Gun on the bow of LCI(L) 487 were Boatswains Mate 2nd Class Kennedy Coulter and Gunners Mate 3rd Class Patrick O'Donnell. Coulter was wearing head sets and was to report observations to the bridge. He was looking down at the first soldiers scrambling down the port ramp when an artillery or mortar round struck amidst them. Horrified, he reported the casualties. 1st Lt. Messer, the new father and replacement officer was killed instantly; he earned his Combat Infantry Badge with a few steps down the ramp. Others suffered mortal wounds including Sgt. Roland Ehlers who had already worn a Purple Heart and had endured three major campaigns in three years with his brother Walter.

More artillery rounds slammed into both sides of the bow of LCI(L) 487. Coulter identified a bunker and gun emplacement on the hillside and asked for permission to engage it with his 20MM. The request was denied. The first artillery strike on the bow knocked O'Donnell to the deck breaking his thumb. As he got back to his feet, he watched as the troops descended the only remaining usable ramp on the starboard side. Meanwhile, Sciecienski was still lying on top of the "Man Rope" anchor on the beach. As the artillery and mortar rounds crashed around him the casualties mounted. He had eleven wounded and three dead soldiers surrounding him. When the last soldiers had passed by him, Sciecienski pulled himself up and dashed back to his LCI.

Having found shelter on board LCI(L) 487, Coxswain Edward Sciecienski was dismayed to find out that once again he had to face the fire on the beach. Faced with no means to winch off the beach, a rapidly falling tide, a sand bar to block them and artillery rounds punching holes in his ship, Skipper "Baggy Pants" Lovell informed Sciecienski that he should abandon ship with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the crew and seek shelter on the beach or escape on other landing craft. "Baggy Pants" would remain on board with some of the crew and try to refloat LCI(L) 487 at the next high tide. Motor Machinist Mate 1st Class Johnson W.

"Bud" Brown had insisted that the holes in the bow could be patched and LCI(L) 487 could be refloated. Brown did not want to lose his ship and he was very concerned for the mounting number of wounded soldiers who were being brought onboard.

While the drama unfolded on LCI(L) 487, The Skipper of LCI(L) 93 Budd Bornhoft negotiated the obstacles towards the beach. With orders not to stop and lend assistance to anyone, they passed an LCVP with dead and wounded hanging over the gunnels. LCI(L) 93 managed to slip over a sand bar in the rapidly falling tide and advance another twenty yards before the ramps were lowered. It struck a mine aft and the starboard engine was thrown against the port engine. The explosion resulted in panic among some of the Combat Engineers with no combat experience.

Gunners Mate 3rd Class Byron Spalding ran down the ramp, anchor in hand determined to get the "Man Rope" stretched to the beach as fast as he could. Having completed his task with mortar rounds exploding nearby, he scurried back on board in record time. He later declared "I could walk on water!" The soldiers then began descending the ramps into a storm of small arms and mortar fire. Some who panicked began jumping over the side. Seaman 1st Class Robert McCrory and Quartermaster 3rd Class Aven Templeton who were manning the starboard ramp winch did their best to help the soldiers inflate their life belts before jumping overboard. Those who did not inflate their belts were dragged under the waves by their heavy loads. McCrory did not see them resurface. Finally, McCrory and Templeton were pushed aside by the frantic soldiers moving towards the ramps. McCrory then received a temporary reprieve from the horror when a projectile slammed into his helmet knocking him unconscious.

Back on LCI(L) 487, the crew began to abandon ship. Some heard the order to abandon ship, and others merely followed those who had heard the order. All saw LCI(L) 93 which was landing troops a mere 100 yards to port as their potential savior. They strapped a life jacket onto shipmate MoMM2c T.V. Nesmith. He was nervous because he could not swim and he had been previously torpedoed while serving on another ship. His shipmates tossed him overboard then followed him off the port side of the Fantail. BM2c Kennedy Coulter found the water to be over his head. He stayed in the water all the way to LCI(L)93. Others found their own route. S1c Carl Spahr made his way to the water's edge then followed it to LCI(L) 93 because he was concerned with mines. Coxswain Edward Siecienski made his way to the 93 through beach obstacles. He covered the distance 2/3 on sand bar and 1/3 in the water. GM3c Patrick O'Donnel elected to run along the beach. This was probably not the best choice because he ran a gauntlet of machine gun fire, tossing his Thompson Sub Machine gun aside to lessen his load. Coxswain Harry Mailahn who was running behind O'Donnel later told him that it appeared the machine gun rounds were kicking up sand between his feet.

All told, at least sixteen sailors from LCI(L) 487 made the wild dash for LCI(L) 93. The flight had immediate consequences for both LCIs. The German artillerymen who observed the flight of the LCIs

ceased fire on the abandoned LCI(L) 487 and trained their guns on LCI(L) 93. When the first Navy LCIs arrived at "Coastie" LCI(L) 93, there were approximately twenty-five soldiers still waiting to disembark from the ship.

When Coxswain Edward Siecienski arrived at the ramp of LCI(L) 93, he believed that it was his duty to report to the "Coastie" Skipper that he and other refugee LCIs were boarding his ship. He was directed to the Conn and he waited for a Stewards Mate to descend the ladder so that he could ascend and report to the Skipper. The Stewards Mate was John Roberts who had just received instructions from his Skipper Lt.(jg) Bornhoft to relay information to the engine room. Communications had been knocked out and the Skipper wanted Roberts to order engines full astern in an attempt to back over the sand bar created by the rapid falling tide.

Just as Roberts cleared the ladder, Siecienski began to climb it. Suddenly, there was an explosion as an artillery round penetrated the bulkhead below Roberts. Siecienski looked down and saw that the Stewards Mate had his right leg hit. Boatswains Mate 2nd Class Abbot who was recently assigned to LCI(L) 93 as an additional Pharmacist Mate immediately came to Robert's assistance applying a tourniquet and administering first aid. Siecienski jumped off the ladder to help Abbot. Not only had the Stewards Mate lost much of his right leg, he had also received painful shrapnel wounds to his left leg. Siecienski assumed that the Stewards Mate was Catholic when he saw him clutching Rosary Beads in his hand. Roberts never lost consciousness throughout his ordeal. Abbot clearly saved Robert's life. He remained with Roberts until he could get him to a surgeon.

When Seaman 1st Class Carl Spahr climbed aboard LCI(L) 93, he was told to deliver a telephone to the Conn. However, he was met by a wounded "Coastie" helmsman who staggered out of the Pilot House and asked him to take the helm. Spahr did so wondering what to do next alone at the helm. He could see that two artillery rounds had already passed through the Pilot House and it did not appear that LCI(L) 93 was going anywhere. While looking out a porthole, he saw a puff of smoke emit from a bunker on the hillside and watched in horror as he followed the contrail of the artillery round from the gun to LCI(L) 93. The LCI shuddered as it was struck with the solid shot. He watched subsequent rounds fired from the same gun which slammed into the "Coastie" LCI. All he could think was "I hope the Destroyers get that son of a bitch!" In fact he saw an effort by the US Navy to do just that but the German gun survived. All told, LCI(L) 93 took at least ten hits from large caliber artillery rounds. LCI(L) 93 Skipper Budd Bornhoft decided that it was at least time to remove some of the sailors off his ship.

A small LSM was called in to remove his guests from LCI(L) 487 and the wounded. They were taken to the Destroyer Doyle where cold, weak and wet they were lifted aboard in baskets. Once below deck, Coxswain Siecienski heard loud explosions and thought that the Doyle was being hit. He ran topside to find out that he had been below a five inch gun that was making all the noise. It was engaging German fortifications on the bluffs. He could clearly see Germans running near Pill Boxes, disappearing in and

out of sight as they ran through the trenches. The Doyle was so close to shore that he was sure that it would run aground. GM2c Patrick O'Donnell also returned topside to watch the action. He helped toss spent 5 inch casings overboard as the Doyle pounded the Germans.

When Seaman 1st Class Robert McCrory regained consciousness, he was alone on the bow. He did not know how long he was out. He knew nothing about the LCIs from the 487 who had boarded his ship and the LSM that had retrieved them. He staggered back towards the fantail where shipmates were seeking shelter from the artillery rounds that were concentrated on the forward part of the ship. Along the way he saw a thick trail of blood that led to the pathetic crumpled body of his friend BM2c Glenn Nichols. Upon arriving at the Fantail, he sought shelter behind an ammunition box with Gunners Mate 3rd Class Byron Spalding. Spalding pointed to a large dent in McCrory's helmet and declared that he should be dead. When the firing subsided, McCrory walked forward along the deck and recovered an Army blanket to cover the body of his friend Glenn Nichols. While placing the blanket over Nichols, McCrory was shocked when the "body" groan "I'm not dead yet you son of a bitch!" He had five pieces of shrapnel in his throat. Surgeons would later leave two of the pieces of shrapnel inside him for fear that they would cause more damage in the process of removing them.

After hours stranded on the beach, Lt.(jg) Budd Bornhoft realized that his LCI(L) 93 was finished . His Executive Officer, John J. O'Conner was one of the severely wounded. There was much flooding below and the LCI was shot to pieces. Even if they could move, a sandbar blocked their escape. He signaled two Destroyers, the USS Doyle and USS Emmons and asked for help. The Doyle which had earlier received LCIs from the LSM sent a whale boat to assist. The Emmons asked for volunteers to do the same and it too sent a gig and a whale boat. Skipper Bornhoft ordered the crew to abandon ship. S1c Robert McCrory was the first over the side and they lowered his wounded friend Glenn Nichols to him. McCrory towed Nichols out to the awaiting Emmons whaleboat.

The USS Emmons deck log states that at 1633 hours, the gig returned with six wounded and eighteen more were recovered in another small boat. Seventeen were "Coasties" from LCI(L) 93, three were sailors from LCI(L) 487 and the remaining four were probably four wounded soldiers reported "removed with crew" by Skipper Budd Bornhoft. The USS Doyle reported rescuing a total of thirty-seven crewmembers of LCI(L) 93 and LCI(L) 487.

That was the end of LCI(L) 93 but not the end of LCI(L) 487. For approximately twelve hours, the remaining crew of LCI(L) 487 patched up her ship and awaited another high tide for a chance to extract from the beach. MoMM1c Johnson "Bud" Brown and his shipmates stuffed mattresses into the holes left by artillery rounds in the bow. The Pharmacist Mates tended feverishly to the wounded only to watch them die one by one on deck during the long day. S1c Robert St. John sadly discovered that the Army Cook who had predicted his own death and had given St. John the ornate plate from Africa was one of the soldiers who succumbed to his wounds on the deck.

Finally, relief from the horrors of June 6 came for the remaining crewmen of LCI(L) 487 in the evening at high tide when "Baggy Pants" ordered full astern. MoMM1c "Bud" Brown felt LCI(L) 487 "bounce off the sandbar" and return to the open seas.

The LCI(L) 487 crewmen who had made the wild dash to LCI(L) 93 were reunited with their shipmates and LCI the following day. Most of the survivors from LCI(L) 93 would spend weeks in a Survivors Camp in England wearing an odd collection of clothes and footwear acquired on the USS Doyle and USS Emmons. The unlucky Robert McCrory received only a pair of rubber goulashes and a denim coat from a sailor on the USS Emmons. He remained in his filthy clothes for weeks. At the survivor's camp the Red Cross gave him a little denim bag containing a plastic razor with no blade, a small tube of toothpaste and a toothbrush that fell apart the first time he used it. McCrory has been "proud of the Red Cross ever since".

However, it was the wounded who suffered most. Stewards Mate John N. Roberts spent six weeks in pain in England at the 83rd General Hospital and then sailed to the United States where he remained in the Navy Hospital in Philadelphia until he was discharged from the Coast Guard on January 27, 1945.

The soldiers who were delivered to the beach by Navy and Coast Guard fought on. After a day long fight to the top of the bluffs, Walter Ehlers searched for his brother Roland only to be told that Roland was "Missing in Action". Although concerned for his older brother, Walter soldiered on, leading his squad to the best of his ability. On June 9, near Goville, France, he successfully spearheaded attacks against two German machinegun nests and two mortar positions, personally killing many of the enemy. On the following day, his squad covered for the withdrawal of his platoon and then he personally covered for the withdrawal of his squad. Although wounded himself, he killed the sniper who had shot him and then carried to safety his wounded automatic rifleman. Incredibly, he then ran back under fire to retrieve the Browning Automatic Rifle that he was not able to carry out with the wounded soldier. After having his wound treated, he refused to be evacuated and remained with his men. Weeks later in July, he received an unexpected visitor. It was his brother Roland's Company Commander who gave Walter the devastating news that Roland was killed on Omaha Beach while descending the ramp of an LCI.

On December 14, 1944, Walter Ehlers was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions June 9 and 10, 1944. People would refer to him as "hero" and rightfully so. However, Walter grieved for his older brother Roland who had always looked out for him. Roland was Walter's hero.

Somewhere in Florida, a young wife grieved for her husband William Heyward Messer. He was listed as "Missing in Action" and remains so today. Somewhere is the daughter who never knew her father, the young Lieutenant killed along with Roland Ehlers while descending the ramp of LCI(L) 487.

Authors Notes:

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