

April 2016



Elsie Item

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

• Established May 14-18, 1991, Norfolk, VA •

**USS LCI (G) 64
and USS LCI (G)
65 at Morotai!**

**WE SAY GOODBYE...
TO OUR PUBLISHER
AND BUSINESS
MANAGER, NEHEMIAH
COMMUNICATIONS,
AND *ELSIE ITEM*
MAGAZINE...**

USS LCI 87 home from Europe!

"THE ELSIE ITEM"

NUMBER 93, April 2016

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. Zach S. Morris, Editor (*John P. Cummer, Editor Emeritus*). Any material for possible publication should be sent to the Editor, preferably by email (morrisza23@gmail.com).

ON OUR COVER:

TOP PHOTO: USS LCI(G)-64 (bottom) and USS LCI(G)-65 (top) during the Morotai Island, Dutch New Guinea invasion on September 15, 1944. The two LCIs, bombarding the south part of Morotai, are pictured between Red Beach (north) and White Beach (south). (Courtesy navsource.org)

BOTTOM PHOTO: A Coast Guard-manned LCI(L)-87 is home from three invasions in the European Theater. The flotilla of Coast Guard-manned LCIs hit the beaches of Sicily, Italy, and Normandy, and made an unprecedented round trip Atlantic voyage for vessels of their size and type. (Photo courtesy navsource.org; information courtesy "USS LCI: Volume 1" by Turner Publishing, p. 55)

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

- John P. Cummer Memoriam
- A Final Word from our Editor, Zach Morris
- A Final Word from our President & Chaplain, Mike Gatton
- "The Heart of Hell" – The story of the LCI (G) 449 is now available in bookstores!
- LCI 713 Update
- Letters to the Editor
- "A Baker at Heart" – We Remember Tom Barnett of the LCI(G)-727

CORRECTIONS FROM THE LAST LCI NEWSLETTER, "ELSIE ITEM" (NOV. 2015):

PAGE 11: It stated LCI and LST Association members toured the **USS Lexington** at the 2015 Charleston Reunion. It should have stated **USS Yorktown**.

"Elsie Item" Notice:

The USS LCI National Associations is not responsible for the accuracy of articles submitted to the Editor for publication. Time and resources does not permit the ability to check each story, therefore, we rely on the author to research each article.

FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS TO "ELSIE ITEM" MAGAZINE

It is with great sadness that we announce that our business manager and magazine publisher, Nehemiah Communications, will no longer be working with the USS LCI National Association. Our gifted and talented Editor-in-Chief of two and a half years, Zach S. Morris, will also no longer be working on our beloved magazine. We want to thank them for their years of hard work, dedication, and service to the USS LCI National Association.

The fate of the remaining three upcoming 2016 *Elsie Item* newsletters is unknown, but will be determined by the LCI Board of Directors.

Please direct all future LCI Association correspondences to the association's new location:

Attention: Robert Wright, Treasurer
J.J. Jinkleheimer - Receiving
2705 E Grand River Ave
Howell, MI 48843

A FINAL WORD FROM THE EDITOR

To the Dear LCI Veterans of the USS Landing Craft, Infantry, National Association:

For the last three years, it has been a tremendous honor being the Editor-in-Chief for your newsletter. I accepted the position of Editor in November 2013 from John Cummer of the LCI (L) 502, one of the finest men I've ever met. From the first time we spoke at the Charleston, SC Reunion in 2012, he has been a close friend, mentor, and inspiration to me. He put his trust in me to take over as Editor for your *Elsie Item*, a newsletter that my grandfather cherished reading. John and I happened to meet the year after my grandfather, Stephen Ganzberger, passed away in May of 2011. He was 86, and the greatest man I've ever known. Stephen served as a Quartermaster aboard the LCI (L) 329 and LCI (G) 65 in the Pacific Theater in WWII. One of the most important lessons my grandfather ever taught me was to always stand up for what's right. Stand up and do the right thing not only for yourself, but for others as well. I am proud to say he has made me a better man. Being the Editor of your newsletter has also made me a better man. Every one of you veterans that I've been lucky enough to meet has taught me something valuable and unique that I will take with me for the rest of my life. I want to thank John Cummer from the bottom of my heart for giving me this opportunity of a lifetime. I loved him like a second grandfather, and will miss him dearly.

I'm sad to say that this will be my last issue as Editor of the *Elsie Item* in its current form. Like all of us that travel on the road of life, I have arrived at a crossroads in my career. The reason for my departure is because I have accepted the position as Editor-in-Chief of LST Scuttlebutt magazine—the quarterly newsletter of the US LST Association. Our departing business manager, Nehemiah Communications, also publishes their newsletter. For those members present at the 2015 Charleston, SC Joint LCI & LST Reunion last September, you will remember voting for exploring the idea of eventually combining both the LCI and LST Association newsletters going forward. I had every intention of accepting the position as Editor-in-Chief of this proposed newsletter—a combination of the *Elsie Item* and *LST Scuttlebutt*.

However, a small number of LCI Board of Directors members, several of whom were not present for the vote in Charleston, believe this is not the best direction for the LCI Association. They chose to call into question the agreed-upon consensus of both associations' veteran memberships, and have instead taken the steps to explore their financial options with the AFMM, who maintain the LCI 713 in Portland,



John Cummer, former *Elsie Item* Editor-in-Chief (left), with Zach Morris, current Editor-in-Chief (right)

OR. I wish them the very best of luck in their future endeavors and thank them sincerely for my time as Editor. The future of the LCI newsletter, LCI website, and LCI reunion planning is currently unknown to me—but in their hands now. As LCI President Mike Gatton explains on page 13, there is a new LCI Board of Directors taking control of the association, and I have no future plans to work with those individuals.

Several days after my grandfather passed away, on May 24, 2011, Congressman John Dingell (D-MI), who was a dear friend of my grandfather's, wrote a letter to my grandmother that was addressed to my entire family. At the end of the letter he wrote of my grandfather:

"Today, you honor a man who lived his life with patience and purpose. His children will be able to tell their children that he not only stood for all that is good, he always took action."

Those words embody the definition of not only the life of my grandpa, but all of you LCI veterans of the "Greatest Generation." The love I have for my grandpa is very much like the love I have for all of you LCiers. To the LCI vets of World War II, I would like to say one last thing before I depart as Editor of the *Elsie Item*: Just like my grandfather, you are all my heroes.

Do not hide your Light.

Forever Gratefully, Respectfully,
and Admirably Your Editor,

Zach Stephen Morris
Associate Member

**Proud Grandson of QM2/c Stephen Ganzberger,
LCI(L)-329 and LCI(G)-65, USNR**

The Heart of Hell: The Untold Story of Courage and Sacrifice in the Shadow of Iwo Jima

By Mitch Weiss

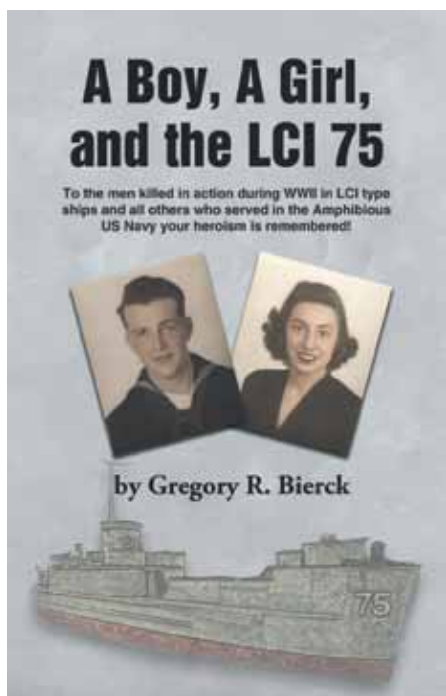
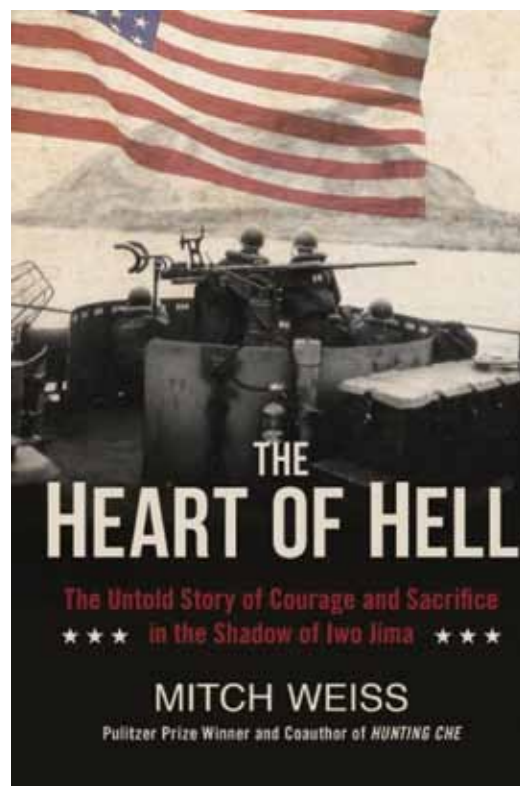
Now Available on Barnesandnoble.com and Amazon.com!

Dennis Blocker—USS LCI National Association Pacific Theater Historian—spent 15 years researching the story of his grandfather, **Cliff Lemke** of the USS LCI(G)-449. Along the way, Dennis' journey revealed a fascinating, heart-wrenching, tragic, and unforgettable story about the tale of the USS LCI(G)-449, part of LCI (G) Group 8, Flotilla 3 at Iwo Jima. The author of the book is Pulitzer Prize winner **Mitch Weiss**.

The USS LCI National Association wants to congratulate Dennis for his years of hard work that led to this book's creation!

"The journey this book has taken began 15 years ago when my mother asked me to find out what happened to her father during the War. I interviewed over 300 people and traveled all over the United States to fulfill this request. What I found astounded me and led me to pursue author Mitch Weiss. Over the past three years we have worked hand in hand to bring this story to light. His manuscript is magnificent and surpassed my expectations. I am so thankful for his hard work, diligence, patience with me, and attention to detail. The families of the 449 will be proud of this work. I know I am."

—Dennis Blocker, Pacific War Historian



New LCI Association Member Gregory R. Bierck Writes Book About His Father...

My dad, **Richard C. Bierck** (aka **Dick Bierck**) served on the LCI 75 during WWII. I have recently written a book about his experiences on this LCI, and how he and mom met up during the war. Dad served in the European Theater. The book will be available in November and should cost \$10.00 plus shipping costs, either through Amazon or from the publisher who is Infinity.

—Gregory R. Bierck

ORDER YOUR COPY ONLINE
AT AMAZON TODAY!



Daniel Mendelsohn in World War II...

Two weeks after the start of the war (December 7, 1941), Daniel tried to enlist in the U.S. Air Force, but he was rejected because of his overbite. He participated in three operas before deciding to enlist in the U.S. Navy (December 14, 1942) and took his basic training and attended Quartermaster School at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

He became a member of the crew of LCI 514. An LCI, Landing Craft Infantry, was designed to carry troops to shore. The 514 could carry about 200 troops. He remembers taking on U.S. soldiers in the Dart River in England before taking them to Normandy on D-Day (June 6, 1944). There was a ship blocking their approach at Normandy, as it was sitting sideways; so they had to ferry the troops ashore in small boats. After that, he made five trips with British troops from Southampton to Normandy. The invasion of Southern France occurred from August 15 to September 21, 1944. The 514 also transported troops from North Africa to Southern France. After this single trip, the 514 carried out other maneuvers in the Mediterranean, such as transporting German POWs from France to a ship offshore. While in the Mediterranean, he remembers visiting Tunisia (Tunis) and Sicily (Palermo and Salerno).

In Sicily, he remembers being invited up to a fifth-floor apartment to have a spaghetti dinner with a family. In January 1945, the ship returned to Boston. Lillian met Daniel there, and they took the train to Chicago, getting married there on February 4, 1945. They returned to Boston.

The war ended August 6, 1945. The ship went to Norfolk, then to San Diego via Key West, Florida, and the Panama Canal. Lillian took a land route to San Diego. Daniel was discharged from the Navy in San Diego on October 6, 1945, with the rating of Quartermaster Second Class (QM2C). In July or August 1945, the 514 was in Long Beach being refitted to use different weapons. This took a couple of months. Al Technow took command of the 514 for a Pacific tour (Hawaii, Guam). Eventually, it was turned over to the Nationalist Chinese (Formosa/Taiwan) for use in their war efforts.



Daniel Mendelsohn in WWII (Courtesy David Fellman, son-in-law of Daniel Mendelsohn)

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 80
Russel E. Bard

LCI 502
John P. Cummer

LCI 727
Tom Barnett

LCI 802
Thomas Carsten

LCI 195
John Edwin Gellick

LCI 612
William B. Quinn

LCI 732
Maurice Bombini

LCI 971
Leonard Block Jr.

LCI 439
Paul Bonner

LCI 644
Thomas Lowe

LCI 758
Robert Mills

LCI 1011
Lt. William Orr II

LCI 495
Anthony Pelle

LCI 1057
Lewis Lionell Tucker

**WE SAY GOODBYE...TO OUR BELOVED LCI ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENT, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, AND EDITOR *EMERITUS*...**

JOHN PHILIP CUMMER

(October 12, 1924 – April 18, 2016)



*John Cummer in WWII.
(Courtesy John Cummer
Facebook Page)*



*President Obama shares a laugh with John Cummer and other WWII
veterans at the D-Day 70th Anniversary ceremony on June 6, 2014 in
Colleville-sur-mer, France (Courtesy John Cummer Facebook Page)*

WE SHOULD ALL BE VERY PROUD to have had the privilege to know John Cummer. He was a lifetime member of the USS LCI Association, but was so much more than that. John was a friend, mentor, family man, American, patriot, World War II LCI Gunner's Mate, National LCI Association President & Chairman of the Board Emeritus, and Editor Emeritus. He was a gifted and talented writer, but was first and foremost a man of God. He had a soothing ability to impart comforting wisdom on his friends and family. He will always be a hero to many of us and we are so proud of his hard work. What he and his fellow countrymen did aboard the LCI(L)-502 at Gold Beach, Normandy, France on D-Day in June 1944, was larger than life. His unique writing was as creatively masterful as it was heartwarming and authentic. It is because of him that the *Elsie Item* is the brilliant and world-class magazine it is today. So many people will be forever indebted to him for his

countless contributions and sacrifices for his country and the association. He trusted, believed in, and was most proud of the LCI Association—his greatest source joy next to his family. During his lifetime membership, John served on the LCI Board of Directors—always staying actively involved, even up until his last days. Still sharp at age 91, he served as an officer on the LCI & LST Joint Commission before it was recently dissolved.

It has truly been a blessing to work alongside a WWII veteran like him. Those of us lucky enough to have known John will cherish our memories we spent together. Many of us love him dearly and will miss him very much. We will never forget all the things he taught us, and will always remember the advice and guidance he offered...

Fair winds and following seas, skipper. You will surely be missed...

USS LCI 502 At D-Day

By John Cummer



USS LCI(L)-502 disembarking during a practice landing at Paignton Sands, England in May 1944. (Navsource.org)

Editor's Note: The following passage is an excerpt from "USS LCI 502 At D-Day" by John P. Cummer. John served as a Seaman 1st Class (Gunner's Mate) aboard the LCI(L)-502 in the European Theater in WWII. His battle station was located at the #1 20mm gun at the bow of the ship. John participated in the D-Day landings at Jig Green Gold Beach, Normandy, France in June 1944.

The Day Draws Near

On Saturday, the Third of June, our ship, the USS LCI(L) 502, moved to Royal Pier, Southampton, England, and embarked 196 men and officers of the Durham Light Infantry, 151st Brigade, 50th Northumbrian Division, British 8th Army. They were carrying freshly printed French currency, a positive sign that this trip was for real. As they clambered aboard, car-

rying folded bicycles and with various bits of equipment hanging about them, they looked somewhat more like peddlers than soldiers. They were, however, first class troops and were to prove themselves so again in the fighting that lay ahead.

Crowded to the limit, we moved back to our normal berthing place at New Docks along with the other LCIs of Group 31. [...] A church party

went ashore and returned, and the crowded troops were permitted ashore for some needed exercise. The usual general quarters were sounded for an air raid alert at 2030 and we stood to our guns for some twenty minutes before securing. Our group did not participate in the abortive foray on June 5th, which had to be recalled because of bad weather, but the certainty of our sailing for the "far shore" was underlined when, at 1400, ship's company was assembled to hear the message of General Eisenhower to the Allied Expeditionary Force.

Throughout that day more and more ships slipped out of the once crowded harbor until it seemed that we were the only ones left. It was an eerie sensation. Finally, at 2000, our group began slipping lines and standing out into the channel. The 502 cast off at 2012, taking its place in column behind the 512. Our escort ship, HMS *Albrighton*, met us as we passed Needles Light on the eastern tip of the Isle of Wight and, forming into divisions for the assault, we were on our way. Jolly Miller and I shared the bow watch from 2000 to midnight that night. As usual he was ebullient and talkative, excited about what was coming.

"Just think, JP," he said to me, "by this time tomorrow we'll be veterans!"

I think I shared some of his anticipatory excitement, but when we were relieved at midnight, I felt the need to be alone. Imminent danger has a way of awakening spiritual concerns. Godly parents had raised me to take the Christian faith seriously.

On this night before battle, I felt the need for reminding myself of the certainties and comforts of that faith. Finding a place to be alone on a 153 foot landing craft crowded with 196 troops can be a problem, but I had my own private place, cramped though it was. Under the fantail deck was the small magazine where ammunition was stored. As the Gunner's Mate, I had the key to that small cubbyhole and so it was to that place that I retreated for my quiet time.

I sat on the cold, steel deck, surrounded by the cases of ammunition and read from the New Testament that had been given to me by the Gideons. The guide to references inside the front cover had suggestions for special times. One was "for times of peril or danger", and it directed me to Psalm 91:

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee..."
"...but it shall not come nigh thee..."

A deep sense, not of fearless bravado, but of assurance in the protection of a sovereign God came to me as I read those verses. To this day, every time I re-read them, that tiny steel cubicle, surrounded by cases of ammunition, pitching with the motion of the sea, comes immediately to mind. In God's providence, that protection was afforded to me and my shipmates on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

The Assault

In the early hours of June 6th, as we entered the swept channels through the minefields north of Seine Bay [...] the nine LCIs of Group 31 formed up for the assault as directed in Group Commander Patrick's order. [...]

My battle station was at the number one gun atop the focs'l, thus placing me in the farthest point forward aboard our ship, a genuine ring-side seat, but one that had the drawback of being an excellent and highly visible target. With our gun cocked and loaded we talked, watched



70 years after D-Day, John Cummer visited Normandy, France in June 2014. This photo was taken as he sat in prayer in the Cathedral at Notre Dame. (Courtesy Mike Gatton)

and waited, speculating as to what was going on ashore, when we would head in, and how much opposition we would face. In the log book, Mr. Krenicky, our Engineering Officer, who made the entries for that memorable day, noted that they observed a German tank hit on a hillside and, as we shifted to beaching stations at 1030, that a German 75mm gun was still in operation as well as mortar fire. At 1040 he wrote:

"Standing in to Jig Green sector of Gold Beach, Asnelles-Sur-Mer, Arromanches sector"

The noise, smoke and confusion grew as we threaded our way through a mass of wrecked landing craft, tanks, and beach obstacles. The nice, tight directions of our Group Commander as to our order of landing disappeared as the confusion of the beach made it totally impossible. It was every ship for itself... ■

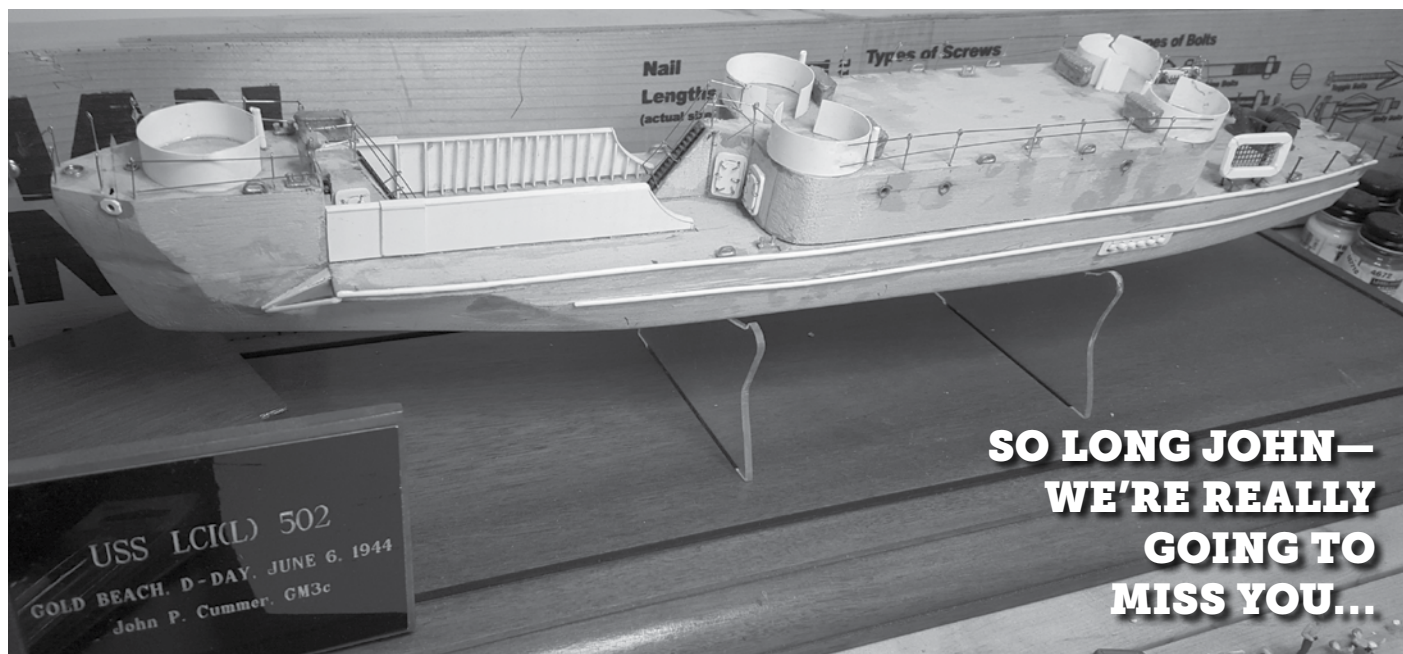


Mike Gatton (right) presents John Cummer with a gift for all of his hard work at the LCI Branson, Missouri Reunion in 2013.

"Unfinished Business"

On April 18th, I was called to the home of my stepfather, John Cummer, only to find that he had passed away. As many of you know, John served for many years as the President of the LCI Association and so loved all of his fellow LCIs and shipmates. John had for years done models of naval ships that had gone to both individuals and museums. He had recently given his car away and was able to get his workbench cleared. He told me that he had done this, as he wanted to start one last project. As the funeral company took his body away, I happened to be walking through the garage and saw his final project. He was working on his own LCI. He had bought the plaque and begun the work (see the picture below). John's model may have gone unfinished, but the legacy of his life and lives that he touched is now complete. Enjoy your final great voyage. We will miss you.

—Ken Breivik



**SO LONG JOHN—
WE'RE REALLY
GOING TO
MISS YOU...**

A Word From Our Friends at the Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum and the LCI 713!

Dear LCI Members, Crew, Friends, and Long-Term Supporters,

This has been a really productive year for us. We are now in our second year at Port of Portland Berth 308, the Swan Island Lagoon. Having a secure berth enables us to work on multiple projects and to plan for the continued long-term restoration of our historic LCI 713. Having a secure location for parking has also encouraged families and groups to come visit the ship. Our visits to the 713 have gone up dramatically! We have also launched our new LCI newsletter: "Deck Log of the LCI(L)713." Please check out the inaugural issue: <http://www.lci713.com/News/2015AFMMNewsletter.pdf>

You can now also help us simply by shopping at Amazon! To get started, click the Amazon Link on our homepage. This links your Amazon account to the AFMM non-profit. Then to shop use: www.smile.amazon.com. Amazon will then donate a small percentage of your purchase to the AFMM! Stay tuned for other programs like this too! Our really good news is that the AFMM and Vigor Industrial have developed a roadmap toward getting a new hull for the LCI-713. But we still need your continued support to make it happen! Thanks to your help, we are at least 75-percent restored – above the waterline. Our challenge is to raise funds to restore the hull of the 70-year old ship.



You can make a tax-deductible contribution online via our website – www.amphibiousforces.org (Click: "Membership/Donation"). As always, \$100 donors get a plaque on our annual donation board and \$250 donors get a Lifejacket Memorial.

We wish you all fair winds and following seas,

Rick Holmes, AFMM President

Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum
PO Box 17220
Portland, OR 97217

NEWS RELEASE

June 19, 2015

Contact: Deanna Frazier
(320) 593-2730

LITCHFIELD, MN — Most 15-year-olds spend time thinking about their next Saturday-night date or their next school event, but at 15 years of age, a young Bruce Cottington pledged to give his all to the U.S. Navy when he enlisted underage in 1942, risking incarceration for lying about his age. He was but one of the more than 20,000 estimated VUMS (Veterans of Underage Military Service) who served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Only about 2,900 VUMS are left today, according to the national VUMS organization.



"My brothers and I were playing a game of football on an unusually warm December 7th in 1941 when we heard of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor," Cottington, 88, recalled. "It was a day that President Roosevelt said would live in infamy."

Though he was only 15 years old at the time, he said he knew joining the service was what he needed to do. However, he was well under the age of 17 necessary to enlist. With the help of his mother and a Notary of the Public, he falsified his birth certificate in order to pledge his life in service of his country.

"According to the Navy, I was 90 years old in January, (2015). I never told a soul (I was underage). I didn't dare. I could have ended up in the brig for it," Cottington explained of his deception. "Or worse, I could have been stripped of my rank and enlistment."

"I was meant to serve my country," Cottington said of his WWII service in the U.S. Navy as a radioman. "And I would do it all over again."

Cottington served as a radioman on the U.S.S. LCI (G) 462 in the South Pacific during WWII. He survived seven landings with the 4th Marine Division, including the first landings at Tinian and Saipan. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation absolving all VUMS from retribution as well as guaranteeing them their military benefits. In 1991, Cottington, who also served as a radioman in The Korean War, joined with others who served in the military underage to form a group called VUMS. Cottington is currently the Commander of the Minnesota State VUMS. The national organization has been losing approximately 600 members a year, he explained.

"We may only have a few more years left," Cottington said of the VUMS organization. "There are only a few of us out there," he explained of the VUMS membership.

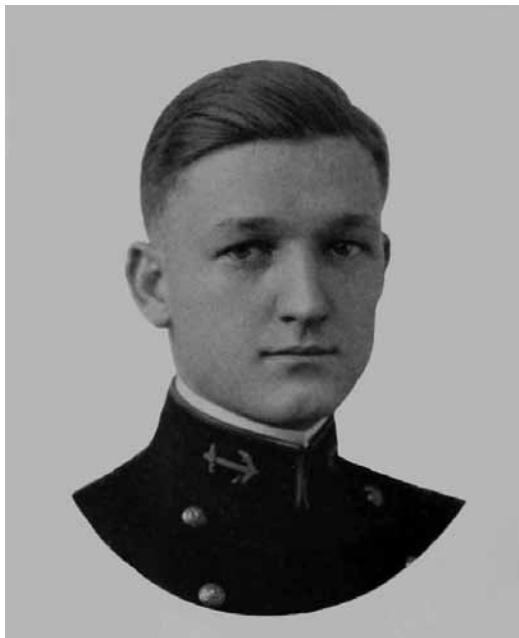
Bruce Cottington resides in Litchfield, MN and is a life member of the Nelson-Horton Post 104 of the American Legion, and he is a life member in the VFW Post 2818. He is also the Minnesota VUMS Commander. Nearly 150 VUMS reside in Texas.

For more information on VUMS, go to oldvums.org. ■

Vice Admiral Lorenzo Sherwood Sabin Jr.

May 23, 1899 – June 2, 1988

Editor's Note: Flotilla 2 Commander, Vice Admiral Lorenzo Sherwood Sabin Jr., kept these "Battle Notes" written in a letter to a Naval Officer friend (Commander D.C. Varion, Commander Landing Craft Group N.O.B. Norfolk, VA) on March 13, 1943. Below is a version of a letter Admiral Sabin wrote, apparently, a short time after taking command of the Flotilla. This is regarding the Flotilla's initial Atlantic crossing. Gives a pretty vivid idea what it must have been like to ride out winter storms in these little, slow-moving, thrown-together, flat-bottomed monstrosities.



LEFT: Lorenzo Sabin Jr. while attending the US Naval Academy. (Courtesy John France)

RIGHT: Vice Admiral Lorenzo Sabin Jr. (Courtesy John France)

Remembering that you asked me to drop you a line after sailing the sea for a while, I hasten (after days, nights, weeks and months) to do so. I'm not quite sure you, as the Assistant Chief of Staff, have read my first official report sent from the first port of call. You will have the dubious pleasure of reading another one before, I hope, too long. This is merely a readable missive "from me to you." I ought to select a title for what follows: something like "Cowboys of the Sea," or "Roughing it on the Deep," or some equally fantastic but truly metaphorical title. On second thought I might call it "Sailors without Guts." Did you ever hear about sailors with all the courage in the world but no guts? If you haven't, you will, because my sailors lost all their guts twenty-four hours after sailing. Well, to begin with a background. You will remember that I reported from the Pacific Area with no idea what this racket was about. You will also remember that I told you I had tried to get a squadron or even a division of DO's, but my friends in Washington just laughed; a sneering laugh, too. Destroyers were

too rugged; duty was too tough in the "boats" for an old man of 43. The Navy Department just couldn't consider such a request from officers my age. So what? So this – I am ordered to command a flotilla of "boats" one-half the size of DDs and what's more to ride on one of them as my Flagship. You are probably smiling, my friend, having been in on the inception of this organization. You know, of course, how interestingly stuffy, cramped, and uncomfortable they are. "Tough and sturdy." You know, as Training Officer, they are supposed to be (and are) sea going and expendable. But there are a few things you don't know which I found out day after day and night after night and week after week. So we went to sea. The lawyers, the bankers, the garage mechanics, the farmers, the salesmen—and me. In our little spit kits, we struck out boldly if not fearfully. We hit rain. We hit fog. We hit sleet. We hit snow. We hit storms. We even found sunshine and starry nights. But no romance! Days passed. Nights passed. Weeks passed. But we went rolling along over the bounding main at the super-colossal

speed of six knots. Day after day, night after night, week after week. Did I say bounding along? An understatement. Bounding and pounding: twisting and twirling; rolling, bucking, and pitching. Never before have I seen such un-rhythmic motion. The cowboy who rode bucking broncos in the rodeo for fifteen minutes won a prize. Fifteen minutes! Nobody won any prize in this outfit for staying with these broncos doing everything but hand springs on the high seas for not minutes, not hours, not even days, but weeks. The majority were seasick—but not the old man who was too decrepit to go on a Destroyer! They were so seasick most of them couldn't get out of their bunks. Some couldn't even move except when they were thrown bodily by this tossing stallion from one side of the ship to the other. Day after day, night after night, week after week. And the food—nice delicious fresh food which spoiled, because fresh food always does. So we ate canned food, and drank stale water. So it didn't make any difference. Most of them were too sick to eat anyhow, and the few "old salts" who didn't get seasick were enjoying the delicious odor of diesel fumes mixed with the equally delectable stench of vomit, the refuse of those poor seasick devils too weak to clean up their own messes. Day after day; night after night; week after week. Tossing, turning and twisting. Pitching, pounding and rolling. Up by the bow, down by the stern. Over on your side into the sea. Straining, battered and bruised. Torn and tattered. Darken at night so the submarines won't get you. Look out for pot shots at night from one of the big ships because you look like a sub. Black night. Can't see the ship ahead, astern or abeam. We're all too small. Little ships with big men. Look out for collisions. What's that on your starboard bow? A sub? Hell no, another spit kit. But don't turn on your running lights when they're in trouble. A sub couldn't possibly see those great big red lights. So keep dark. No collisions, please. The water's too cold. It's deep, and there are only two life rafts on these little gadgets. Well, it's only ten hours until daylight. Hang on boys. Clutch the grab rail with one hand; hold your glasses with the other. Wrap your legs around the compass stand, peer into the darkness and pray, brother, pray. God—the son of a gun missed us. Ahead standard! Night after night, week after week. Well, there's breakfast in the morning. Sorry—no breakfast unless you fix it. The cook's too sick. Oh well who hasn't fried an egg before? Stand in line to use the head. Cuss because you caught your finger in the door. Who the hell is staring back at you from the mirror?...A dirty looking tramp. Stubble beard, bloodshot eyes. Dirty and dumpy. Frizzled and filthy. My gawd is that you?

How about a bath? Sorry, no bath. Wastes water. So you continue to stink. Day after day, week after week. How's the Gyro? Pretty good today. Only a hundred and thirty-five degrees out. Magnetic is O.K. No heeling magnet ever made could correct contortions of the cantankerous camels. What's the course? Somewhere between north and east. Why are you reading South, Compass? Compass error. That's simple. You figure out why. Got a star sight this morning. Turned the sextant upside down and watched a sinking sun jump from the sky to the horizon. You can't take a sight that way. No? Who says so? You're standing on your head most of the time anyway. Never mind, it won't be long now. Just day after day, night after night and week after week. You watch the kids who are manning these things: officers and men. A year ago they were lawyers, accountants, advertising men, farmers, grocery clerks, soda jerks, and garage mechanics. Not so now. They're sailor men. They stick to it. Those who can still move, struggle to their stations with a bucket. The signalman pukes in the bucket in a steady rhythm with the flashing of a message. The steersman holds the ship as best he can on a course while vomiting in the bucket between yaws of the ship. Day after day, night after night and week after week. They've got no guts left, these kids. They've spilled them all. But they've got what it takes. Fine spirit. Game guys. Big men in little ships. American youth, learning the hardest way of all, on the high seas in a spit kit through the war zone. They take it all in stride and somehow (God only knows) they manage to smile. Somehow, also, Don, you go below feeling "that's why we'll win this war. No one can beat that kind of stuff!" Well, there it is. The object can be summed up quite simply. I've said it officially and I've said it to you on the assumption that you are still on your old job. Don't sail this craft with slow speed convoys. Put them with an eleven or twelve knot set-up or send them alone with a long-legged escort (preferably with a sea-going tug to look out for stragglers). And unless you can improve communications, don't send a flotilla all at once. Send a group at a time. But, above all, don't inflict twenty odd days at sea on any of them. My regards to the Commodore, Percifield, Standley and any others who may still be there.

Yours,
L.S. Sabin Jr.

P.S. Don't tell me Columbus didn't have this much. It makes me mad.

Ralph Miller submits photos of the LCI 805!



A BAKER AT HEART: WE REMEMBER... TOM BARNETT OF THE LCI(G)-727

**OUR TRIBUTE TO A LCI SAILOR AND FRIEND
REST IN PEACE: MARCH 19, 2016**



Tom Barnett, Ship's Cook of the LCI (G) 727 inaugurates spud locker on October 18, 2014. (Courtesy AFMM)

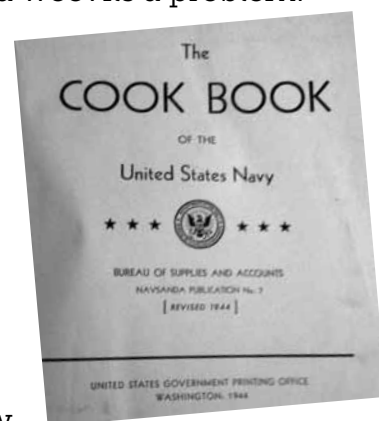
Tom Barnett loved to bake, and didn't mind peeling potatoes. That was back during WWII on LCI (G) 727, cooking for 65 men and 5 Officers. He loved baking bread, but found weevils a problem. That was solved by stacking sacks of rye flour around the outside of the white. Bread baking was every other day on that size of ship—26 loaves at a time. Another favorite was Apple Crisp, using canned apples. Page 37 of the 1944 USN cookbook was his guide. One holiday, pumpkin pie was in order. Tommy had problems with the pie slopping all over, due to the ship motion. He kept adding thickener until it stabilized. Unfortunately when baked, it was not edible. "But by golly we had punkin pie!"

The spud locker was outside by the fantail, tucked into a corner next to the aft booby hatch. Tom loved going outside to work where it was peaceful. It was not a chore but a joy instead. When seas were rough, there was no cooking on the diesel stoves. Tom was assigned to the Damage Control crew beside a Motor Mac to help keep the ship afloat. During General Quarters, Tommy humped the 60 round 20mm ammo drums to the gun tubs. He learned to run up the ladders on the up roll of the pitching ship.

LCI (L) 727 was built in Portland, OR at Commercial Iron Works. Keel 12 Nov 43, launch 24 Dec 43 Commissioned 7 Jan 44. Converted to LCI (G) 15 Jun 44 (added 2-40mm, 6-50 cal, 10 Mk 7 rocket launchers, removed 1-20mm). Flotilla 3 in 44, Flotilla 6 in 45, Group 18, Division 35 Asiatic-Pacific in Western Caroline Islands and Iwo Jima. Grounded in typhoon Louise in Buckner Bay Okinawa. Occupation duty in Far East 8 Sep 45 to 2 Dec 45.

Fair winds and following seas-to a true gentleman who always had a smile and a kind word. Until we meet again our friend...

Courtesy Rich Lovell, Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum (LCI 713)





The crew of the LCI 1062 while docked at Saipan in 1945. The men were involved in the mop-up of the Mariana Islands after WWII. The LCI 1062's last work was at a nuclear test at Bikini Atoll. (L to R) Spaeth; Beck; Butler; Morgan; Morse; Beal; Foley. (Photo and information courtesy Will Beal)

Vaughn Brown Submits Photo of the LCI 1077 at Iwo Jima and a Letter from a Japanese Prisoner at Okinawa!

A letter to Larry Roth's (RM1/c, LCI 1077) wife from a Japanese prisoner the 1077 took aboard at Okinawa, translated as follows:

Dear Mrs. Roth,

I was taken prisoner in this war. Once when I boarded the ship (LCI 1077) your husband was on, he treated me especially well. And then I thought all Americans were all considerate and nice people as your husband. I am very grateful at Okinawa.

—Zukui (his last name only is given)



USS LCI(L)-1077 and USS LCI(L)-707 along with other Flotilla 21 ships provide fire support for the Iwo Jima landings of 19 February 1945. The battleship in the background is unidentified. (Courtesy navsource.org)

A Final Word from the USS LCI Association President & Chaplain, Mike Gatton



PLEASE ACCEPT MY PERSONAL APOLOGIES as well as those of your Board of Directors for the late publishing and mailing of this *Elsie Item*. We had hoped that this issue would be a combined effort with our brothers in the LST Association, but our inability to reach consensus on our LCI Board resulted in separate newsletters.

Major changes in our organization will be forthcoming. This column is an effort to inform you as fully as possible.

By vote of the Board of Directors and by virtue of his resignation, Ken Breivik and Nehemiah Communications will no longer manage the affairs of the LCI Association, effective April 30, 2016. All contractual responsibilities with Nehemiah end effective on that date—including correspondence, website management, newsletter publication and mailing, mailing list and membership management, financial management and dues payments, and reunion planning. Instead, the following LCI Board Directors will be responsible for various tasks:

Rich Lovell — newsletter articles

Joe Flynn — memorial list

Robert Wright — membership affairs, dues payments, financial matters, and all LCI correspondence

John France — website management

Personally, I would like to thank Ken Breivik and his capable staff at Nehemiah for their many years of loyal service. His friendship is one that I will always cherish and value. I wanted to also thank our Editor, Zach Morris, who is also stepping down as Editor as of April 30, 2016. As a former journalism teacher, as far as I am concerned, he is simply “the best.”

Meeting in a conference call, the LCI Board of Directors voted to poll the membership to determine the future of our organization. You should have received and returned that ballot by the time this publication reaches your mailbox. Unfortunately, at this time, due to publication deadlines, I cannot report the results of that vote.

By virtue of our Board’s actions, the LST Association’s Board has chosen to continue on their course to

form a greater Amphibious Forces Association group without us. So, the LCI/LST Joint Commission, agreed upon at our last reunion, has ceased its work and is dissolved at this time.

Finally, as you will note in my article as your Chaplain, this will be my last communication to you as President and Chaplain.

Several years ago, you bestowed upon me one of the highest honors in my lifetime. As the first ever elected to leadership who was not a member of “The Greatest Generation,” I have attempted to serve using the lessons learned from my Dad, John Cummer, Hal Bleyhl, and so many of you, and have always sought to celebrate your contributions in our annual Memorial Services. You entrusted me to lead you, and I did that to the best of my ability. I remain firmly convinced that the future of our Association and the assurance of a lasting legacy lies with a greater Amphibious Association reaching out to other groups and to those who served on similar ships in more recent conflicts. Recently, it has become obvious that my course is not the one chosen by your elected Board.

So, respectfully, I resign my positions as LCI President and Chaplain, effective April 30, 2016. I remain forever grateful for our time together and wish you fair seas and prevailing winds.

Agape,
Mike



At the National LCI/LST Charleston Reunion banquet dinner on September 19, 2015: (Back, L to R) Zach Morris, Dennis Blocker, and Mike Gatton. (front) John Cummer (LCI 502).

LETTERS *to the* EDITOR

From Steve Besse, LCI 420 Omaha Beach, Normandy Invasion – June 1944

I was executive officer on LCI 420. After a number of landings at Omaha Beach on D-Day which resulted in losing some of our sister ships and having the barrage balloon blown off of our fantail by German 88's, we were on our way back to a troop transport to haul another load of troops into the beach when we were ordered to tie up to a barge and take it into the beach. The tug towing the barge had hit a mine and was sunk. We tied up on the starboard side and another LCI tied up on the port side. It was then that we were advised that we were towing a barge with 1000 tons of open ammunition. It was night time and the Germans had opened up with everything they could. The sky was full of fireworks like a hundred 4th of Julys with tracers flying every which way and shells bursting all around us. We were hoping and praying that none would hit our barge.



Steve Besse in 1944.

We were nearing the beach when we were waved off—wrong beach! We backed down and got off of that beach just as a shell hit where we had been moments ago. We steamed down a few thousand yards and then headed into the beach. We came in fairly fast so as to put the barge up on the sand. Every-



thing went well. We docked the barge and then, instead of unbending the lines, we cut them with an ax and got off the beach as fast as we could. It was a job well done.

Fireworks have never been a thrill for me since then.

—Steve Besse



Steve Besse in 2008.

From David O. Stanley, LCI 972

I served aboard the LCI 972, Flotilla 15 Asiatic Pacific Theatre in WWII. I was not a crew member. I served in Admiral Kincaid's Communication Staff as a RM2/c petty officer. 972 participated in 11 beachheads, 8 in the Philippines, 2 in Okinawa, and 1 in Formosa (Taiwan). Our crew saw a lot of action, particularly from kamikaze suicide planes. I remember we had 27 planes attack us on day when we were on our way to invade "Ormoc, Leyte" in the Philippines. Being only 17 years old, I imagine many youngsters like me thought it was exciting. Needless to say, it was exciting, but being a casualty never occurred to us.

I'm honored to be a member of the US LCI National Association. Thank you!

—Dave

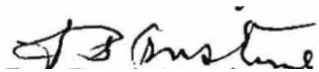


USS LCI(L)-972 underway coming alongside USS Russell (DD-414), date and place unknown. (Navsource.org – original photo from the collection of Lt. (jg) Edwin H. Klump Jr., USS, courtesy Mrs. Rebecca Klump Cottrell)

From L. Paul Anstine, LCI 630

To the Editor,

Your cover on the May 2015 of the *Elsie Item* brought back a lot of memories for me (Okinawa, LCI 630). I was in Okinawa 70 years ago on the SS Bartlesville Victory ship. I was a signalman in the Navy Armed Guard assigned to this ship. When the war ended we were on this ship in Guam fully loaded waiting for the next invasion. We returned to San Francisco where I left this ship. I did not have enough points to leave the Navy at this time and I was put on a troop ship and we sailed for Subic Bay in the Philippines. I was then assigned to the LCI 630 and we sailed to Shanghai, China we spent a short time there and then sailed to Northern China to Taku where we spent a few months ferrying US Marines to Tientsin for liberty.



L. Paul Anstine
Houston, TX



Editor's Note: The second man from the USS LCI(G)-65 killed in action was F1c. Hurley E. Christian (552-85-05). Christian was struck in the forehead and killed instantly by a flying bomb particle from a Japanese bomber on July 4, 1943 in Rendova Harbor, during the New Georgia Campaign.



LEFT: Walter Winfred Henry, S1c. [RdM], (872-86-95) during WWII. Walter suffered a wound to his wrist while clearing a jam in the #4 20MM of the LCI(G)-65 during the Morotai Invasion. He was transferred to medical facilities aboard the USS LST 456 after suffering from shock and loss of blood. He was later awarded the purple heart. (Photo courtesy Ken Howdeshell, Walter's grandson and a veteran of the USMC; Information courtesy of the deck log of the USS LCI(G)-65, U.S. National Archives)

RIGHT: Walter Henry (right) and a Marine buddy while on liberty in San Diego. Walter was born on August 15th, 1924 and died July 26th, 1996. (Courtesy Ken Howdeshell)

From J.R. Reid, LCI(G)-65

May 22, 2015

J.R. Reid, S1c. (939-69-45)
Huntsville, AL

I was a crew member on the USS LCI(G)-65 and noticed in the May 2015 *Elsie* issue it listed two killed in action. I was onboard when Lester Aiston was killed in the Leyte Gulf invasion in Oct. 1944. We also had Walter W. Henry wounded in action at Morotai, Dutch New Guinea on Sept. 15, 1944. He was a loader for a 20MM gun and it jammed and the ammo exploded and injured him. Hope this gets posted with the 65's record.



The gravestone of Lester Eugene Aiston, SC3c. (860-75-33) at Lulu Cemetery located in Ida, Michigan (Aiston's hometown). Aiston was killed in action on October 24, 1944 by a twin engine Japanese kamikaze bomber that made a suicidal crash into the LCI 65. He was killed at the stern 20 MM gun after it had shot down the Japanese plane.

From Leroy A. Langer, World War II Vet

Dear Editor: Please accept the enclosed article as a contribution to your "Sailor Story" segment of your magazine. I recently relayed this story to a longtime friend of mine (Linda Nucifore) and she was able to put my story to paper. I hope my accounting of this story will be enjoyed by your readers.

Thank you.

As I look toward my 90th birthday, I find myself reflecting on the very productive life I have been fortunate to have. As with anyone who has ever taken part in the duties associated with a war, those times will always be a large part of one's life story.

That being said, I have decided to relate a story which moves away from the actual battles of World War II to that of the story of 2 young kids in uniform in the battle of Okinawa.

I guess I will start by giving you some background information. I joined the Navy at the age of 18, training at Camp Pendleton in California. Training consisted of 14 weeks after which I was shipped out to Okinawa serving on LCI 741 as a Radioman 3rd class. It was the crew's responsibility to protect aircraft carriers with smoke and to fire on enemy planes as ordered. For anyone not familiar with the LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) it is a stepped-up amphibious assault watercraft developed for follow-up waves of troops. Some were used as sightseeing boats after World War II – NYC Circle Line. Also included, as part of the ships equipment was a wooden dinghy, which is where my story begins. Young 18-year old sailors (just as kids of today) can become very bored when not active in their duties and thus finding things to do is a challenge. Of course there are card games and board games, etc., but



"The Historical Atlas of World War II," by Alexander & Malcolm Swanston (Chartwell Books, Inc.; p. 367)

in the beauty of the Pacific, there is a strong tug to the water. Thus the "boys will be boys" syndrome took over and my buddy and I found a great way to relax and have fun when the opportunity presented itself.

Without thought of the consequences, we found that "borrowing" the dinghy from the ship and cruising in the Pacific around Okinawa was fun and relaxing so this became part of a routine without ramifications - UNTIL - again a beautiful day combined with boredom drew us to the dinghy, so out we went. Thinking we knew it all, we unfortunately motored too close to a coral reef, striking it, causing the boat to sink and for us to get torn apart from the sharp coral reef. Obviously the pain from the cuts was excruciating, and we were covered in blood. We fortunately were able to salvage a piece of the dinghy, and by paddling by hand and holding on for dear life, we were able to get to land which turned out to be the island of Le Shima where fighting was intense. We thankfully had landed on the side of the island occupied by the Americans and not in the middle of the fighting.

As we were helped out of the water, authorities took one look at us and assumed that our deep cuts and injuries were as a result of war. We were medically treated and escorted back to

our ship without further ado. Needless to say, our dinghy escapades came to an end and we served our remaining time accordingly.

Early on the morning of Easter Sunday 4/1/45 we approached the beach in southern Okinawa with a group of other ships firing our mortars and 20 MM guns. We made two runs to the beach without landing. After the second run we had no opposition. We turned north and proceeded to the original invasion with no opposition to stand-by for smoking or fog to keep the kamikazes away from the larger ships. We

were credited for shooting 5 planes, which we painted on the conning tower. After about 3 weeks we left and went to the Philippines for supplies and Pearl Harbor for installation of a 40 MM for the invasion of Japan.

War is tragic no matter where the fighting is. I am one of the few remaining WWII veterans, serving this great country of ours with a different twist to one war story.

—Leroy Langer, LCI (M) 741
New Windsor, NY



Chet Collom

USS LCI National Association,

Please find a copy of my recent watercolor painting "Storm at Sea" – six LCIs headed home April 2, 1946 from Tokyo Bay and ran into huge waves in a storm lasting 3 days. I was 18 years old, Seaman 2/c at the helm of the 1097. WWII over, I was part of the honor of bringing home some of the men who fought and won it!

"Storm at Sea" records one of the scariest times of my life.

Chet Collom, LCI 1097

USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Our membership is open to anyone who served in Landing Craft, Infantry, during WWII or anyone else interested in our small ships and the men who served aboard them.

Please complete this form and mail it to the address indicated below with your first year's dues.

DUES ARE \$35.00 PER YEAR, June 1 through May 31.

I. For Application as a LCI Veteran:

Name _____

Which LCI did you serve on? _____ What was your Rank/Rate? _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Phone #: _____ / _____

E-mail Address: _____

Alternate/Relative's E-mail Address: _____

(This is so we have a family member or friend we can contact if we cannot reach you)

Name of Alternate Contact: _____ Relationship to contact: _____

Occupation or Former Occupation: _____

II. For Application as a Relative or Interested Person:

Name _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Phone #: _____ / _____

Are you related to someone who served on an LCI? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, what is the relationship? (*i.e. father, grandfather, uncle, etc.*) _____

What is/was his name? _____

On which LCI did he serve? _____ Email Address: _____

(If unknown, or if you do not have a relative who served on an LCI, leave blank)

Please send this application with your check (\$35) made payable to:

USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Mail to:

Robert Wright, Treasurer
J.J. Jinkleheimer - Receiving
2705 E Grand River Ave
Howell, MI 48843

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PROFILES OF THE MEN

Jack V. Higgins

LCI Association Lifetime Member
February 27, 1924 – January 16, 2015

Jack V. Higgins of the USS LCI (G) 67 enlisted in the Navy on March 13, 1943 through February 16, 1946. He underwent boot camp and gunnery school at Great Lakes, IL. Then he was shipped overseas to Noumea, New Caledonia, then sent to Solomon Islands and assigned to the LCI 67. They helped secure Bougainville and did patrols in the Bismarck Archipelago working between Bougainville and New Guinea looking for gun runners and for mines. They participated in the invasions of Green Island (New Guinea), Balikpapan, Borneo, Mindoro, and Mindanao Philippines. He was awarded the World War II Victory Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three Battle Stars, Philippine Liberation Medal with one Battle Star, and Fleet Unit Citation and American Area Ribbon.

He worked as a toolmaker for 44 ½ years at Marion Power Shovel. He retired on January 30, 1987. He received a real estate license in July 1979. He also worked for Ron's Realty in Marion, OH. He and his wife were married for over 43 years. They have a daughter Patricia, son Jack, two granddaughters, and three grandsons. His pastimes included bowling and golf. (Information courtesy John Morgan, and "USS LCI: Vol. I"; Turner Publishing, p. 111)

