



Elsie Item

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
USS LANDING CRAFT, INFANTRY, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

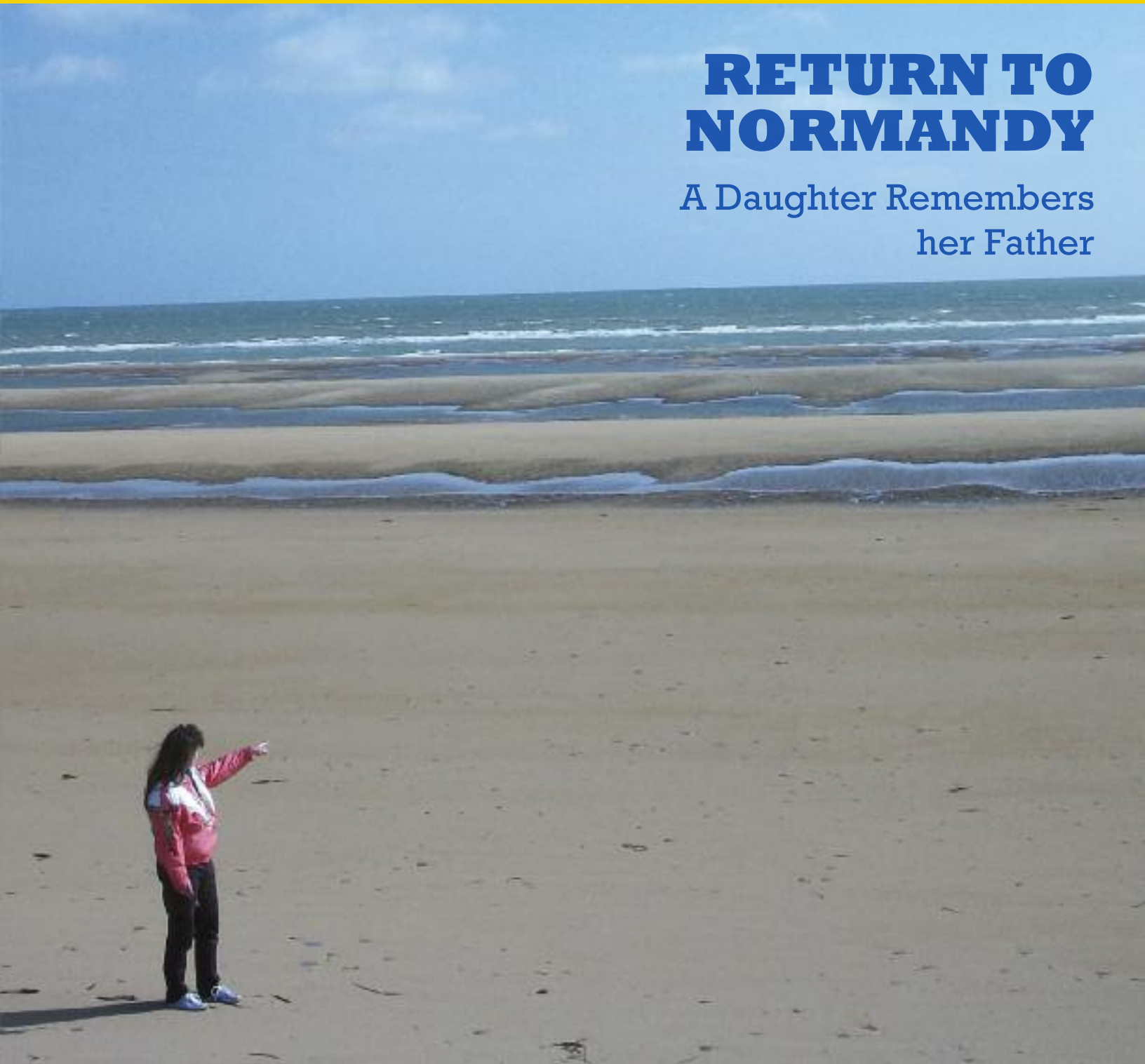
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RETURN TO NORMANDY

A Daughter Remembers
her Father



Official publication of the USS LCI National Association, a non-profit veteran's organization. Membership in the USS LCI National Association is open to any U. S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard veteran who served aboard a Landing Craft Infantry, to anyone related to an LCI veteran, or to anyone just interested in the history of LCIs. Published quarterly by the USS LCI National Association. John P. Cummer, Editor. Any material for possible publication should be sent to the Editor, preferably by email (cummerj@bellsouth.net) or by regular mail to 302 Pinewood Cottage Lane, Blythewood, SC, 29016.

ABOUT OUR COVER:

Val Vierk, author of our lead article, on Omaha Beach at the approximate place where USCG LCI(L) 92, her father's ship, landed on D-Day.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: Bring on Your Sea Stories!

We're looking for some really good sea stories for future issues! You've probably told them a dozen times to your children or grandchildren – now share them with your shipmates! Here's some suggestions:

- The Best Liberty I ever Had!
- My Special Shipmate!
- My Scariest Experience in a Storm!
- Funniest Stunt I Ever Saw a Shipmate Pull!
- The Best Officer I ever met!
- The Most Heroic deed I ever saw!
- Our Ship's Mascot
- The Toughest Duty I Ever Pulled
- The Most Rewarding Experience I Ever Had!
- The Biggest Challenge I Faced

Or any other topic you can think of! We'll pick out the very best and share in future issues of the newsletter. Winning entries will have their choice of either one of our LCI Challenge Coins or a copy of *The Best of Elsie Item*, our special issue number 70.

If you have access to email it would be very helpful if you can send your story that way because it will make it much easier to copy over and insert it instead of having to re-type what you've written.

But don't let your lack of email skills keep you from sending us your story. We'll be glad to get them however they are sent.

Send your story to: John Cummer, 302 Pinewood Cottage Lane, Blythewood, SC 29016

A Word from the President/Editor



Yep, you're right! That's me with two beauty queens! How did this come about?

It was part of the welcome about 60 other WWII vets and I received at the Columbia Airport upon our return from an "Honor Flight" to Washington, DC. These two lovely young beauty queens were part of a including honor guards, the Fort Jackson Army Band and a large crowd of cheering families and friends! Our "fifteen minutes of fame" that everyone is supposed to have!

Don't pass up the chance if you get invited to go on one of these flights. The flights originate from all over the continental United States and are designed to give WWII vets an opportunity to see the beautiful, impressive WWII memorial in Washington, D.C. In addition we also saw the Korean War Memorial, the Viet Nam Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the new Air Force memorial, and the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. All in one day! It was a magnificently planned and executed operation for which all of us were grateful.

Well, it's a new year, Shipmates, and we're still on course! We may be a bit fewer in number and we might not be able to run an obstacle course anymore, but we're here and we're grateful for that!. The Cincinnati reunion was another success and we enjoyed the company of the LSM/LSMR veterans. As you will read elsewhere in this issue we are planning on doing it again, this time in Nashville and in the month of September. After discussion in our respective groups and then together it was most evident that there was little or no sentiment for stopping our reunions yet. We did decide to hold it as close to the geographic center of the country as possible and, after considering other sites, Nashville was chosen. Not exactly in the geographic center, but pretty close and the attractions and hotel rates available there were positive factors in the decision.

As to our future after the Nashville reunion, we all should be thinking about that. The Board of Directors and I would be glad to have any input you would like to give. Other options? Well, we could consider smaller state or regional meetings. I'm sure we all would like to continue to share our fellowship for just as long as possible. At the same time we want to be realistic about the challenges of growing older. Sort of makes me think of a line I heard recently from **Ravi Zacharias**, an outstanding Christian defender of the faith, who was commenting on how long he planned to stay active—"I'm not quite ready to ride into the sunset yet, but I know which way the horse is pointed!"

Again, we have been able to put together what we think is an outstanding collection of articles which we know you will enjoy. We are particularly pleased with **Valerie Vierk's** moving account of her visit to Omaha Beach to see the exact place where her father's LCI made the D-Day landing.

Have at it, Shipmates!

John Cummer

Make Your Plans Now for the Nashville Reunion, September 7-11, 2011!



The Sheraton Music City Hotel – Our Reunion Hotel

It's not too soon to begin making your plans for our 2011 reunion! Once again we will be meeting in joint reunion with our friends from the LSM/LSMR Association. The beautiful **Sheraton Music City Hotel** will be our reunion headquarters and Armed Forces Reunions is again planning an outstanding program for us. There will be lots to see—and hear!—in Nashville, but the great attraction again will be the opportunity to see all our old shipmates once again.

The Sheraton Music City Hotel has an excellent reputation for hosting meetings. As the second largest freestanding convention hotel in Nashville, it has been recognized with ten consecutive “Gold Key Awards” for meeting excellence from *Meetings & Conventions Magazine*.

If you've checked hotel prices lately you'll know that we are fortunate that **Ted Dey** of Armed Forces Reunions has negotiated the price of \$109 per day for us. Cut-off date for accepting reservations at this price is August 14, 2011. For you who have access to email, the hotel will create a website allowing you to book your reservations online. This website will also include detailed information about our reunion as well as dining, entertainment, and city information.

Parking and shuttle service from the Nashville airport will be complimentary.

Registration forms will be in the next issue of *Elsie Item*, scheduled for April, 2011. Program details are on the next page.

JOINT REUNION PROGRAM

USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION AND USS LSM/LSMR ASSOCIATION

*The first draft of our reunion program arrived just as we were going to press so we share it with you here.
There may be some “fine tuning” but this will be what you can expect.*

Wednesday, September 7

Our Hospitality Room will open at 1:00 pm and the registration desk will open at 2:00 pm. You can have dinner on your own and then we'll have a welcoming reception at 7:00 pm.

Thursday, September 8

The big event for today will be a four hour luncheon cruise aboard the General Jackson Riverboat. We'll enjoy a full buffet lunch as we cruise up the Cumberland River to downtown Nashville. We will be treated to true hand-clappin', toe-tapping Nashville entertainment. We'll return in time for some fellowship in the Hospitality Room and a meeting of our younger LCI Association members, formerly known as the “Associates.”

Friday, September 9

This is going to be a great day! First, we'll enjoy a city tour of Nashville. We will have professional guides with us to keep us supplied with interesting facts, colorful legends and amusing anecdotes of Nashville and her people. We'll drive by the Governor's Mansion, as well as homes of several well-known personalities such as Tammy Wynette, Ronnie Milsap and Minnie Pearl. *(We'd probably be happier if we could see the home of Roy Acuff. OUR WWII favorite, but they tell us he's not around anymore!).* We'll drive through Centennial Park and view the Parthenon, a full-scale replica of the original in Greece, visit the famous Ryman Auditorium where the Grand Ole Opry got its start, and stop on 2nd Avenue for lunch on our own at one of several restaurants there. We'll get back to our hotel in time to change our socks and head out for the Grand Ole Opry! We'll board the buses at 5:45 and head for this legendary show. It is the longest-running live radio show in the world – an American institution at its entertaining best.

Saturday, September 10

After a breakfast buffet we'll have our business meeting and, in the afternoon, our memorial service. In the evening, we'll bring our reunion to a close with a gala banquet and entertainment.

Get ready for another great reunion!





Val Vierk and her host, Yves, visit the grave of SIC Bernard Wolfe, USCG, of USS LCI(L) 91

OMAHA BEACH REVISITED

by
Valerie Vierk

Recently my cousin, Nancy Nolda, and I visited France. I flew into Frankfurt, Germany, to meet her, and then we flew to Paris, where we spent two days. Then we boarded the train for Bayeux, where our host would meet us and drive us to Omaha Beach. For years I had wanted to visit the famous beach where Dad came in aboard Coast Guard ship LCI 92 on June 6, 1944—D-Day. I first learned about this when I was about second grade when my mother told me Dad took part in this monumental event. Every June 6, our family would remember the day, and as I grew older, I learned more about it—the day when the greatest armada ever assembled crossed the English Channel to assault the beaches of northern France.

As both of our dads were railroaders, Nancy and I enjoyed the train journey and joked that this was “42”, one of the trains we used to ride together from Alliance to Ravenna as kids. Both of our dads had died the previous year, so it was a time of remembrance for us. The countryside was pretty, then suddenly we were seeing red poppies, and I was immediately reminded of the poem, “In Flanders Fields,” by John McCrae. While most of the fields had scattered poppies, one was entirely red. It was a brilliant sight!

Our host, a Frenchman names Yves, met us at Bayeux, only 20 kilometers from Vierville-sur-Mer, which is the little village right behind Omaha Beach. (Sur-Mer means “by the sea” but I will only use Vierville in this account .) To see Yves standing there is an amazing story, and I must explain.

We must go back many years—to 1944. Yves and his family were living in Paris at the time of the Invasion, and were there when the Allies liberated the city on August 25, 1944. Yves’ parents wouldn’t allow him to go out into the streets during the wildly jubilant celebration, but he was able to view it from their apartment balcony overlooking the Seine River.

In October 1944 Yves’ family came to Vierville for a visit with relatives. (Before the war, Vierville had been a summer resort with its beautiful beaches.) Their relatives owned a large manor, called the Manor of Than. Other relatives owned the Chateau De Vierville “the castle.” During this visit the Americans were still there and wouldn’t allow access to the beach.

In winter 1945 Yves’ family returned to Vierville for a holiday. By then the last of the Americans had departed, and the local people were allowed access to the beach. All of the beach obstacles had been cleared, but many wrecked ships remained, some of them drifting on and off the beach as the tide ebbed and flowed. One ship had large numbers 91 painted on her, and she was stuck in the sand, a pitiful wreck. Another one had been towed west about a half mile because she had been floating free with the tides, and causing a navigational hazard. Yves, 14, and his cousin, Jean-Pierre, 24, climbed aboard this ship bearing large numbers 92 and explored. They removed some artifacts, including a saw with 92 clearly marked on it.

Yves returned to Paris, continued his education, and eventually graduated from a university there with an engineering degree. His interest in the Invasion continued to interest him, and he started collecting magazine articles, maps, and photos. In 1950 and 1951, a Belgian scrap company bought all the metallic wrecks on the beach. Pieces of the 92 were loaded onto trucks and taken to Bayeux, then shipped via railway to Caen to a steel manufacturing plant. Workers in the plant discovered two bodies in the extreme part of the bow! The bodies were turned over to the American cemetery nearby. By 1955 this company had completed most of their work. Now another company started on the more difficult task of removing hulls that were submerged in water, but close to the shore. About eleven years after the Invasion, the beach was finally restored to its former condition.

Years went by, and after his retirement, Yves and his wife returned to Vierville where they built a house about 120 feet south of the beach. Several other houses lined the beach, much as they did before the war.

Meanwhile, back in Nebraska in 2001, we received notice from Leroy Peters, son of one of the crewmembers on LCI 91, that an email list had been developed on which some of the crewmembers and many sons and daughters of crew members of Dad’s LCI Flotilla were communicating. We joined the list, and this opened a new door to Dad’s long years of wondering what had happened to most of his crewmembers. He had written Washington several times after the war, asking for information, but always the answer came back, “No information available.”

Dad had been a crewmember on LCI 91 until a month before D-Day when he was transferred to the 92. LCI stands for Landing Craft Infantry or “Lousy Civilian Idea” as the sailors dubbed them as they were rough riding due to a flat bottom so they could navigate in shallow water near the beaches. The ships had a ramp on each side that was lowered for the soldiers to run down and onto the beach.

On D-Day Dad was manning the forward gun as his 156-foot ship plowed into Omaha Beach with the goal of landing army troops. Dad was wounded by enemy fire, and his ship and sister ships, 91, 93 and 85 were destroyed. He made it onto the beach, though, and was there for 16 hours. As the 91 and 92 burned on the beach for hours, close together, they served as reckoning points for other ships coming in. Thus, they are frequently mentioned in the history of June 6.

In this time of many e-mails flying back and forth, someone mentioned there was a Frenchman who had actually seen the wrecked LCIs at Vierville and had explored them! I was fascinated by this, but figured it would be impossible to find this man, even if he was still living. Five years went by, and in 2006 I persuaded Dad to write his Coast Guard memoirs with my help. Again I thought of the Frenchman, and started searching for him, going through hundreds of emails. Finally I found reference to him, wrote the man on the list who mentioned him, and asked if he could put me in touch with him. Within hours I had the reply: the Frenchman, named Yves, was still living and could be contacted! Within a couple of days we were in touch, and I considered it a miracle. We exchanged information and photos.

In June 2009, my son, Edward and his wife Frauke, visited Yves. He presented Edward with the saw from the 92. Edward brought it home, and showed it to his grandfather, Herbert. He was amazed to see it after 65 years!

So now we are back to June 2010. Yves drove us the brief distance to Vierville, now with a population of about 240. As we entered the city limits and I saw the town sign, my heart began to beat faster. I noted the American flags flying in various places, and a sign, "Welcome Our Liberators." Dad had spoken of Vierville many times in the past. After so long a journey and so many years of wanting to visit the famous beach, I could hardly believe I was almost there!

Then suddenly there it was with the white caps so pretty on the breakers rolling in. It was very windy that day, which made the water more dramatic. It was sunny though, and the water was colored blue, not the dark green/gray as on D-Day with the tremendous storm blowing. We had only driven a short ways along the road parallel to the beach when Yves said, "Here is where the 91 and 92 came in." Once again, I felt a sense of, "Am I really here?"

Yves' house was located about 1/4 mile west up the road. It sits on a hill, and one has an excellent view of the beach from his large living room window. He showed Nancy and I to bedrooms on 2nd floor, and said we could choose which one we wanted. When we stepped into the smaller one that faced the beach, Nancy said, "Val gets this one as her dad was here." The beach was beautiful, and belied the fact that so many had died here.

I stayed up late that evening, until about 11:30 when darkness finally came, because I was fascinated by the waves, by the fact that I would be sleeping by a battlefield. I remembered Dad saying it didn't get dark in England/France until about 11:00 in the summer. I tried to put myself back in that time—the night of June 5-6, 1944. By now the ships would be beating their way across the stormy Channel, heading for Vierville and other points along the coast...



Omaha Beach, Now tranquil and beautiful

The next morning we visited the large American cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, which encompasses 172.5 acres, and overlooks one section of Omaha Beach. Here are placed in perfect rows 9,387 white Lasa marble headstones-- 9,238 are Latin crosses, and 149 bear the Star of David. Of the entire total, 307 are for the Unknown. Four are for women. There are 41 sets of brothers buried here. To see rows and rows of these white markers makes it all too clear that "Freedom isn't free."

At the visitor's center an employee asked if we have family buried there. I said no, but that my dad came in on a Coast Guard ship on D-Day. The employees were very interested in this, and asked if we had photos of the crewmembers. When I said we'd written a book of Dad's war memoirs, they became even more enthusiastic as they did not have much information on the Coast Guard. I said I would send them the book and photos. They provided a chart, and we easily found the graves of two of Dad's crewmembers from the 91—Leslie Fritz and Stanley Wilczak (shown in photo.) Families could decide if they wanted their loved one's bodies sent home or buried here, and these two stayed among their comrades.

The Memorial square features a 22-foot bronze statue, "The Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves" that faces west toward the headstones. The youth is wearing a crown of laurel. To the east of the Memorial lies the Garden of the Missing. The 1,557 names inscribed on the plaques are listed by branches of service.



Colleville Cemetery: "The Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves"

Strangely enough, the only name on the Coast Guard plaque is that of Bernard Wolfe, crewmember on the #91. I communicated with his nephew when we were writing Dad's book. Bernard was hurt in an accident just before the Invasion, and could have been sent home, but he insisted on remaining on the #91. He asked a medic to change his bandage just before boarding his ship. He was last seen caring for the wounded after his ship was hit, and did not abandon ship when the order was given. Five crewmembers died on the #91 plus 22 Army troopers. No crewmembers died aboard the #92, but several were wounded, and 19 Army troopers died.

In the center of the cemetery is a little chapel that posts the flags of the nations who fought here. One very touching inscription on the wall reads: "Think not upon their passing. Remember the glory of their spirit."

One evening we had "tea" with Theresa, the widow of Jean-Pierre, Yves' cousin previously mentioned, and their daughter at their manor home, called the Manor of Than. The Germans occupied this home from October 1940 to June 7, 1944. The home was absolutely fascinating. After tea, we strolled around the grounds, which were wooded behind the lawn, and I was delighted to see a charming two-story gardner's cottage a few yards from the house.

The next evening we had supper with another of Yves' cousins, Jean-Paul, and his wife, Odette, who live in the "castle" as the family calls it. Its formal name is the Chateau De Vierville.

The Germans also occupied this home during the war. On June 8, 1944, the Americans moved in for a few weeks. Outside the gate, there is a bronze plaque stating such. We were given a tour of this very large and historic home, and were amazed at so many things. Also, we saw a very large and old bible that an American soldier returned to Jean-Paul on the 50th anniversary of D-Day. The soldier said he had found it in the yard in 1944 and brought it back to America.



Colleville Cemetery: The Tablets of the Missing

Jean-Paul was eleven when the Germans came, and has vivid memories of that time,

which he was written about in two poems. He presented me with a book titled, *Omaha—in the Name of the Last Survivors*. He and Yves served as references for the book, which is excellent.

Jean-Paul also gave Nancy and I copies of two of his poems. One is titled, “In the Little Wood Behind My House” and it tells of a bitter battle between a small group of Americans and Germans. The Germans were told to hold the little wood at any cost, and the Americans to take it at any cost. Twenty-three young men died in the hand to hand combat, and Jean-Paul expresses sympathy for all of the families. This poem was printed in the book he gave me.

The other poem is titled, “Hans, do you remember?” and tells of an 18-year-old German soldier, with thick glasses, who was an assistant to his Prussian colonel. They arrived in 1941 and lived in the Chateau De Vierville. The poem is fascinating because it tells how it was for the French to live with the Germans in their homes. Even though they were “enemies” there were still many acts of kindness between them. The French cook helped Hans prepare a meal when they learned that Field Marshall Rommell would be having lunch at the Chateau en route to his inspection of the nearby beaches.

From the lookout in the tallest tree in the little woods, Hans saw the huge armada approaching Vierville. He tried to call his superiors to warn them, but the phone line was cut. He witnessed the hand to hand combat of the group of soldiers in the woods. He saw the corner tower of the Chateau destroyed, as well as the church, because the Americans knew German snipers were up there. (My dad saw the church from the beach, and informed a commander that the Germans were firing from it.)

Knowing how the Americans watched for snipers in trees, Hans lay flat for two days in the lookout before coming down for food and water. His eyesight was so poor he couldn’t use a rifle. That night he departed on his old bicycle, after refusing the civilian clothes the cook offered him because he was proud of his uniform, and if he must die, wanted to be wearing it. The family listened to the sound of his squeaky bicycle fading into the night. Hans eventually made it home to Hamburg, riding his bicycle, but home was now just a pile of rubble. Ten years later he came back to Vierville to visit Jean-Paul, and told his story of what happened to him on his way home. All of his family had been killed in the war.

We also visited Point de Hoc, where the American Rangers achieved the almost impossible task of scaling the 100 ft. cliff with the enemy firmly entrenched. When we visited, a large crane was there to put reinforcements in place to stabilize the

cliff. Thus, we weren’t able to get up as close as ordinarily, and the tall monument had been moved until the work is completed. Still, we could walk among the large bomb craters made by the American naval guns on D-Day as they tried to knock out the enemy guns atop the bluff.

The Normandy countryside is charming, with roses growing on the stone walls everywhere, and dairy cattle lying peacefully in pretty little pastures. Some of the cattle were Charolais, and I thought it was neat to see them in their place of origin. Other cattle were brown and white speckled and may be the Normandie breed or perhaps a shorthorn breed like we have in Nebraska.

We visited the church in Vierville that Yves attends, and it too is very historic. (The church previously mentioned was destroyed.) In the church yard we saw a woman using an old hand pump to draw the water. In the church yard also, is a memorial to the citizens of Vierville who died in the war. Many bouquets were placed at the base.

The last morning we were there, we went down on the beach at the place where Dad’s ship came in, and I shot a video. Nancy also photographed me standing on the beach in the area. It was very meaningful to me. There were many jellyfish on the beach, and they were sparkling in the sunlight. Yves commented that he had never seen so many, and I jokingly replied that perhaps it was because the Americans were here. There were also little sailboats zipping around on the beach sand in a race.

We had one more lunch in Vierville, and then as we drove east along the beach to leave, I became very sad as we passed the landing site once more. I didn’t know if I ever would be back, but when I got home, Yves wrote and ended with, “until your next visit.”

Maybe I will go back.



What Did You Say Our Mission Was?

By
John P. Cummer

It was December of 1943. Our ship, LCI 502, was tied up; at Pier S, Lambert's Point, Virginia. We had finished our shakedown cruise and were preparing to depart for England to take part in the D-Day invasion.

Every day trucks would arrive with a load of something that someone somewhere had decided we needed if we were to be completely equipped for our mission.

One day a truck arrived, parked and the driver notified the gangway watch that he had a load for the 502. A working party was called, the truck doors were opened and there was – a truckload of toilet paper!

After a bit of a laugh we called Mr. Nearman, our Exec, to see if we really were to have this load – or, if we were, to tell us just what in the Sam Hill our mission was! Yeah, we knew we were going to clean up on the German army, but.....?

Mr. Nearman was as baffled as we were. He argued to no effect with the truck driver that there must be a mistake somewhere – we could never find space to stow that much toilet paper, let alone eventually use it. All the truck driver would say was, "Well, I sure as heck ain't hauling it back!"

Now not even a commissioned officer in the U. S. Navy could carry the day in an argument with a Norfolk truck driver, so we bowed to the inevitable and began unloading case after case of the stuff and looking for places to stow it. It went in the overheads. In any slightly vacant nook or corner. Finally, in the double bottoms.

Those double bottoms held so much toilet paper, we decided we were safe from at least one threat during our Atlantic crossing. If a torpedo hit us, we would just go "squish!"

So, off we sailed across the wide Atlantic with our exotic cargo. Fortunately, we had no need to test our torpedo theory. Twenty eight days later we arrived in Plymouth, England, along with dozens of other LCIs. Then, as time went by, other less far-seeing ships ran out of that necessary commodity and were reduced to using British-issue toilet paper – a grey, scratchy material with bits of wood splinters inserted!

Suddenly, we had the best trading commodity possible! Toilet paper was exchanged for just about anything we needed or desired – spare parts to fruit salad to whatever! In fact, thanks to that insistent Norfolk truck driver, we traded our way through the rest of our European stay.

But I still wonder who up there in the higher echelons of command could have had the great foresight to know that a truck load of toilet paper was just what an LCI need to fulfill its mission.

I also wonder if there was a battleship somewhere wondering what became of their toilet paper!



GOIN' HOME!

By Robert Rearick, LCI 419



USS LCI(L)-419 beached on Utah Beach, Normandy, September 1944

We are indebted to Charlie Lupsha, LCI 419 for sending us accounts written by his shipmate, Robert Rearick when he was enrolled in a creative writing class at Alfred University in 1947. Robert, drew on his wartime experiences for his class assignments.

In this excerpt from Rearick's writings the story is told of a hazardous episode on the return voyage of the 419 after participating in the D-Day landings.

In December, 1944, plans were being made for the LCIs who had participated in the D-Day invasion to return stateside or to be turned over to the British. Rearick's ship, LCI 419, was one of the ships selected to return to the United States and be fitted out for further service in the Pacific.

MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 1944

I'm one excited boy tonight. Afraid someone might interpret it as fear, but I'm not worried in the least. I've talked about the sea being a woman. Today I feel as nervous as her groom. I took a shower, and am prepared to "marry" her; my outfit: a pair of clean dungarees.

This is the last night in England. I feel rather sorry I didn't have time to see as much of her as I had wished; but I am not unhappy to leave. I can well imagine what the members of another crew felt over 320 years ago in this same port of Plymouth. Everyone is feeling very happy tonight, and most are tossing in their bunks. I cannot sleep, either.

TUESDAY, 12 DECEMBER 1944

At 0910 this date our ship joined one of the strangest convoys which ever made the Atlantic crossing. Of the 28 ships in our convoy, the majority are seagoing tugs, many of which had the task of towing disabled LSTs back to the states. The speed of advance was estimated at five knots. At midnight we watched the last navigational light on Lizard Head disappear over the horizon.

(During the ensuing days we hit a bad storm off the coast of Portugal, and the speed of our convoy was reduced at times to two knots. For two days our total distance traveled was 96 miles. Our position in convoy was astern the LST 359, which was being towed. On Monday 18 December she broke loose from her tug; it was nearly 24 hours before she took up her position again.)

TUESDAY 19 DECEMBER 1944

Discovered today that we were badly in need of sugar. Upon contacting LCI 421, we were promised 100 pounds. Through clever maneuvering in a rough sea, employing our mast pulley, we took the sack aboard. The sea began to diminish in the afternoon and the speed was increased to eight knots. Mr. Kerruish began talking about the danger in the area in which we were sailing. Vigo, a Spanish port, was a famous German submarine fueling base, he said. We were almost parallel with Vigo.

WEDNESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 1944

On 20 December the storm had completely subsided, and the convoy took advantage of the weather by speeding up to eight knots. I came on watch at about 0400 and everyone was feeling happy because the weather was so pleasant and the convoy had increased speed.

“Gee! It’s good to be alive!” I exclaimed to Mr. Kerruish, as I enjoyed one of the loveliest sunrises I had ever seen. In especially good spirits, I blinked away to the LCI(L) 542”

“BT – GOOD MORNING BT-K”

“BT – WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT IT? – BT-K”

I was disgusted with the low morale on the 542, and answered:

BT-ONE CAN EAT HIS BREAKFAST ON THE TABLE INSTEAD OF THE DECK NOW AND BESIDES A GUY CAN USE CERTAIN HEAD (toilet) FACILITIES NO HANDS NOW THAT WE ARE MOVING FASTER – BT-K.

Being relieved of my watch, I went below to work out my star sights, whistling gaily and at peace with the whole world.

About 1000 I went up to the pilot house to see what course we were making good. At the instant I arrived, there was a muffled explosion aboard the LST ahead. A hoist was raised on that vessel indicating simply that an explosion had occurred. We all rushed on deck with our life preservers. Reger came flying up in his long underwear. There was no alarm sounded. We just stood by to give the men aboard the LST a hand.

Running up alongside the LST to offer assistance, they told us they believed it would be necessary to abandon ship. Looking at the gaping hole in their port side, we were greatly relieved to discover that, contrary to our first belief, they had NOT been hit by a torpedo, but had been disabled by an internal explosion. Everyone relaxed. We had all assumed that a submarine had been in the vicinity.

“My God!” one of the crew of our ship screamed. “There goes our DE!”

Immediately we knew no internal explosion had occurred in either case. There was a submarine in the midst of our convoy! General Quarters was sounded and all men rushed to their battle stations. Lupsha hooked the radio in at the pilot house outlet and I could hear a pleading voice begging: “Liberator Help us! Two ships of convoy struck by torpedoes. Two or more submarines believed to be in area! Liberator! Come and help us!

[Liberator – a PB4Y aircraft that patrolled the area]

All our engines were clutched in, and we proceeded to the DE to offer assistance. We could see a survivor struggling in the water, holding on to a mattress. Over his head machine gun bullets were spitting forth from the torpedoed vessel, to indicate the supposed position of the submarine.

Occasionally depth charges would go off, causing the man to bounce roughly upon the mattress. His escape from death was miraculous, not because we managed to take him aboard, but because he had survived what had taken place in the water about him. When he was able to speak he told us he had been in a gun turret, slightly forward of the fantail, and that the explosion had knocked him out of his shoes into the water. When we had taken him from the water he begged us to give him a gun to turn on the sub.

The DE began to throw everything on her stern overboard. Depth charges set at their lowest depth began to explode beneath us

and shake hell out of us. Tugs were coming toward the DE – the USS *Fogg* – from all sides to try and save her. We took our distance so that we wouldn't interfere with their work. We stood by. While we were waiting, we cruised about the area looking for survivors. We found only two floating bodies. We later learned that seventeen men had lost their lives aboard the DE *Fogg*. Their Firestone life belts, the pneumatic type, had both been deflated. They had probably been dead before hitting the water.

I don't think more than ten minutes elapsed before air coverage flew in.

"Captain," I cried. "Is that an Allied plane?"

"Yeah! One of those new PB4Y jobs, I think," he assured me.

I tried to repeat all of his orders without letting my voice falter or break, but my knees were shaking to beat the band. We continued to search for survivors. Two more planes flew in, and I never felt more proud of our air strength than I did at that moment.

The main body of the convoy continued on, and we fell behind with the LCI(L) 420 to offer assistance to the torpedoed vessels. Soon the convoy disappeared over the horizon and we were left alone with the battered remnants of the *Fogg* and the LST. A Navy salvage tug began to fire on the LST to sink it., after the crew had been taken off, but its guns seemed to have very little effect. Soon the tug abandoned the task and disappeared over the horizon with the main body of the convoy.

Pulling alongside the *Fogg*, LCI 420 took aboard their wounded and a number of their crew. Just enough men were left aboard to repair and run the ship. Nothing was seen or heard of the submarine.

Wishing us a "Happy New Year", and instructing us to stand by to help the *Fogg*, the 420, our senior ship, went on ahead to join the convoy. For the better part of the afternoon we were left with a net tender, an Army tug, and the disabled *Fogg*. The dead men were searched for identification purposes, covered with blankets, and the Captain set about reading up on the proper ceremony for Burial at Sea.

As twilight drew on, another DE, the USS *Jeffery*, dropped back from the convoy and joined us for escort purposes. The net tender and Army tug began to tow the DE at eight knots. We were a peculiar sight, we five ships. We looked like a bunch of bloodied kids who had just lost a fight in a dark alley. We stumbled on.

THURSDAY 21 DECEMBER 1944

About 0200 the cable snapped on the net tender's stern and the speed was reduced to about three or four knots. As the day progressed LCI 542 fell back to assist us in aiding the DE, which was floating in good shape, and expected to make the Azores without much trouble. We planned to arrive in Horta, Fayal, in about three days' sailing. The force of the water pouring through the battered fantail of the *Fogg* prevented straight steerage, and this hindrance prevented her from traveling at satisfactory speed. We came alongside the *Fogg* to transfer necessary welding equipment and then fell behind the group to hold Burial at Sea.

The men were placed on stretchers on the gun deck, sewed up in canvas. Over their bodies were draped ensigns. At the side, five of the crew were practicing for the volley salutes, and we were taking our places as the congregation. To my unexperienced mind, this whole scene first appeared as quite unreal . . .like some stage play I had been in, where all the actors were assuming their places before the rise of the curtain.

Gradually I felt my eyes mist up, and the solemnity of the occasion affected me when all the ships present lowered the flag of the United States of America...lowered it to half mast.

The Captain had never been seen with a prayer book in his hand before, and God grant that he will never again have to preside at such services. His voice was drowned out by the snap of the ensign at half mast, by the idling engines, and by the whisper of the wind, but one phrase was uttered loud and clear:

"In my Father's house are many mansions..."

There was sickening splash as the bodies slipped from the stretchers, from the shroud of Old Glory, over the side, consigned forever to the sea. The gunners stood at attention, raised their rifles, and shot six volleys. We stood saluting. In my mind was a silent prayer: "In my Father's house are many mansions; O God, give me the courage to do thy will."

And then I left this place to sob alone in a corner, perplexed by God's will, and the true significance of war.

An LCI on Post-War Duty in China

by
Robert M. Morris
LCIs 631,632 and 1026



A group of LCIs at Sai, Formosa (Taiwan) en route to Post-War China Duty

After graduating from Midshipman's school, Robert M. Morris was assigned as Communications and Commissary Officer aboard LCI 1026 for her commissioning in Portland, Oregon and shakedown cruise to San Diego. Before the 1026 departed for duty in the Pacific he was transferred to LCI 631 where he served as Gunnery Officer.

He was aboard the 631 at Pearl Harbor, preparing to take part in the invasion of Japan, when the atomic bomb was dropped. After the peace treaty was signed his ship was assigned duty in China.

We share his account here because not many of us had the experience of China duty and, because his well-written, thoughtful account gives perspective on the WWII experience we all shared.

We were at anchor in West Loch of Pearl Harbor when we got news of the devastating new type of bomb that had pretty well obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed soon after by Japanese capitulation and V-J day and the end of the war.

That night several of us went in to Honolulu to celebrate. Civilians in town were outnumbered, it seemed, ten to one by Navy, Army and Marine personnel. Every civilian woman in sight got endless hugs from elated servicemen. Everybody I saw was overjoyed by the news and back at Pearl Harbor that evening, most ships fired off their Very pistols, a signaling device that shot off colored fireworks like roman candles. The Fleet Commander tried in vain to prevent this aspect of the celebration because of concern that someone might be injured or that a fire might be started. As far as I recall, we had neither serious injuries or fires.

The end of the war, of course, changed everything and instead of invading Japan, our duty was to assist in repatriating Japanese from various outlying places back to the home islands. While those plans were being formulated, in September, we were sent up to the island of Kauai together with a dozen or so other LCIs. We had by then been modified from an LCI(M) back to an LCI(L) with bunks to accommodate troops and our mortars were removed. I always felt they sent us to Kauai chiefly to relieve overcrowding in Pearl Harbor because we had no real duty there and spent part of the time in Nawiliwili Harbor near Libue and some time down the coast at Port Allen.

Kauai was a beautiful rural island in those days with no tourist hotels and beautiful, nearly deserted beaches. Farming and fishing seemed the chief occupations. Doug Faulconer, Manning Case, John Johnson and I often hitch-hiked around the island and by the time we were sent back to Pearl Harbor, we

had pretty well travelled over all the roads. On one of those hitch-hiking tours we were picked up by the Circuit Judge, Philip Rice, who later on became Chief Justice of the Hawaii Supreme Court and whom we saw in Honolulu on our way to New Zealand in 1961. In any event, he picked us up and insisted we come to his house on the beach at Koloa and have breakfast with him. The fact that we had had an earlier Navy breakfast was irrelevant. He had a beautiful house right on the beach and showed us wonderful Hawaiian hospitality. We returned several times to enjoy a meal and a swim at his beach

Sometime in September 1945, we returned to Pearl Harbor and were provisioned, loaded with fuel and water and set off for Okinawa directly. This was the longest non-stop run we had made. We were accompanied by 10 or 12 other LCIs. Our flagship status was ended by then and I think our officer complement consisted of Manning Case, Captain, Doug Faulconer, Exec, Jim Dudlum, Engineer, and me, Lord High Everything Else. I don't recall where Bruce Hurt went or whether he stayed with us. In any event, we were at sea about 18 days covering something on the order of 4500 nautical miles. The trip was a good deal more pleasant than wartime runs because we could run with lights on at night and have all the ports and hatches open in hot weather.

As we neared Okinawa in early October we got into the fringes of a severe typhoon that had swept across the island causing much destruction and driving dozens of Naval vessels up on the shore. Although we experienced some very rough weather, we never were in the central part of the storm and it had blown off somewhere by the time we arrived.

Doug, Manning Chase and I had a wander around Buckner Bay (Nakajusuku Wan) and I photographed a number of the grounded and damaged ships. While it would have been interesting and exciting to have gone through the main part of the storm, it would also have been dangerous though I didn't recall that any LCIs actually were sunk.

After a week or so in Okinawa, we were ordered to Subic Bay in the Philippines where we had a short visit., but most of us were not allowed to go ashore. All the Captains, however, went ashore and into Manila for a big meeting at which they were briefed about our further duties. I think it was in Subic Bay that we were sent alongside a big freighter for some reason and Captain Case misjudged the distance between a big cargo boom and our masthead with the result that our radar and the top of the mast were broken and leaned at a pitiable angle for some weeks until it could be repaired.

From Subic Bay, we sailed north to a small ort on the southwest coast of what was then known as Formosa (now Taiwan). The cities still had their Japanese names and the port was Saei. Inland was a much larger city now known as Tainan. We didn't have much to do at Saei except to wander around the area when we were off duty. It was an interesting place because it had been a base for what we called Japanese suicide boats and one-man submarines. The suicide boats were designed to carry explosives and to be rammed into larger ships. They were about 16-20 feet long, built of plywood, and fitted out with a copy of a 6-cylinder Chevrolet engine, so they were quite fast. I seem to remember that they had no reverse gear. Some of our engine room crew managed to get one of these and load it aboard just before we were to leave for China, but the Senior Port Officer discovered this and had it put ashore, to our great disappointment.

This happened shortly after I was transferred "temporarily" to LCI(L) 632 as Acting Engineering Officer, because their engineer had come down with appendicitis and was sent off to some Naval hospital, I think, at Subic Bay. Because this transfer was supposed to be temporary, I left most of my things on the LCI 631. However, as things worked out, by the time we reached Shanghai, my transfer was made permanent. Luckily for me, the 631 stayed with us as far as Shanghai, so I was able to move all my things to the 632.

My fellow officers aboard the 632 were: Captain, Lt(jg) Fred Gulbransen, Exec, Lt(jg) Dick Langton, and Communications/Commisary, Ens. Francis G. Addison, III.

Gulbransen was a friendly guy and not hard to get along with, but very casual about Navy regulations and was also an inveterate woman-chaser, which led to some interesting events later on. Dick Langton hailed from Spokane, Washington, and planned to go into high school teaching. He and I were good friends almost from the start. Ens. Addison came from a wealthy banking family in Washington, DC, and was easy to get along with as well. All in all, I found the officers on the 632 about as compatible as those on the 631, though I did have a higher regard for Captain Case, personally, than I did for Captain Gulbransen.

Back in Midshipman's School, I had indicated, as my second choice, Engineer's school, but was not chosen for that duty or training. As a result, I had really no useful knowledge about diesel engines or about the other mechanical things on the ship such as the steering engines, the shaft bearings, the piping and electrical systems. I had picked up a bit of knowledge, of course, but I had my hands full with Gunnery and deck duties. Fortunately for me, the 632 had a Chief Motor Machinist in charge of the black gang. Most of our sister ships were lucky if they had a MoMM 1st class.

As a result the 632's engines and the engine room were spotless and always in first class order. Chief Morrison and I quickly agreed that I would never interfere in his engine room operation but would look after the paperwork of preparing daily fuel and water reports and that I'd see to it that we got fuel and water as needed. This worked out very well indeed.

Just before we left Formosa for China, I came down with some very severe stomach cramps and thought there was a real possibility that I had appendicitis. There were, at that time, no Navy doctors on any of the ships at Saei, so I found a Pharmacist's Mate on one of the ships who inspected me, poked me and decided (correctly) that it wasn't a case of appendicitis after all, and cured my problem with a dose of baking soda.

The trip to Shanghai was fairly uneventful though We did have a near collision one night with a Chinese fishing junk. We avoided a collision at the last minute because we saw a Chinaman in the bow of the junk, holding a lighted match in his cupped hands! He had no other lights aboard and had we not seen him, we would certainly have sunk his fragile craft.

Nearly a hundred miles off the mouth of the Yangtse River, we came upon discolored fresh water from the river floating on the sea. This was the first sign we were near this low lying deltaic coast. To get to Shanghai, one must go up the mai Yangtse channel about 20 miles and then enter the Whangpoo River for perhaps 10 miles more to the main port of Shanghai.

We tied up on the east side of "The Bund", a waterfront of European-style multi-storied buildings which at one time housed many European businesses operating in China. The river was a very busy place, not only because there were a number of naval vessels there, large and small, but also because there were numerous civilian freighters and many, many small Chinese "bum boats" on which some families sent their lives.

Almost every day we would see the body of a Chinaman or the body of some animal floating down the river. During the same day we would see people on the bum boats dipping water out of the river for drinking or cooking.

Shanghai was like nearly all other Chinese cities in that it was packed with pedestrians, bicyclists and rickshaws going and coming. In 1945-46 it also had a huge number of beggars who seemed to have the city divided into districts or wards. In walking down a street, a beggar would approach and often say as he held his hand out, "Hi Joe, No mama, no papa, no chow-chow, no longevity" They had picked up the "Joe" part and at least the "longevity" part from servicemen. All servicemen in

those days were “Joe”. The beggars would release their grip on your clothes when you crossed a street into another beggar’s territory, and it wasn’t long before a different beggar attached himself once you crossed a street. Whatever else one may say about the Chinese Communists, they did eliminate both begging and rickshaws, but both were abundant under the government of Chiang Kai-Shek. This is rather remarkable because in 1946, China had a population of about 600 million and today has more than twice that number.

On New Year’s Day in 1946, the Chinese decided to switch from driving on the left to the right. This was pretty chaotic and probably would have been worse had they had as many trucks and cars as they have today.

While we were in Shanghai, LCI 632 got a special assignment for a couple of days to take a group of American and Chinese Engineers down the coast from the mouth of the Yangtze to a tiny little place called Lien Yung Chiang. I’ve never found it on a map, but our Navy charts evidently showed it. The Engineers needed to inspect a small dam inland a way in an area held by the Chinese Communists. A troop of Nationalist soldiers went inland ahead of the Engineers and evidently found few red soldiers for the inspection went off smoothly.

We spent Christmas 1945 in Shanghai and soon after got orders to go north into the Yellow Sea to the port of Taku to assist in repatriating Japanese soldiers.

Captain Gulbransen had been complaining about the quality of the food on the ship; and one day showed up with a young couple of White Russian extraction who agreed to cook for the ship’s company in exchange for a passage to north China. The other officers and I tried to dissuade the Captain on the grounds that it was flagrantly illegal, but to no avail. They came aboard and I have to say they were both good cooks and we ate fancier things, including a lot of special baked goods, on our trip north. Once we arrived in Taku they were in no hurry to leave and stayed aboard for about a month.

North China was very cold in winter and we would occasionally find ourselves frozen in a sheet of ice. Shanghai, though at latitude 31 degrees North, was cold too, and we had ice in the Whangpoo several times. North China, however, was very much colder.

We ferried a few Japanese to larger ships waiting offshore, but most of our duty seemed to be carting miscellaneous cargo from Taku up the Hai Ho River to the inland city of Tientsin that was, in some respects the port city for Peiping (now Beijing). In 1946, the Chinese capital was at Nanking.

We made numerous runs up the Hai Ho River to Tientsin, a trip of perhaps 50 miles by river, but not more than 15 in a direct line. One of the things I never understood was Shanghai’s insistence on our starting these runs at 0700 or 0800 each time because this totally ignored the state of the tide. Many times we would get to the river mouth and run aground on the mud, while watching Chinese net fishermen walk back and forth in front of the ship until the tide came in and floated us free of the river mouth bar. Each of these groundings did a little more damage to our screws and finally, in February, we got a turn in a floating dry dock. Inspection in the dock also showed that the ships’ bottom needed repainting and, because our time in the dock was strictly limited, everybody from the Captain to the most junior seaman had to turn to and wield a paint brush. This job would have gone much more quickly than it did if the weather had not been so cold. The thick paint would freeze on the brushes until we put into service every electric hot plate and coffee warmer we could find to heat the buckets of paint. We got the job done somehow, though it was not a first class job.

We remained in North China as long as I was aboard ship, though in May and June we moved a bit south to Tsingtao. However, before this move, several things of interest occurred.

Sometime in February or early March one of our group of LCIs was assigned to take some cargo across the Yellow Sea to the port of Inchon on the west coast of Korea. Inchon has a very high tidal range, about 20 feet or so, and as a result has an enclosed tidal basin that ships enter when the tide is high. For some reason, the Captain didn’t bother to read the port instructions that were in a book on board each ship. The LCI arrived off Inchon at night and, as it happened, when the tide was high. Rather than enter an unfamiliar port in the dark, the Captain anchored offshore and everybody except the deck and engine room watch went to bed. As usual, it was very cold and the engine room watch had to keep the steam generator going to keep the inside of the ship warm. About 0400 or 0500, when it was still quite dark, the engine room watch noticed that the heat exchangers that kept the generator cool weren’t getting any sea water, so he went up to talk to the fellow on deck watch inside the pilot house.

They got a light and looked over the side to find that the sea was gone except for a few puddles and the ship was resting solidly on the mud.

“I guess we’d better wake the captain,” one of them said, and they did so.

The man on the engine room watch had to shut down the generator and the heating system, the pumps and the galley stove. The Captain was embarrassed and looked in the port instructions to find he had failed to enter the tidal basin during the night and was sitting far outside on a mud flat. The cold weather quickly cooled things inside the ship and when the cooks got up in the dark not only were there not working lights in the ship apart from battery-powered lanterns, but the galley stove could not be lit because the exhaust fan wasn't operating nor was the electric coffee urn going with its perpetual supply of hot coffee.

It was about 1000 before the tide came back in, refloated the ship and allowed them to start up the electrical system. By then everyone aboard was thoroughly cold and hungry for breakfast and some hot coffee. On a round bottomed, or keeled ship we would have known much earlier because the ship would start to heel over as the tide went out, but with a flat-bottomed LCI, the ship, just settled down evenly on the soft mud.

The Captain was feeling foolish about this episode and tried to persuade the crew to keep it quiet when they returned to Tskul but of course that was not possible and we all knew the story shortly after they returned.

In March we got an emergency message from headquarters in Shanghai to go north to a place called Shalutien Shoal and try to pull a freighter free from the shoal. When we got there we found the SS *Marine Leopard*, a brand-new cargo ship; from the United States with a miscellaneous cargo. The freighter was a good deal bigger than we were; it was 17,000 tons and we were about 350 tons.

We tied up alongside and succeeded only in parting most of our big hawsers without so much as budging the bigger ship. We tried only at high tide, of course. We then tried to drag their anchor off a ways to see if their anchor winch could do the job. Again, we just didn't have the power to even drag a four or five ton anchor.

After reporting this to Shanghai, we were ordered to stand by and to provide security as the cargo was unloaded into what was called a coolie hulk. The coolie hulk was duly brought alongside by a small tow boat and the unloading began. Coolies, in cold weather, wore long padded parka-like coats so that here was a convenient place to hid things they pilfered. Our job was to frisk them after the unloading, and we found a number of items, the most amazing of which were rubber baby pants. One coolie had stretched two or three pairs over his legs under his padded coat, and I have no idea at all what he thought he might do with them.

Shanghai was most concerned about the whiskey that was aboard. There were a hundred or more wooden cases of bourbon aboard, and we received several messages reminding us that this was very important cargo. After all the unloading and frisking was done, the Captain of the freighter gave each of us ship's officers a case as thanks. I was not a whiskey drinker, so had a chat with Chief Morrison who reckoned he could get a very good price for my case if I was willing to sell. I was and he did and I instructed him to take a proper commission which I think he also did. In any case, I got about \$100 in cash. I think Captain Gulbransen of our ship drank most of his and probably used the rest for some of his girl friends in port. A number of times he brought these girls aboard for dinner; they were a bunch of over-dressed and over-made-up hard cases.

After we attempted to refloat the *Marine Leopard* unsuccessfully, but looked after the whiskey satisfactorily, we were relieved and sent back to Taku and a large tug came from somewhere and dragged the big ship to safety. The Captain of the big ship told us that the reason he had run aground was that a light was shown on his chart of the shoal despite the fact that it was not serviced during the war and the Chinese had not yet got around to putting it back into service.

In April, we were ordered to go to the big port of Tsingtao to train Chinese crews to operate LCIs as the Navy was preparing to turn over many of our group to the Chinese Nationalists. This proved to be quite an experience partly because of the need to pass instructions quickly through an interpreter, but also because of what might be called cultural customs, and I suspect because some of the Chinese sailors just weren't very bright, having been dragooned into their Navy by some means or other. It was further complicated by the fact that the Chinese officers were nearly all of higher rank than we, their instructors, were. It was very difficult to find a diplomatic means of pointing out errors on their part without at the same time causing them to lose face in front of their junior officers or crew.

Captain Gulbransen would get so frustrated trying to deal with his Chinese counterpart that he would stomp off the bridge and tell the first American officer he encountered to go up on the bridge and take over the instruction, sometimes when the ship was underway and the Chinese Captain was looking at our captain rather than where the ship was headed. Several times I had to tell our helmsman to take over quickly to avoid a collision with another ship. Similar problems took place among the enlisted men. In one case a Chinese engine room sailor just decided to pull all the switches on the main electrical panel, effectively stopping the rudder control, the galley stove, the bilge pumps and so on.

Things were pretty chaotic at first but gradually improved by June. It was becoming increasingly evident that the Nationalists under Chiang Kai Shek were losing the country and that Mao and his folks were taking over. We wondered if the crews we had trained would be able to get the ships to Taiwan (Formosa) in time. I guess most of them did.

In May and June, 1946, we were getting increasingly short-handed as members of the crew and the officers got enough points based on length of service, age, sea time and marital status. We lost Dick Langton in April or May and I moved into his slot as Executive Officer. We lost all the enlisted men who could type, leaving me as the only person aboard who could use the typewriter and as a result, Captain Gulbransen didn't want me to go and tried to entice me to stay on after I had enough points. I think he had accumulated enough to leave, but either wanted to be around for the decommissioning and handover to the Chinese or possibly had found a new girlfriend in Tsingtao whom he did not want to give up.

I wanted to leave so that I would have a summer at home and time to get ready to return to the University for a Master's degree, unless there was some particularly interesting assignment for a month or so. I had had enough of training the Chinese Navy and had enough of China as well.

One day I happened to meet the skipper of a small Navy oiler that was due to sail home via Saigon, Singapore, India, the Suez Canal and England. He desperately needed another deck officer, so I asked him if he would accept me if I could arrange it with the Senior Officer in Tsingtao. He said he would be delighted and even wrote me a note to be passed on to the Senior Officer, telling him what I wanted to do. I got an appointment with the Senior Officer and told him what I wanted to do. Unfortunately, he was one of those people who never want to accept any suggestions from juniors, no matter how sensible. He told me he wasn't about to have his junior officers arranging their homeward transport and to return to LCI(L) 632 and wait for orders. I hadn't handled this very astutely so missed out on what would certainly have been an interesting trip.

In June, I went aboard the USS *General Butler*, a huge troop transport carrying several thousand sailors and naval officers. We sailed non-stop straight across the Pacific from Shanghai to San Francisco. Many of us aboard received quite a bit of back pay in cash as we boarded the ship. During the course of the voyage, there were dozens of high-stakes poker games played resulting in a great redistribution of wealth. I sat and watched some of these games and quickly realized that my poker skills would quickly lead to poverty if I got involved even once, so I abstained.

I was returned to inactive duty in San Francisco and provided with a train ticket home. Naval Reserve Officers had to remain on the inactive role for 10 years after the war, subject to recall. A number of my friends, including my former roommate, Jerry Trnka, were recalled to duty during the Korean fracas.

In retrospect, my days in the Navy were educational, maturing and often interesting, but wars seemed to me to be pretty poor ways to settle problems and the military life and general approach to problems didn't fit well with the way I wanted to lead my life. I treasure my experiences in the Navy and especially appreciate the life-long friendships made and the opportunity to relive some of these experiences with others who shared them.

A Thought from Chaplain Mike Gatton

God Bless You



I am fascinated with how often we use words without thinking much about their literal meanings. I have a whole shelf of books that explain why we say what we say, like “going bananas.” Why is a “grapevine” a suitable way to get news? Just how “fit is a fiddle,” anyway? How many people know that “good-bye” is really a shorthand way of saying “God be with you?”

There is one common phrase that needs some exploration and explanation. When someone sneezes, we invariably say, “God bless you!” When and why did people start saying that?

Some say that when someone sneezes, the heart stops, and saying “God bless you” means “I’m glad you’re heart started again.” Another theory is that people once believed that a sneeze was caused by demons leaving the body, and the “God bless you” protected the sneezer from them re-entering. One early pope even passed a law telling folks to ward off sneezes during a plague with a blessing--kind of last rites.

After 9/11 “God Bless America” signs appeared everywhere. Comedian Red Skelton used to end his television show by saying, “God bless.” Many children end their prayers at bedtime with “God bless Mommy and Daddy.” Most every politician ends a speech with “God Bless America.” Charles Dickens’ classic, *A Christmas Carol*, ends with Tiny Tim exclaiming, “God bless us, every one!”

What does it mean for God to bless us? To bless America? Just what does blessing mean?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word we translate as blessing means “good fortune.” We are fortunate in life because we are assured of God’s blessing. In other words, God shows us favor and goodness. In turn we are to worship, adore, and praise God. Even more we are to bless others, invoking upon them the blessing of God. We are blessed to be a blessing. Our blessing has the purpose of being the resource for making life better for others. For example, those of us who are always given “our daily bread” are to feed the hungry of the world.

There is a profound responsibility and privilege that each generation has in blessing the generation that follows. And nothing does more to strengthen that blessing than freely given expressions of love, acceptance, and appreciation. We need one another’s blessing more than we need the material things we work so hard to provide. The word blessing in Latin is the word from which we get benediction. It literally means “speaking well or saying good things of someone.” We each need to hear good things said of us and to us--to be reminded of the good that is within us.

Blessings are to be passed on. That’s the thing about them. You are blessed. Be a blessing to others. Do it in your homes. Do it in your churches. Do it in you communities. Offer encouraging words, listening ears, helping hands, and empathetic hearts. If you do, you will be answering your own prayer, “God bless you!”

Agape!

Mike

IN MEMORIAM

*“Almighty and eternal God, from whose love we cannot be parted, either by death or life;
hear our prayers and thanksgiving for those whom we here remember.”
“Grant unto sorrowing family and shipmates the blessing of your peace that passes understanding.”*

LCI 8
Gerald C. Lemmon

LCI 70
Arthur H. Youd

LCI 340
Charles E. Savard

LCI 364
Arthur N. Chernin

LCI 439
Robert H. Reinhardt

LCU 489
L. Glen Neikirk

LCI 514
Daniel Mondelson

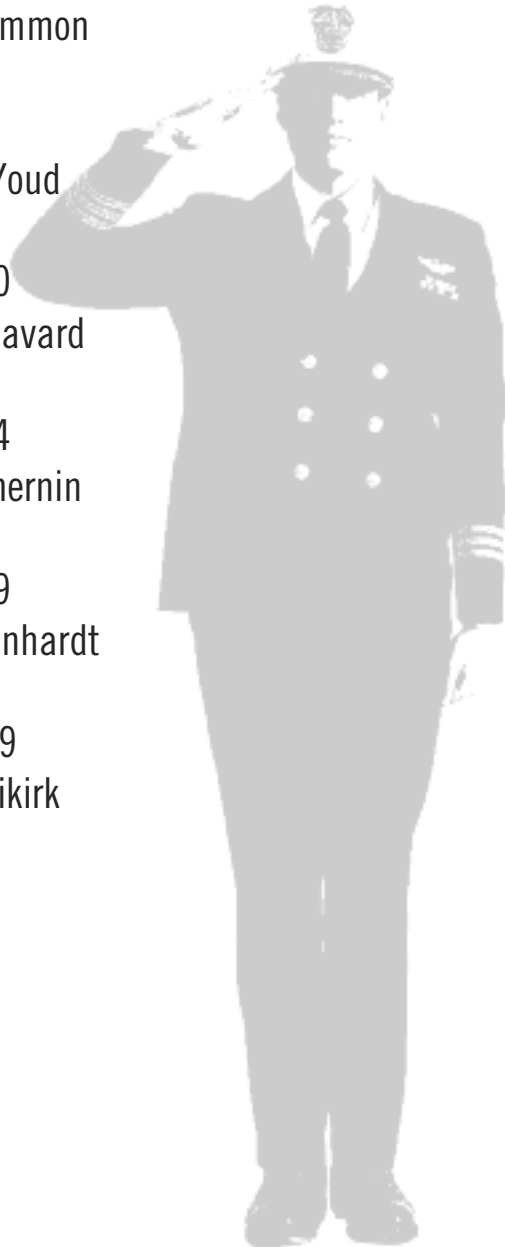
LCI 564
Robert Knutson

LCI 593
Miner J. Stackpole

LCI 990
Milton P. Merritt

LCI 1059
Charles E. Allen

LCI 1078
Earl Cain



LCI MODELS PRESENTED BY THE USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION



Models of LCIs 431, 455 and 872

For several years, the USS LCI National Association presented models to museums across the country. Thinking that some of our members may want to see the models, we list the models presented and their locations.

The models are listed by ship number

LCI (L) 48

Presented to the USS Texas Battleship Memorial, San Jacinto, Texas, on September 2, 1999

The 48 participated in landings in Tunisia, Gela, Salerno, Anzio, Elba and Southern France.

She was the ship of Harry Davies, a native of Texas who arranged for the presentation to the USS Texas at the San Jacinto Battlefield outside Houston, Texas.

LCI(L) 91

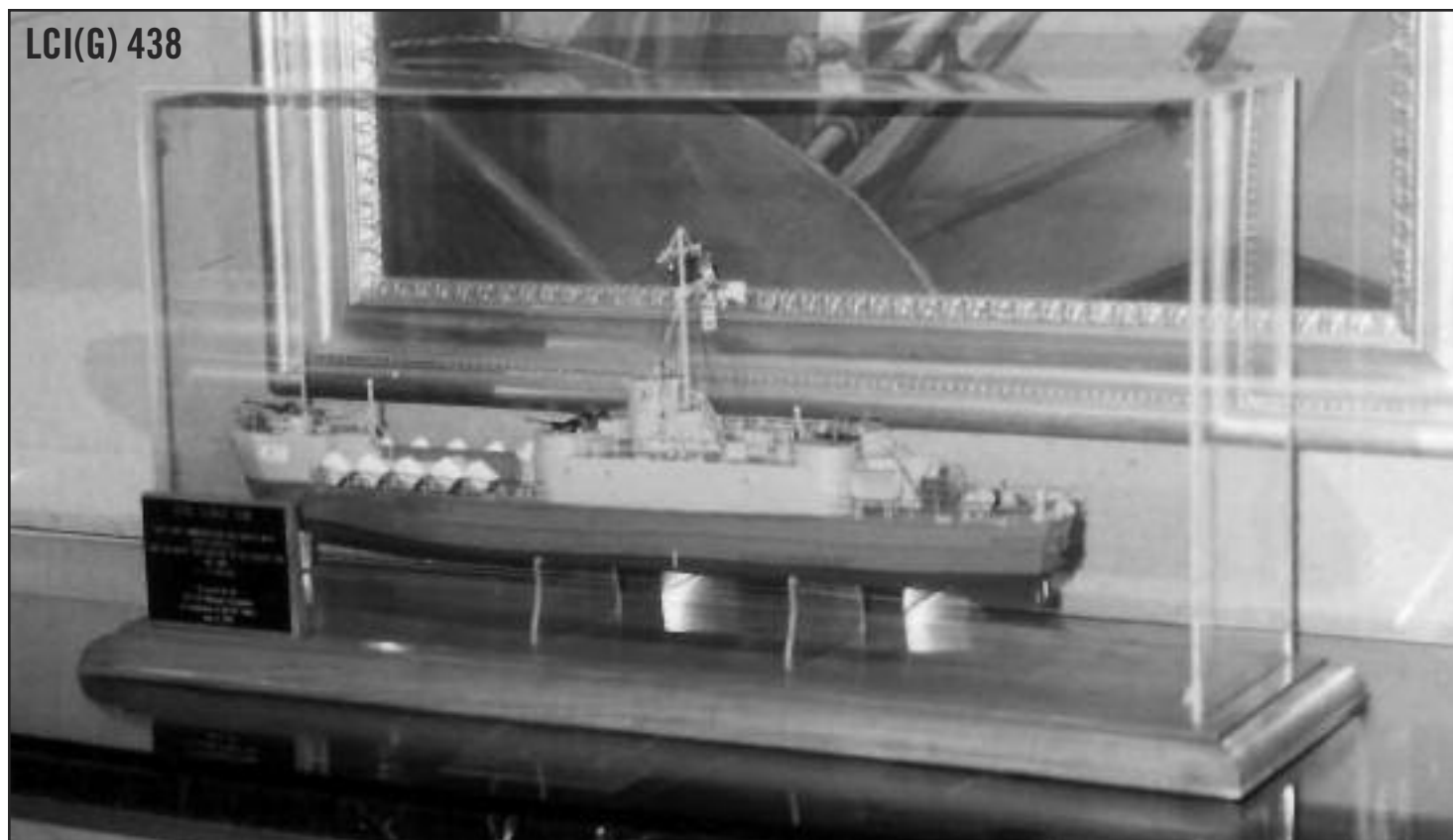
Presented to the Coast Guard Museum, Grand Haven, MI

LCI(L) 91

Presented to the Coast Guard Museum, Seattle, WA, May, 1998

LCI(G) 438

Presented to the Navy Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., June 6, 1998



LCI(L) 438 was lost to enemy action on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

LCI(R)455

Presented to the USS Missouri Memorial, Pearl Harbor, HI., November 17, 1998

LCI(R) 455 saw extensive action in many major amphibious operations in the Pacific Theater. A former crew member of the 455 organized a reunion of his former shipmates in Hawaii. The National Officers and model builder John Cummer were invited to be present for this presentation

LCI(G) 456

Presented to the Patriot's Point Naval and Maritime Museum, Mt. Pleasant, SC, July, 1995.

LCI(G) 456

Presented to the Sampson, NY, Naval Museum, May 1999

LCI(G) 456 saw extensive action in the Pacific Theater. It was the ship of Bob Weisser, founding President of the USS LCI National Association.

LCI(L) 497

Presented to the National D-Day Museum, New Orleans, June 6, 2000.

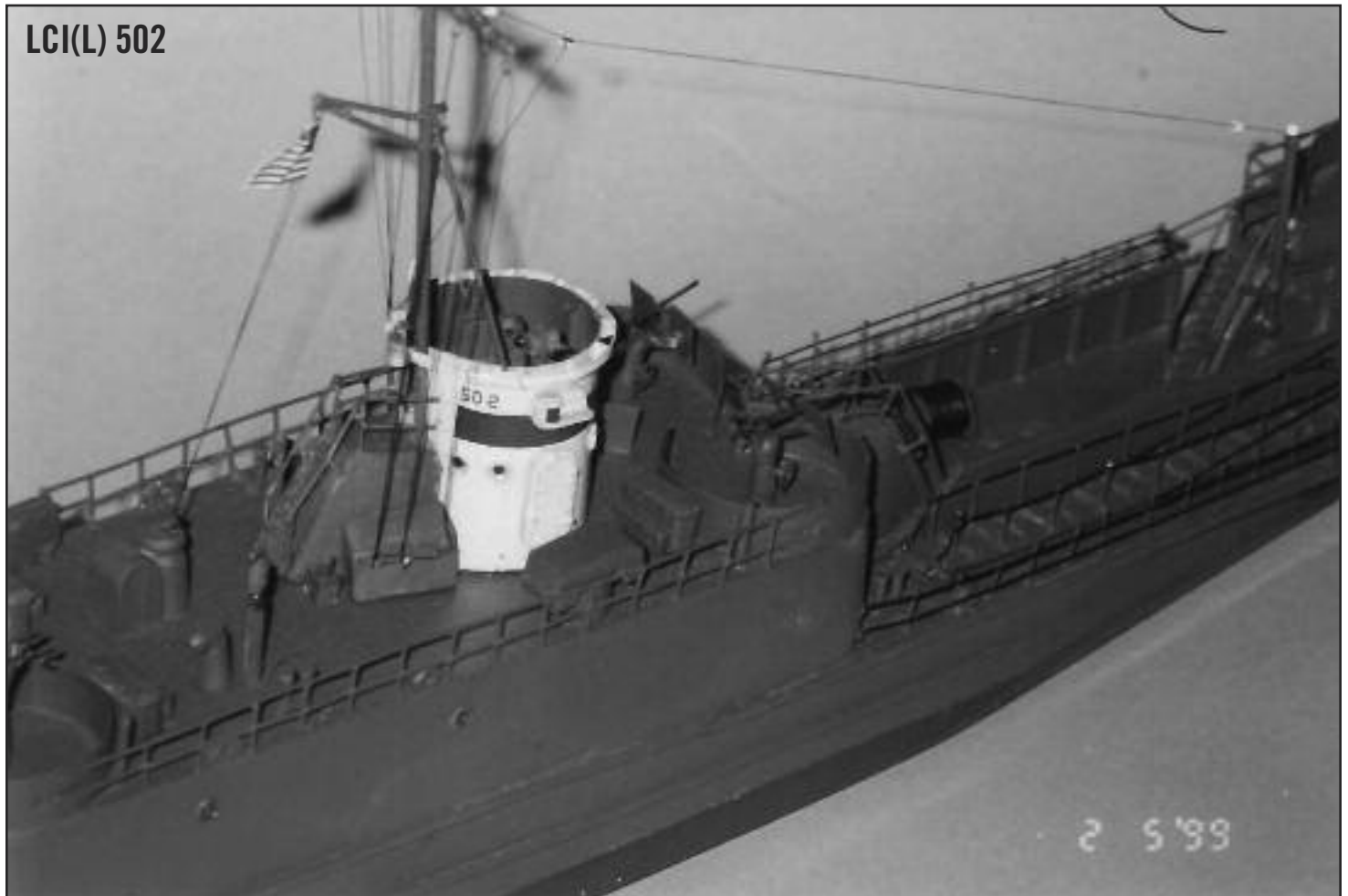
LCI(L) 502

Presented to the Calvert Maritime Museum, Solomon's Island, MD, October 1994

This was the first model presented by the USS LCI National Association. John Cummer was given the privilege of making it of his ship. The 502 participated in the D-Day landings, June 6, 1994.

LCI(L) 502

Presented to the Admiral Chester Nimitz Museum, Austin, TX, September, 1995.



John Cummer was again given the privilege of picking the ship number to be modeled.

LCI(L) 537

Presented to the Naval Surface Museum, U. S. Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, CA, April, 1995.

The LCI(L) 537 participated in the landings on Omaha Beach, D-Day, June 6, 1994. It was the ship of Tiny Clarkson, long-time treasurer of the USS LCI National Association.

LCI(L) 553

Presented to the United States Naval Ship Building Museum, Quincy, MA, April 1997

LCI(L) 553 was lost to enemy action at Omaha Beach, D-Day, June 6, 1944.

LCI(L) 553

Presented to the USS Olympia and Waterfront Museum, Philadelphia, PA,, April 1997



Presented as part of the USS LCI National Reunion at Cherry Hill, PA in 1997. The 553 was chosen again to honor several of her former crew members who were present at the reunion.

LCI(L) 590

Presented to the U. S. Naval ROTC Unit, Villanova University, October 7, 1999

This presentation was a special project of LCler John J. McCarthy in honor of members of the Villanova University V-12 program during WWII, many of whom were assigned to LCI duty.

LCI(L) 614

Presented to the Ft. Lewis Military Museum, Seattle, WA, April, 1998

The 614 was chosen for this presentation to honor her former Captain who was able to be present for the event.

LCI(L) 710

Presented to the State of Missouri Museum, St. Louis, MO, November 11, 1998.

The 710 was chosen for this presentation to honor Frank Ruxlow, Jr, who served on the 710 and was the organizer of this presentation.

LCI(L) 740

Presented to the Naval War College Museum, Newport, RI, October 8, 1998

The 740 was chosen for this presentation to honor Ken Farrar, Riverside, RI, who served in her during WWII and who was the organizer of this presentation.

LCI(L) Unnumbered

Presented to the Bay City, MI, Museum, July 1996

This unnumbered LCI(L) was a bow door model presented to the museum in Bay City, MI, in recognition of the many bow-door model LCIs that were built there during WWII.

A First Hand Account of the “Friendly Fire” at Parry Island

By
Dominick Marone
LCI(G) 440

In our last issue we carried an article written by Robert E. Wright entitled “Friendly Fire at Pawley Island”. Dennis Blocker, USS LCI Association for the Pacific Theater, was quick to point out that the name of the island was Parry Island, not Pawley Island. Pawley Island is, in fact, an island off the South Carolina Coast!

Name error notwithstanding, the article was a compelling reminder of how tragic accidents can occur in wartime. Wright was researching the story behind a series of unpublished photos he had come across entitled “LCI Burial at Sea” He came to the conclusion that these were photos of the burial at sea of casualties occurring as a result of the erroneous fire of the destroyer USS Hailey. The fire was meant for targets on the beach but smoke from the naval bombardment obscured the view and the barrage fell on the LCIs leading the boat waves. In our files we discovered an account of this incident written by Dominick Marone, who served on one of the unfortunate LCIs. Here is his first-hand account of that terrible day

On D-Day, 31 January 1944, we led the first wave of marines onto the beaches at Roi-Namur (part of Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands), firing our rockets at the island along with Group-Eight, which consisted of eight other LCIs. After the rockets were launched, we turned broadside to the atoll and continued to fire at the beach with our guns. We were so close to the beach we could actually see Jap snipers in the trees. In all of our beachhead encounters, the 440 and other LCI(G)s would go in ahead of the first wave of troops.

That afternoon, we made a run on Arno Atoll and Majuro Atoll. On 1 February, we hit our main objective, which was Kwajalein, the main Japanese naval air base in the Marshall Islands. In total, we were involved in twenty-six [of the thirty] beachhead landings in the Marshalls. Many of those islands had very few or no Japanese on them.

The landings at Eniwetok, another large atoll, took place on 19 February. On the twenty-second, we made our last run, which was also the last island to be taken in that campaign, and that is one day that has never left my mind. We were making our run and had just finished our last salvo of rockets. We turned to

starboard, facing Parry Island. We started firing on the island when our 40-mm gun, the one I was on, jammed. As “first loader,” it was my responsibility to go under the gun and remove the shell that was causing the jam. The gun crew consisted of four people, two who guided the direction and firing of the gun, a “first loader” who would load the gun (there were four shells to each clip), and a “second loader” who removed the clips from the magazine and handed them to the first loader.

While I was under the gun I heard a loud hissing sound. At first I thought it was more rockets going off, but then I noticed that the second loader was laying on the deck. When I looked over at him he was bleeding and had a large gash in his back. He was dead. We were under attack and I could no longer hear any of our guns firing. The ship appeared to have lost power and was adrift.

To this day I don’t know what made me go to the rear of the gun deck and slide down the ladder to the fantail, while the rest of the crew on the forward gun deck went down the ladder to the well deck. We were being hit by 5-inch shells, the first one hitting on the front starboard side of the gun deck, destroying one of the 40-mm guns and damaging the conning tower. Lt. (j.g.) Grace was wounded on the thumb. It also put the radio room and steering compartment out of business. The second shell hit the ladder going down to the well deck, killing all the men from my gun.

While we were drifting out of control, I could hear bullets being fired from snipers on the beach hitting the winch on the fantail. Up to that point I had been too occupied to be scared. Then one of the crewmen was able to switch the ship over to manual control, which was a big steering wheel turned by hand. It was his battle station to begin with. After we were hit and out of control, he came up through the hatch, which opened to the fantail. He was wearing a headset under his helmet, and when he saw that we weren’t sinking he went back below and switched the ship over to manual steering and was guided by the people in the conning tower.

The marines had secured a beachhead by then, and we were able to restart our engines and pull away from the island. Our pharmacist’s mate was one of the eight crewmen killed during

the action and we were without any medical personnel on board. Those of us who were not wounded started treating the wounded as best we could, giving morphine to those who were in pain. There were thirty-five men, including one officer, who were wounded, well over half the crew.

We pulled alongside of the USS *Solace*, a hospital ship, so they could treat our wounded. We later buried our dead at sea from the decks of the battleship, USS *Pennsylvania*. I can still see the canvas bags sliding from under the American flags and splashing into the water. Those eight were the only deaths we suffered during the entire war.

Going back to our ship was the only time in my navy career that I became seasick. I'm sure it was due to both the sight of those eight crewmen being buried at sea and the choppy water hitting the LCM as it took us back to our ship.

We had some minor repairs done on the ship, then headed back to Pearl Harbor. On the way back, it was told to us by our captain that the shells that hit us and two other LCIs were from our own destroyers. We arrived back at Pearl sometime in March 1944, and the ship went into dry dock for further repairs.

A Summary of Life!

*Reprinted by permission from the Newsletter of the U. S. Navy Amphibious Force Veterans Association.
Have a smile on us!*

Great Truths that Little Children Have Learned:

1. No matter how hard you try, you can't baptize cats.
2. When your Mum is made at y our Dad, don't let her brush your hair.
3. If your sister hits you, don't hit her back. They always catch the second person.
4. Never ask your 3-year old brother to hold a tomato.
5. You can't trust dogs to watch your food.
6. Don't sneeze when someone is cutting your hair.
7. Never hold a Dust-Buster and a cat at the same time.
8. You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.
9. Don't wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts.
10. The best place to be when you're sad is Grandpa's lap.

Great Truths That Adults Have Learned:

1. Raising teenagers is like nailing jelly to a tree.
2. Wrinkles don't hurt.
3. Families are like fudge ... mostly sweet, with a few nuts.
4. Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground.
5. Laughing is good exercise. It's like jogging on the inside.
6. Middle age is when you choose your cereal for the fiber, not the toy.

Great Truths About Growing Old:

1. Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.
2. Forget the health food. I need all the preservatives I can get.
3. When you fall down, you wonder what else you can do while you are down there.
4. You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.
5. It's frustrating when you know all the answers but nobody bothers to ask you the questions.
6. Time may be a great healer, but it's a lousy beautician.
7. Wisdom comes with age, but sometimes age comes alone.

“I LIKE THE NAVY!”

Author Unknown

You may have come across this before, but we thought we'd include it just in case some of you haven't heard it. Written by a sailor who served long after we did,, and although many references do not apply exactly to our service in LCIs, there is much here that brings back good memories of Navy service.

I was standing on the bridge wing at sunrise with spray in my face and clean ocean winds whipping in from the for quarters of the globe – the ship beneath me feeling like a living thing as her engines drive he through the sea.

I like the sounds of the Navy – nervous darting Destroyers, plodding fleet auxiliaries, sleek Submarines and steady solid Carriers. I like the proud sonorous names of Navy capital ships: *Midway, Lexington, Saratoga, Coral Sea* – memories of great battles won. I like the lean, angular names of Navy Tin Cans: *Barney, Dahlgren, Mullinix, McCloy, John Paul Jones* – mementos of heroes who went before us.

I like the tempo of a Navy band blaring through speakers as we pull away from an oiler after refueling at sea. I like liberty call and the spicy scent of a foreign port. I even like all hands working parties as my ship fills herself with a multitude of supplies, both mundane and exotic, which she needs to cut her ties to the land and carry out her mission anywhere on the globe where there is water to float her.

I like the surge of adventure in my heart when the word is passed , “Now station the special sea and anchor detail – all hands to quarters for leaving port.” I like the infectious thrill of sighting home again, with waving hands of welcome from family and friends waiting pier-side. The work is hard and dangerous, the going is rough at times, the parting from loved ones is painful, but the companionship of robust Navy laughter, the “all for one and one for all” philosophy of the sea is present.

I like the restfulness of the sea after a hard day of ship's work, as flying fish flit across the wave tops and sunset as it gives way to night. I like the feel of the Navy in darkness – the masthead lights, the red and green navigation lights and stern light, the myriad noises large and small that tell me that my ship is alive and well, and that my shipmates on watch will keep me safe.

I like quiet mid-watches with the aroma of strong coffee – the life blood of the Navy – permeating everywhere. And I like hectic watches when the exacting minuet of haze-grey shapes racing at flank speed keeps all hands on a razor edge of alertness. I like the sudden electricity of “General Quarters, General Quarters. All hands man your battle stations.” followed by the hurried clamor of running feet on ladders and the resounding thump of watertight doors as the ship transforms herself in a few brief seconds from a peaceful workplace to a weapon of war – ready for anything. And I like the sight of space-age equipment manned by youngsters clad in dungarees and sound-powered phones that their Grandfathers would still recognize.

I like the traditions of the Navy and the men and women who made them. I like the proud names of Navy heroes: Halsey, Nimitz, Perry, Farragut and John Paul Jones. A sailor an find much in the Navy: comrades-in-arms, pride in self and country, mastery of the seaman's trade and an adolescent can find adulthood.

In years to come, when sailors are home from the sea, they will remember with fondness and respect the ocean in all its moods – the impossible shimmering mirror calm and the storm – tossed green water surging over the bow. And then there will come again a faint whiff of stack gas, a faint echo of engine and rudder orders, a vision of the bright bunting of signal flags snapping at the yardarm, a refrain of hearty laughter in the wardroom and chief's quarters and mess deck. Gone ashore for good, they will grow wistful about their Navy days, when the seas belonged to them and a new port of call was ever over the horizon.

Remembering this, they will stand taller and say,

“I was a sailor once. I was part of the Navy and the Navy will always be a part of me.”

Your Officers and Board of Directors

Please feel free to contact any of the officers or directors listed below for whatever comments or questions you may have. If the person you contact does not know the answer to your question, he will direct you to one who can. We're here to serve you!

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NATIONAL REUNIONS TO CONTINUE!

We'll see you in September in Nashville!

