



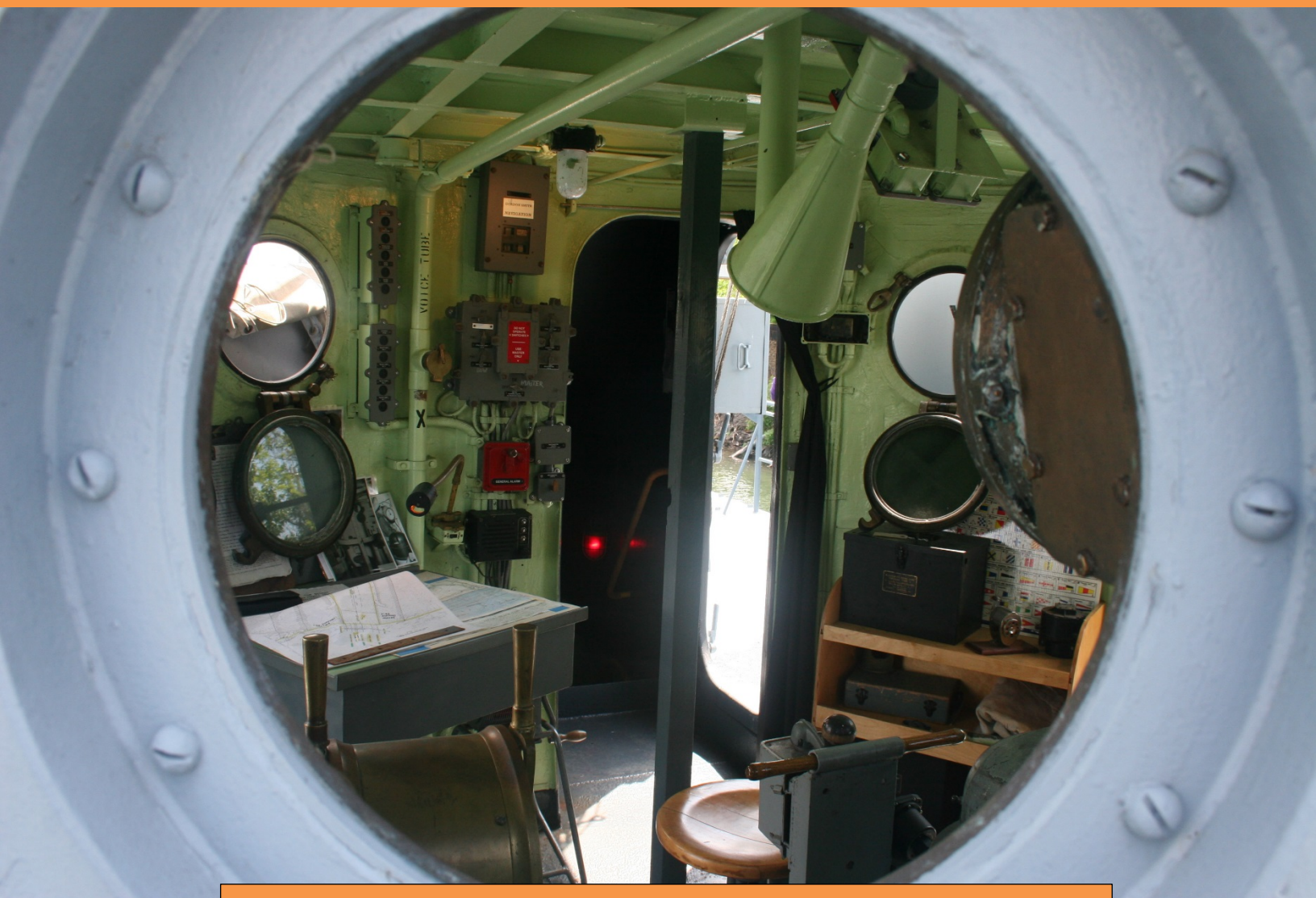
Elsie Item

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

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

ISSUE 101

JUNE 2018



Inside this issue...

- Reunion Photos and 713 Tour
- LCI Sailors landing on Omaha Beach
- How to Preserve LCI Legacy for the Future

“The Elsie Item”

Number 101 June 2018

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, to any past or current member of the U.S. Armed Forces, and to anyone interested in the history of LCIs. Any material for possible publication should be sent to Jeff Veesenmeyer, Editor by email (JeffreyMktg@gmail.com), or postal mail to the address listed below.

We are always looking for stories and memories of your LCI service. Although we primarily are interested in you LCI experiences, we are also interested in the circumstances leading up to your entry into the Navy and the impact that your WWII experiences have had on your postwar life. General guidance on sharing your story can be downloaded from the Association website:

<http://usslci.org/share-your-story/>.

Stories/ Letters

USS LCI National Association
% Jeff Veesenmeyer, Editor
W9203 Blue Spruce Ln
Cambridge, WI 53523
608-692-2121

Membership Information

USS LCI National Association
% Robert E. Wright, Jr., Treas.
P.O. Box 407
Howell, MI 48844
517-548-2326

Cover Photo: A porthole view of the *LCI 713* pilot house interior.

Visit our Website: www.usslci.org for additional information to the USS LCI National Association.
You’ll also find all past issues of the “Elsie Item” for your reading enjoyment.

For information related to the LCI(L) 713 visit: www.amphibiousforces.org

Visit our Facebook pages for photos and updates...

- For LCI National Assoc. visit: <https://www.facebook.com/USSLCIAssn/>
- For LSIL 1091 visit: <https://www.facebook.com/USSLIL1091/>
- For AFMM visit: <https://www.facebook.com/LCI713/>

“Elsie Item” Notice: The USS LCI National Association is not responsible for the accuracy of articles submitted to the Editor for publication. Time and resources do not permit the ability to check each story, therefore, we rely on the author to research each article.

President's Corner

The reunion is now history, and from history we learn. – After serving as our Vice President for eight years and our President for the past two years, John France decided not to seek re-election. So, Rich Lovell, being the good Vice President, stepped forward and presided over the business meeting and election of officers. The Association stayed the course. Robert Wright is now leading our organization forward after years as an Association Director and Treasurer reestablishing our financial stability.

Operation Portland 2018 - TARE VICTOR GEORGE (WWII well done) is now known as **BRAVO ZULU**: Rick Holmes (lodging, bus, tours, banquet and more), Sue Cosper (registration, gifts, door prizes, research, slide show, displays, smiles, cornbread), Gordon Smith (bean soup, chili, bagpiper, bugler, honor guard), Sandy Rausch (greeting and registration, photos, gifts), John France (coordinating National and AFMM) and the whole crew of the 713 (restoration, research, extra hours-all volunteer) plus so many more became the 'behind the scenes' workforce needed to pull off the event. Of course, this would not have mattered as much without the Greatest Generation and the families that attended. **THANK YOU ALL—R. Lovell, VP.**

Observations from Officers Country - There are times in life when things happen. I have just experienced one of these when I was elected as President of the USS LCI National Association. I don't think this was ever on my bucket list of things to accomplish during my lifetime. But here I am, and being my father's son, I will follow the advice that he often imparted on me and my brothers; "If you are going to do a job, you do it RIGHT!"

A Big Thank you to All who shared your experiences with me while I was writing articles for the Elsie Item. - Recently someone asked me if I knew any surviving WWII

Veterans. At first, I was taken aback by the question, but I quickly realized that most people in this county no longer have any remaining living connections with the generation that struggled and fought to make the "World Safe for Democracy". I told her that I was fortunate. I can pick up the phone at almost any time and talk with hundreds of US Navy Veterans about their experiences.

I plan to continue making these calls to our members who served on the Landing Craft, Infantry. If you see the name **ROBERT WRIGHT** show up in your caller ID you can safely answer the phone. If you monitor your calls, I will usually identify myself right away as a caller from the Landing Craft Infantry Association. So, pick up the phone, and I promise that the only thing that it will cost you is a few minutes of your time, to make **your** contribution to our shared history.

I have volunteered in McHale's Navy - The TV program McHale's Navy came out in 1962, when I was 11 years old. I remember that it was one of the few programs that my father watched weekly. As a young boy I couldn't bridge the connection between the "REAL" Navy, and zany antics going on in the TV show. It was only later, when I had the opportunity to meet and interact with my dad's fellow LCler's, that I realized McHale's Navy was my Dads Navy. On the LCI each and every crewman was a separate individual who brought with them their unique life experiences, city or rural, Northern or Southerner, maybe Western, poor or poorer because no one was rich in 1941, different levels of education, and different religions. It was these diverse differences that help form the solutions that contributed to achieving the United States Navy victory in World War II.

Robert E. Wright Jr., President/Treasurer

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER
MEMORIAL
Proverbs 1:24-31, Luke 11:13

Each year at the National reunion, a solemn Memorial is held to honor those who have departed in the last year. This year as we were quieting our hearts and minds, the bag piper played Amazing Grace in the courtyard. As the notes wafted over the assembly, I thought of the origins of this hymn.

John Newton was not only a slave trader but also known as the Great Blasphemer ¹. He not only rejected his mother's teachings, but led other sailors to unbelief. On 21 March 1748 he was at the helm of Greyhound in the North Atlantic. The sails were ripped, wood on one side of the ship was gone. After 11 days of storm he was too exhausted to work the pumps and tied off the helm.

Having been taught at an early age from Watts' Divine Songs for Children, he remembered Proverbs 1:24-31 "Because I have called, and ye refused...ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof...". He found a Bible and read Luke 11:13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Newton was saved, delivered and was transformed into the ministry. He would preach for 43 years. He wrote 280 hymns. These were combined and published as the Olney Hymns.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost
but now I'm found, Was blind and now I see."

TAPS is played at the end of the memorial. Dating back to the Civil War. Butterfield's bugle call was known as "Extinguish Lights"

until 1891. ² Prior to bugle call, "lights-out" was announced by 3 drum beats or 'taps'. Another version is that the Dutch taptoe was sounded to close the beer taps and send the troops to camp. ³ This was played at a military funeral for a Union cannoneer killed in action. It was thought safer than firing three rifle volleys. The actual tune is reported to be 59 seconds long. Listening, it seems longer as the notes sooth the soul.

Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

Fading light, dims the sight,
And a star gems the sky, gleaming bright.
From afar, drawing nigh, falls the night.

Thanks and praise, for our days,
'Neath the sun, 'neath the stars, neath the sky;
As we go, this we know, God is nigh.

Sun has set, shadows come,
Time has fled, Scouts must go to their beds
Always true to the promise that they made.

While the light fades from sight,
And the stars gleaming rays softly send,
To thy hands we our souls, Lord, commend.

Respectively submitted for Abe,
Richard Lovell FTM-1 USN retired
Vietnam Era
Brother Abe has health issues. His
guiding spirit and light encourage
me. We attend the same church.
What a blessing!

Ebenezer (I Samuel 7:12)
RM-1/C Abe Laurenzo LCI 47, 409



¹ Christianity.com

² History.com

³ Wikipedia

In Memoriam

LCI 48
William L. Lawler

LCI 346
Grover C. Barnes

LCI 371
Rinaldo LoRusso

LCI 449
Maxwell "Max" Ball

LCI 530
John E. Hill

LCI 530
Anthony Moligo

LCI 548
Salvatore A. Bosco Jr.

LCI 618
James Talbert

LCI 652
Charles Masterson

LCI 666
Wilson Brockenbrough

LCI 726
Forest Coontz

LCI 763
Rev Robert W. Schmeltzer

LCI 975
Frank Bosa

LCI (G)
John Cerpanya

Flot 20
William Harman

LCI (?)
Dr John Lingo

LCI (?)
Bert Ludwig

LCI (?)
William Young

Memorial Day

The mist was lifting at five a.m., the ground covered in dewy gloss.

Just beneath where the fog did lay could be seen the base of many a cross.

Stretching wide and so very far across this sacred place.

Crosses by the thousands with the occasional star, all so evenly placed.

Visitors have not yet arrived as bugle sounds out reveille for all present on this day.

For now, standing by every star and cross are soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen, at attention where the mortal shells lay.

Somewhere a lone voice commands "company, at ease".

Then these thousands shift as one awaiting visitors to receive.

Uniforms from all our wars and ranks of every type.

All displaying medals for valor, bravery and heroics from the battles of which historians write.

The fog lifts higher and visitors come to respects pay.

While those who await them come back to attention and salute, for this is Arlington on Memorial Day.

Those who visit this sacred place and upon its grounds do trod.

Are in the presence both of heroes and our loving God.

This scene is repeated all across our land.

Where our heroes stand silently at attention for we who honor them in the only way we can.

By John Sharp

Gator Gossip

by Jeff Veesenmeyer

Rode the rails to Portland. Met the LCI Board. Took pictures. Shared stories at the reunion. Ate navy chow on the 713. Took pictures. Made many new friends. Drank beer and consumed enough of Royal Wetzel's sausage to hold me for another year. Oh, and I took pictures. Check them out on pages 21-25.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Dear Mr. Veesenmeyer,

Firstly, I want to tell you how much I enjoyed reading my Elsie Item March 2018 newsletter and to give you a big welcome aboard. I was particularly interested in the Memorial Day article honoring the LCI heroes who will be remembered.

My Father, John Lawson, served aboard two LCIs; *LCI(G)-365* and *LCI(G)-439*. He was a MoMM1/c and handled the rockets and rocket launchers on the ships. He died before I could get him to talk to me about his experiences in the Navy during WWII.

A few years back I spent a summer researching his naval service and joined your organization as an associate member. I even found one or two members who "sort of" remembered serving with Dad. It was great corresponding with them. During my research I obtained deck logs and after-action reports from the 365 and 439 to prove Dad's service aboard both vessels during the Guam invasion. The action report lists the seven dead crew members from *LCI-365* as having died on July 21, 1944.

Your article lists them KIA on July 16. Also, two of the crewman from *LCI-439* are listed KIA on July 24 in the action report but on July 27 in the article.

I was stationed in Guam while in the Air Force from 1986-1987. Dad passed in 1965. It would have been great sharing our Guam experiences over a beer or two. He would have had the better stories.

Keep the great articles coming. Again, Welcome Aboard.

Sincerely, Mike Lawson

EDITOR'S NOTE: I asked Membership Director Robert Wright to look into the KIA discrepancies Lawson has discovered. Here is what he found:

Robert Wright: These dates have been compiled over time, by many people and many sources. I primarily use Action Reports and Muster rolls.

The deck logs may be the most accurate. There are a lot of instances where numbers and dates got changed by typing errors in the reports.

We can go back and cross-reference and find confirmations. I have no issue with correcting our information from more creditable sources.

Wright pulled the muster reports for these dates and confirmed the dates Larson had in his ships logs. Good job to both of you!

Looking forward to hearing from you too.

Jeff Veesenmeyer

608-692-2121 JeffreyMktg@Gmail.com

W9203 Blue Spruce LN – Cambridge, WI 53523

Navy Beachmasters on “Red & Green” Omaha

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Ensign Joseph Vahgi couldn't sleep. He was playing cards below deck on Coast Guard *LCI(L)* 88 (Landing Craft Infantry Large). The flat bottomed, 300-ton amphibious ship rolled in four-foot waves on the English Channel. Playing cards helped Vahgi avoid sea sickness or thoughts of what lay ahead.

Vahgi commanded Platoon C-8 of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion. When he joined the Navy, his goal was to be captain on an amphib for invasion day. His chronic sea sickness derailed that, and he ended up training to be a beachmaster. It is said, a beachmaster on an invasion beach has rank that is slightly above God. This duty was certainly an advancement from skipper.

On board the *LCI(L)* 88 that morning was the Coast Guard crew of 33 plus about 140 passengers and their cargo. This included Vahgi's 45-man platoon and a platoon of amphibious engineers. A writer from the “New Yorker” magazine was along for the cruise. He described Vahgi's men as sailors dressed like soldiers. They wore full combat gear. Only the red insignia on their helmets identified them from Army infantry. Their training surpassed anything most army units had experienced. These men were specialists in beach reconnaissance, demolition, communication, boat repair, combat medical and evacuation. They could fight too. His men called themselves “The Fighting Sons of Beaches.”



LCI(L) 88 transported beachmaster Joseph Vahgi's platoon to Normandy Beach on 6 June 1944

Vahgi's job on the beach was traffic cop. The beachmaster used a power megaphone, flags, blinkers and Walky-Talkies to direct landing craft, men and supplies. They helped the amphibious-engineers clear paths to keep the flow of everyone and everything moving off the beach. *LCI(L)*88 would be in the 3rd wave on Easy Red of Omaha Beach. Smaller landing craft delivered the first waves of infantry. They were supported by amphibious tanks. The plan was to have the beach mostly secured for the third and successive waves.

Joseph Peter Vahgi Jr. was born June 27, 1920 in the small town of Bethel, Connecticut. He was the son of Italian immigrants who had nine children. All six of their boys served in the armed services during or after the war.

Joseph Vahgi, Ensign: *When I enlisted my mother, who spoke pretty good English, said to me in Italian, “My dear son, God be with you. Never forget your parents.”*

Vahgi would turn 24 on Omaha Beach. He was the youngest of nine commanding

beachmasters in his Battalion. Vahgi had played football for Providence College, attended midshipman school and received his Navy commission in 1943. His platoon included men from all walks of life. The only thing they had in common is they were all older than their leader. The oldest was 36-year old Amin Isbir, S1/c. And then, of course, his mom had enlisted God. Most young men would be nervous facing combat for the first time. Vahgi was playing poker.

H-Hour for the first wave was 0630. When the battleships and cruisers opened-up the whole channel shook. Wave after wave of bombers and fighters flew overhead. They attacked German defenses before troop landings. The bombers were to drop their payloads on the beach to create craters, explode mines and open paths in the barbed wire. Only 600 raw enemy troops were expected to be defending Omaha Beach. This was the information shared with unit commanders and passed down through the ranks. None of it became true.

Everything went wrong on Omaha Beach. The ship bombardment overshot most enemy positions on the high ground and started grass fires to the rear. Smoke provided concealment for enemy positions. The bombers flying at 8,000 feet feared dropping on their own troops, so they waited 3 more seconds for “bombs away.” All their bombs landed seven miles inland which mostly killed cows. Of the 32 amphibious tanks, 27 sank in the high waves. The five that made the beach were immediately taken out by anti-tank guns. Most German gun

emplacements had survived the massive ship bombardment. The 600 poorly trained defenders had been reinforced by crack German troops from the Russian front.

When the bombardment began, German defenders were in awe. One survivor recalled, “There was a strip of fire when the guns opened up, the whole sea looked like it was on fire. I’ll never survive this. But they missed our gun emplacements. Our weapons were still ok.” When the bombardment ended, the Germans came out of their bunkers to man the guns. They watched hundreds of small craft approaching. Artillery and mortars zeroed in on them. Machine gunners held their fire.

Oral history interviews from German survivors: *I had a Polish machine gun that could fire 3,000 rounds per hour. We fired straight into the boats when they opened-up. I thought good god, those poor men. You shoot to survive. During the first onslaught, hardly any of them got through. There were so many bodies on the beach and men kept coming. We couldn’t understand it. The beach was full of bodies, yet new ones kept coming, but they didn’t make any headway. It’s hell – it looks like hell.*

At 0730 LCI(L) 88 was approaching Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach. Something looked terribly wrong. The coxswain couldn’t see his landmark. The high ground was shrouded in smoke. The beach was flat – no holes – and covered with dark specs. He soon determined the specs were dead and wounded men. Tracers were hitting the water, shells sent plumes of water in the air,

the boat hit ground about 200 yards from the beach. The tide was at its lowest. Lt. H.G. Rigg, the skipper of *LCI(L)* 88 ordered the ramps lowered. A sailor in swim trunks ran into the surf pulling a guideline toward the beach. A shell landed and blew him apart. Vaghi was next down the ramp. The magazine writer for "New Yorker" wrote, "Our ship kissed the shores of Normandy when the tide was at its lowest. Shells were coming in, splashes coming over, smell of gunpowder, LCIs in flames, men standing in water up to their necks not knowing what to do next with tracer bullets skipping. Vaghi ran for the beach like linebacker with a football."

Joseph Vaghi, Ensign: *I was the first of my platoon to leave the LCI after beaching. The craft had ramps on each side of the bow for purposes of discharging the passengers. Shortly after leaving the craft, the right ramp was blown away by an enemy shell, causing several casualties both on the craft and in the water. We saw tracers coming toward us. We saw people fall. We saw people yelling for help. If not for the good training – train, train, train, - we couldn't have made it.*

Vaghi was the first Navy beachmaster to arrive on Omaha Beach. His entire platoon made it to the beach with him. Not every beachmaster was that lucky. LTJG Hagerty was beachmaster on *LCI(L)* 85. His platoon doctor was LTJG John Kinkaid Jr. They were both on deck preparing to go ashore. As the ship touched bottom they began taking shell and tracer hits. Wounded men began falling. Hagerty assisted Doctor Kinkaid with treating several. When the ramps were lowered Hagerty went forward

to lead his men to the beach. He turned to Kinkaid with a big smile and yelled, "See you on the beach." At that moment a big shell landed aboard and exploded. It killed Hagerty instantly. "He left me with a big smile and an encouraging word," recalled Dr. Kinkaid. The Captain of the *LCI(L)*-85 was LTJG Coit Hendley Jr. He described the scene in his reports.



LCI(L) 85 listing badly from mine and shell hits while approaching Omaha Beach in D-Day.

Coit Hendley Jr., LTJG: *Going to the beach, this craft hit a mine, careened through the jumble of beach defenses, and finally got her ramps down for the troops to disembark. Before the unloading was completed, crossfire of German 88s (artillery pieces) machine guns and sniper fire blew one ramp off, killed 15 men, wounded another 40, and set her blazing in three compartments.*

Concentrated gunfire on the bow left a pile of dead and wounded on the remaining ramp. It became impassable. Smaller craft pulled alongside to finish unloading the men who had been unable to make it to shore. The ship had been hit about 25 times and was listing from shell holes at the water line. LCI(L) 85 was abandoned.

Seaman First Class Robert Watson was on a landing craft that was transporting his beachmaster platoon to Fox Green Beach. The church steeple in Coleville

was visible. They were on target. The waves were huge. Watson and many others were seasick. Other landing craft started getting hit by artillery. Some were on fire, some were sinking. The terrified coxswain slowed his ship to a crawl. An Army officer ordered him to get this thing going. He powered up and hit a floating mine that blew the bow clear out of the water. Watson was hurled over the side into water 300 yards from shore. His 60-pound pack took him down, but he quickly inflated his life vest and popped to the surface. Salt water stung his leg wounds. Other dead and wounded men bobbed all around him. He spotted a LCVP coming right at him. He knew it wouldn't stop, but he yelled "Hey stop," anyhow. The coxswain slowed a little, a rope hung over the side - Watson grabbed it then held on for dear life. It tore the skin off his hands, but he hung on until he was 40 yards to the beach. From there he crawled up into a nightmare. German shells were

exploding on the beach. Machine gun bullets sprayed the sand. Landing craft and tanks were on fire. The dead and their body parts were everywhere. "It was horrible, everyone's screaming for help, everyone's wounded," Watson remembered.

A rope hung over the side - Watson grabbed it and held on for dear life.

Watson crawled through the gore to a medic who had lost all his supplies. He gave the medic his kit and gathered a few more off dead soldiers. He got a shot of morphine for his wounds and proceeded up the beach.

A surviving officer spotted Watson. He was trying to assemble a firing line of able bodied men. Nobody was shooting back at the German defenses. Watson pointed to the red beachmaster insignia on his helmet but was ordered to join the firing line. He unwrapped his Springfield 30-06 and inserted a wet clip. Bam! It still worked. He emptied about 10 clips on the Germans who had been running around up on ridge. Now they had their heads down.

Robert Watson, SI/c: I was scared the ammunition wouldn't work. I squeezed the first shot without any problem. I don't know if I killed anyone or not. I really didn't care.

After doing his part in the battle, he returned to the beach and his job. He found Dick Watson from his platoon and a medical officer. The men put up big green banners and flags signaling to incoming ships that they were approaching Fox Green Beach.

Each quarter mile along Omaha the beachmasters set up sandbagged communications stations. The Germans had filled hundreds of sandbags and beachmasters made good use of them.

On Easy Red Joe Vahgi had taken control. He was confronted with chaos and horror. He began by trying to restore order. His men first attended to the wounded, moving them to aid stations and clearing them from vehicle lanes. They put up their Easy Red flags and directed ships to paths that had been cleared of obstructions. They established medical and communication stations. Officers told Vahgi what they needed. He would order the equipment or supplies on a walkie-talkie. Despite continuous shells raining down on the beach, Vahgi calmly walked his sector shouting orders on his megaphone. The advance from the beach on German defenses had stalled at a barbed wire-strewn minefield. An officer asked Vahgi to order the troops to move forward. Vahgi gave the order with his megaphone. A bangalore team moved up, blew a hole in the wire and soldiers charged 50 yards to the steep bluffs.

Bulldozers created one of the most horrendous sights witnessed that day. Paths across the beach had to be cleared. Bulldozers were used to move bodies for making roads off the beach. Easy Red had been cleared of many water obstacles by demolition teams. It became the primary beach for bringing in trucks, tanks, jeeps and supplies. The beach was becoming clogged with machines, equipment and wounded men.

Joeseeph Vahgi, Ensign: *You know what to do because instinct and training tell you ...like helping a dying boy. We had trained so much that everything came quite natural except one thing. In training we didn't allow people to die.*

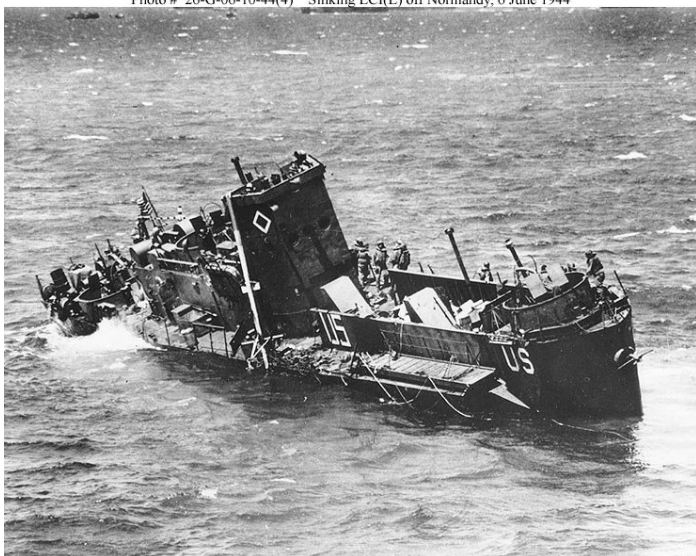
About mid-morning Vahgi was helping a medic move a dead soldier out of the path of incoming troops. A shell hit, lifting a jeep and setting it on fire. Vahgi was knocked unconscious. When he woke up his clothes were on fire. He rolled the fire out and found many of his men were wounded near the jeep. It was on fire and loaded with gas cans and ammunition. Vahgi unloaded the jeep before it could explode. He was awarded the Bronze Star citation for his action. Two days later, he learned that one of his men was crushed under the jeep. It was 36-year old Amin Isbir. His death date was incorrectly recorded and not included with those who died on D-Day. A nephew corrected the error many years later. Isbir is now among the 4100 who died on 6 June 1944 on the Normandy beaches.

Of the 9 beachmasters with the 6th Naval Beach Battalion, four were killed by day two. The Battalion had a 27% casualty rate. Vahgi would survive. Vahgi spent 23 days in Normandy before being sent back to the states. He was assigned to training other officers for amphibious landings. He eventually volunteered to go back into combat and was sent across the Pacific for the invasion of Okinawa. To his astonishment, Okinawa was nothing like Omaha Beach. This time he walked ashore with virtually no opposition from the Japanese. Vahgi decided he was going to survive the war.



By the time the LSTs arrived at Omaha, the Beachmasters had established order. Despite the injury to his leg, Vahgi directed traffic on Easy Red for three days. Tanks, trucks, jeeps, supplies and men flowed in daily.

Photo # 26-G-06-10-44(4) Sinking LCI(L) off Normandy, 6 June 1944



USS LCI(L) 85 is listing after hitting a mine and taking 25 German artillery shell hits. The USS *Samuel Chase* (APA-26) would come alongside to evacuate the crew. A short time later 85 capsized and sank. Four Coast Guard LCIs were sunk on D-Day. Wartime censors painted out the landing craft's number on this photo.

Close? Too close for a Quartermaster

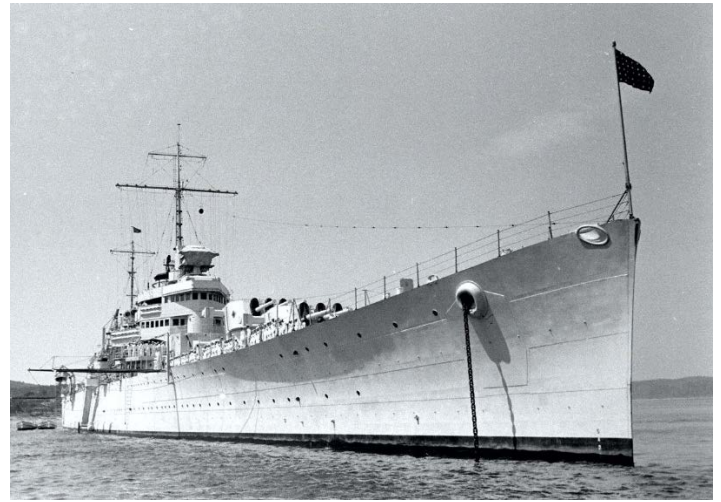
Gordon Smith sat on top of the Signalman's Perch on *LCI 43*. He was doing his 0400 to 0800 signal watch. His ship was part of Operation Avalanche. The 5th Army was invading Salerno, Italy during September of 1943.

Smith was probably the only LCI sailor in the entire U.S. Navy who could describe a Signalman's Perch. That's because he designed it while in the shipyards of Chesapeake Bay. He realized the top of the conning tower provided the perfect profile for sending and receiving semaphore messages. But the tower needed a perch. He had two posts welded to the top of the tower with a chain strung between them. Then he added another chain to the left post with a snap-lock on the other end. Now a Signalman or Quartermaster could wrap his legs around a post, and snap-lock one chain behind him. He'd be securely perched on the highest point of ship.

This is where Smith was perched on a very foggy morning during the invasion of Salerno.

“We were creeping along at about two knots when I heard Woooooaaaap, Whoooooaaaap, Woooooaaaap booming around me in the fog.”

Suddenly a bow of a large ship loomed toward the LCI on perfect opposite course. “I had to look upward from my perch on the



The USS Philadelphia (CL 41) was a 10,000-ton 600-foot light cruiser, dwarfing LCI 43 by 25 to 1.

conning tower to see the main deck and the sailors thereon,” Smith remembered.

As the huge ship slipped by sailors shouted quips at the man chained to the conning tower. “Where are the rubber bands,” one sailor shouted at Smith. “I suppose he was referring to the small balsa wood model planes kids built that were powered by rubber bands,” said Smith.

Later, Smith found out the Cruiser was the *USS Philadelphia CL 41*. “I would say she was on mission and going about 20 knots. She was very close! Really close! So close, as she went by her catapult - that was extended outward over the side of the Cruiser - scraped the starboard running light off the conning tower I was standing on!”

Close? Too Close! Especially for a Quartermaster on the Signalman's Perch.

Gordon Smith, QM 1/c *LCI 43*

The LCI Legacy

by Rod Scurlock

We are all proud of our part in winning the war. Proud of the shores we bombarded to give troops a chance to wade to the beaches without being killed. Proud of the close-in trips made to land troops to provide the shortest possible distance to the beach. Proud of the hours spent fighting Kamikazes and Zeros that were trying to knock us out of the water. Proud of standing at our battle stations while watching mortar rounds hit the water or our ship. And proud of the buddies who paid the ultimate price and were never able to tell their stories.

We would like the world to know that it wasn't just the battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and other major ships that took the limelight and made a difference. Without those little old flat-bottomed workhorses and their gator sailors it would have been a different war.

Our USS LCI National Association, along with the Northwest and California chapters, plus our dedicated associates are still working hard to spread the word. We are one-tenth the size of the original national organization, started in 1991. We get smaller every year. If we are to get the word out about the LCI contribution to the war, it needs to be soon.

Despite the creaks and groans of getting around, there are still things all of us can do. We'll have to be the ones to get the word out. Here are few suggestions.

- Submit a picture with an article to a local paper.
- Provide an interview to a local TV station.
- Leave a copy of Elsie Item at the local library.
- Find ways you can network and promote the LCI story.
- Tell your own personal story.

In Boise, we formed what we called the "Boise Five." It started with five of us who sailed on LCIs. We'd get together with our wives once a month for dinner at a local restaurant. The national trend has seen all WWII groups losing members. We've lost Hal Bleyhl and George Menhorn, almost half our crew.



The Boise Five are L-R: Rod Scurlock, Leroy Olson, George Menhorn, Hal Bleyhl, and seated in front Pete Petersen

In trying to tell the LCI story, we've talked to restaurant customers who asked about our service. We built display cases containing pictures of crewman, of LCIs in action, war artifacts, and other memorabilia from the war. A model LCI is included in each display. We arranged for the displays to be shown at the Military Museum in Boise and the Warhawk Air Museum in

Nampa, Idaho. These exhibits are viewed by thousands of people every year.

Some of our “Boise Five” members are talking to groups of students on field trips to the Warhawk Museum. Many of the area Idaho schools visit the museum every year. The Warhawk Museum is video-taping veterans who want to tell their stories. The videos are stored at the Library of Congress.

Looking in the mirror, we know that in a few years, there will be no one who had first-hand knowledge of what we did, what it was like, and the experiences we had. It is on our shoulders, and ours alone, to make the information available to the world, if it is to get out there.

Rod Scurlock *LCI(G) 565*

EDITORS NOTE: Most every military museum is actively interviewing any WWII veteran who wants to tell his/her story. These oral histories are video-taped, archived and made available on line. They provide researchers, educators and historians with first hand accounts of the war. You don’t have to see combat to have war stories to tell. Every sailor experienced boot camp, shipboard life, navy chow, liberty, VJ and VE Days. Those experiences are just as important to WWII history as the battles. Those stories are even more important to your personal legacy and family history.

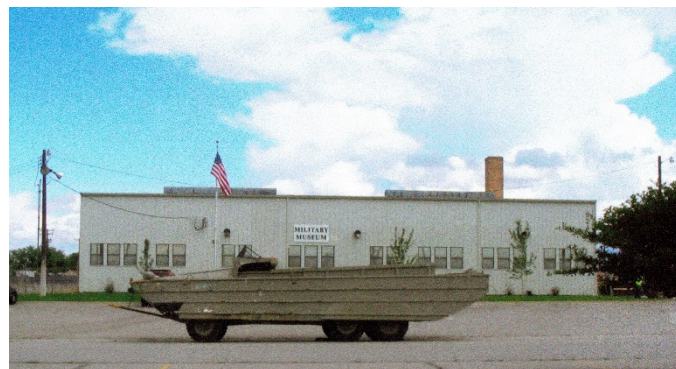
Contact a museum and ask to be interviewed for an oral history. You could even ask a grandchild to record your story on a cell phone. If you need help contact me. I have a short interview form that will help get you started. And the Association

website provides guidance on sharing your story at <http://usslci.org/share-your-story/>.

Also, check out **Andy Fancher Presents** on YouTube. This 18 year-old high school senior has interviewed over 50 veterans. “I’m preserving their stories,” Fancher says, “In 10 years, we may not have these guys to tell their stories anymore.”

I have utilized oral histories for my books and articles from the National Museum of the Pacific War, the National WWII Museum, The Wisconsin Veterans Museum and the Library of Congress. Just think, your story might end up in a book or a movie, 100 years from now. That’s what the LCI legacy is all about.

Thank you, Rod Scurlock for writing this important article.



Military Museum in Boise, Idaho



Warhawk Air Museum in Nampa, Idaho

Changes to the LCI Executive Board

The LCI Board has announced changes to The Executive Board. New director, Lisa Tancredi received a unanimous vote of approval during the May 2018 reunion. Tancredi is an attorney from Baltimore. Her father, Robert David Bittle served on *LCI(L)* 944.

Lisa joined LCI Association in 2017. She wanted to learn more about LCIs and her father's ship. Finding surviving shipmates who remembered Bittle was her initial goal. Her quest paid off when she connected with Lt. Ralph Rayner and MoMM3/c Joseph Rosenthal. They served with and remembered her dad. She also tracked down half dozen other families who had connections to the 944. The Eberhart and Fischer families joined Lisa and the Rayners at the 2018 reunion.

She also hoped to learn what might have caused the change in tone of her father's letters home. The exuberance of an 18-year old boy became darker and more mature. She is still researching and looking for families of shipmates. The research and opportunities to connect with other LCI families have become some of the great joys in her life.

The LCI board recognized her ability for historic research and membership building. They felt she would be an immediate asset to the Executive board. Her dogged persistence to find information about her

dad's service and shipmates has uncovered resource tools that could help other families. She is more than happy to share what she has learned.

Lisa lives with her husband and 17-year old son in Baltimore, Maryland. She has a 19-year old daughter in college. Lisa is a bankruptcy attorney with Gebhardt & Smith, LLP. She has practiced law for 24 years.



L-R: Lisa Tancredi with her dad's shipmate Lt. Ralph Raynor LCI(L) 944 and Sue Cosper. Photo taken during the tour of LCI 713 on 6 May 2018.

In other board news, John France has resigned as president. Robert Wright was nominated as President by the Executive Board and elected at the General Membership Business Meeting. Robert will also continue his duties as Treasurer with Rich Lovell providing additional oversight.

John France will continue as Historian. Our thanks to John for his past and continued service to the Association.

See the updated Executive Board listing on the inside back cover.

History Repeats Itself In selection of Assn. President

I have it on good authority (a Sea Story repeated by a number of people) about how the first President of the LCI Association was selected.

According to my sources, Robert Weisser, our first president said his election came as quite a surprise to him when it was announced at a business meeting in 1991 at the first meeting of the USS LCI National Association. It seems Mr. Weisser got a call from Mother Nature, and we know we cannot put her on hold. So, when Mr. Weisser returned from the head and entered the meeting, he was greeted with a round of applause, and told that he had just been elected President.

Now I don't know the details, but I have it on good authority that Robert E. Wright, Jr. arrived late to the Business Meeting at the 2018 Reunion in Portland. Before he sat down he learned that he had just been elected President of the LCI Association.

Just goes to show that attendance at Business meetings is important when you have LCI friends.

Congratulations, Robert, a very timely election.

Joe Flynn



Robert Wright opens the Memorial Service.



Wright visits with attendees during chow on 713.



Robert served as Master of Ceremony at the reunion banquet. He introduced all the WWII veterans including Rod Scurlock LCI(G) 565.

Heroes Among Us

One of the things we have learned about LCI sailors is that they are a very modest group. Whenever we try to thank them for their service they tell us they “were just doing their jobs, like any other serviceman.” Once when I called Dr. Charles Crandall, *LCI(G) 471*, a hero he protested. I said, “I think the Navy thought you were a hero when they awarded you the Silver Star.” Then I learned more about the action he was involved in which merited this award. (Elsie Item, June 2017)

Now, in files of Roland Ellingson, *LCI 1033*, provided by his family, I found a 1946 letter from the Secretary of the Navy thanking him for his service in WW II. All LCI sailors may have received such a letter but it is worth sharing here as a reminder to our veterans and it will probably be welcome news to many of the families of those LCI sailors.

This letter is from, *The Secretary of the Navy*, dated May 29, 1946 begins;

*My Dear Mr. Ellingson;
I have addressed this letter to reach you after all the formalities of your separation from the active service are completed. I have done so, because without formality but as clearly as I know how to say it, I want the Navy's pride in you, which it is my privilege to express, to reach into your civil life and to remain with you always.*

You have served in the greatest Navy in the world, it crushed two enemy fleets at once, receiving their surrenders only four months apart. It brought our land-based airpower within bombing range of the enemy and set

our ground armies on the beachheads of final victory. It performed the multitude of tasks necessary to support these military operations.

No other Navy at any time has done so much. For your part in these achievements you deserve to be proud as long as you live. The Nation which you served at a time of crisis will remember you with gratitude. The best wishes of the Navy go with you into civilian life. Good luck!

Sincerely yours, signed,

James Forrestal

By Joe Flynn

The Search for Amelia Earhart

Since Amelia Mary Earhart's plane disappeared in 1937 somewhere in the Pacific Ocean as she neared the end of her globe circling flight the search has continued. Every clue, every first-hand report generated news articles and trips to investigate the information. Bones were discovered in 1940 on the Pacific Island of Nikumaroro in the Phoenix Islands, (the Gardner Islands if you have an old map.) First thought to be bones of a male, later examination determined that they were female and likely those of Amelia Earhart.

Other opinions abound, including one by Stuart “Snuffy” Smith, LCI sailor. In his memoir, *“World War II, As I Saw It, On LCI (G) 372,”* Smith said he had read the stories that Earhart was off course and crashed into the sea, but he believed that they crashed on the Island of Majuro in the Marshall Islands. Sailors from the 372 talked with natives on that island and talked to a man named Johnson, a Missionary's son. They related a story about a plane that was smoking and had

crashed into the lagoon. They confirmed that they saw a man and a woman injured in the crash taken prisoner by the Japanese.

According to the natives the plane was taken out of the lagoon along with a lot of photographic gear. Later one of the 372 sailors saw a LT.j.g. Dunn from the ship with a small briefcase with the letters A.M.E., retrieved from someone on the island.

“Snuffy” told me at our California and National LCI reunions that they believed the plane may have been hit with anti-aircraft fire as they flew over the Japanese occupied Island of Wotje. After the discussion with the natives and the retrieval of the brief case, the crew were given strict orders not to mention this topic with anyone. Later, when some members of the 372-crew suggested they bring up the story at the USS LCI National reunion in San Antonio in 2002, “Snuffy” said they were encouraged not to do so but he did not say by whom.

Now it appears that the scientific evidence is solidly on the side of Nikumaroro Island as the site of Amelia Earhart’s plane crash. But a good LCI story is hard to shake, and a lot more interesting.

By Joe Flynn

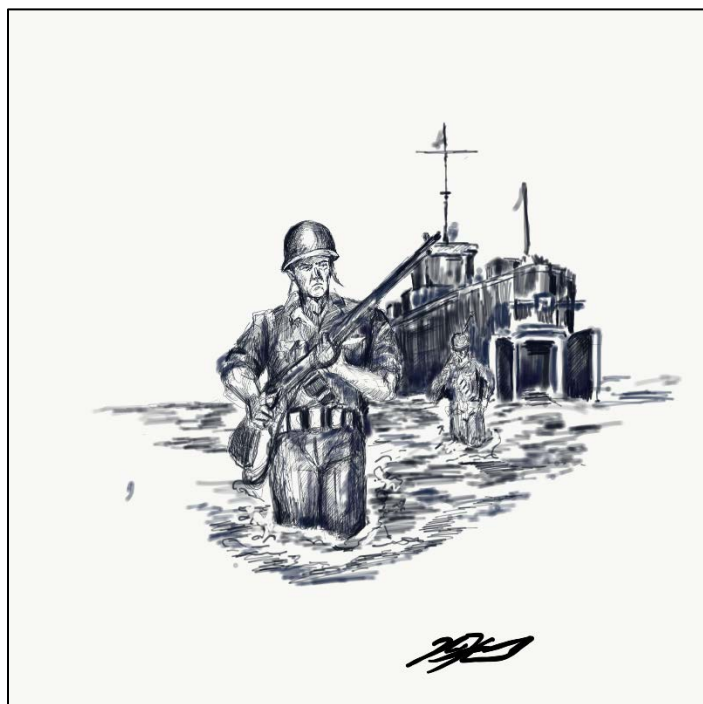
Stuart Smith got his nickname after the hillbilly cartoon character “Snuffy Smith” popular in 1942. But Stuart only answered to that name at reunions.



Hironori Tajika joined the reunion tour of LCI 713

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

I saw a young Japanese man with a camera and sketch book on the 713. I asked if he planned to draw the ship. He said yes, because he was interested in WWI and WWII military weapons. He lives in Seattle and is taking art classes there. He came to Portland just to see the ship. I gave him my card and asked if he would send me the sketch. Here it is.



Hiro moved to the U.S. in 2010. During WWII his grandfather attended the Edajima Naval School on a small island near

Hiroshima. On August 6 his grandfather and classmates were in class when they felt a huge impact and then saw the cloud raising up to the sky. After seeing the destruction, they knew the war was lost.

the Newswire

Wire Photos and Captions from Press Releases during WWII



REACH LAND AFTER PERILOUS TRIP – US Navy Photo

San Diego CA-- The gun crew of the LCI(G) 64, a 385 ton ship, looks for land as it nears the end of its dangerous 8,000-mile trip from China. L to R; the gunners are: William Hartman, S1/c, Columbus Ohio, William Gross, S1/c Boston MA, E.L. Radzik, GM3/c Chicago, IL and R.W. Nelson, Coxswain, Brainerd, MN

Notes from the Association Historian – In the many years of looking at pictures from World War II, this was the only picture that I remember finding with the names identifying specific LCI crew members. GM3/c Elmer L. Radzik is a current member of the LCI Association, living in Arizona. A closer look reveals 2 additional LCI's alongside, one with its laundry hanging out to dry. -- Robert Wright

Welcome aboard display puts everyone “In the Mood” during reunion registration



The other attraction was the Amish made sausage and cheese. Royal Wetzel has made this his reunion welcome aboard gift. The dogs loved it too.

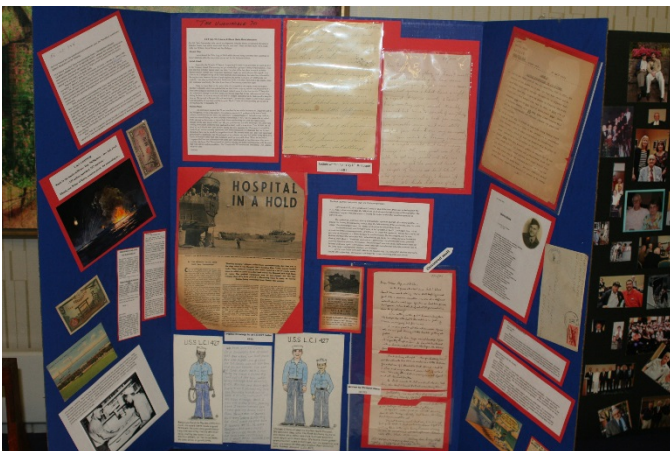


Photo and document archives were beautifully displayed in hospitality room. But the main attraction was the video slide show produced by Sue Cosper complete with WWII era music.



Sue’s video included photos of every ship represented by an attendee. Folks watched the video two or three times...just to hear Glenn Miller play “In the Mood” again.

Touring LCI-713 is a memorable experience



Walking up the bow ramp of LCI-713 is like entering the gates of a time machine and into 1944.



Top-Bottom: AFMM Gate, flare gun, chart room, and supplies with retro cigarettes, candy and ads.



The radio room was Abe Lorenzo's domain on LCI-47, 409. (his picture is on shelf)

Main deck and superstructure



The main deck of 713 just forward of the superstructure, round conning tower and flags.



On lookout conning tower are L-R Del Hollinger, Royal Wetzel, Chris Shelvik, and Gordon Smith.



Interior of the pilot house



A 20mm gun mount in the bow was one of five weapons for anti-aircraft defense.

Bottom right: Down the Hatch goes Kinlee Colivas.



Chow time reunion style



Navy bean soup, chili, corn bread and coffee are served up on 713. L-R: Del Hollinger, Royal Wetzel giving thumbs, and David Forman.



The 713 Cookmates are L-R: Jeff White, Rich Lovell, Elizabeth Bauman.



The BBQ gang at Famous Dave's.



Rich Lovell's cook shack converted from a freezer.



Sheraton Hotel Banquet: Anelia & John MacKay, Penny Keilman, Joni Harcourt, Rick & Mary Dulaney, John Woodard, Leo & Randolyn Kelley



Sheraton Hotel Banquet: Kevin Flanagan, Jeff Malmquist, Mike & Judy Flanagan, Vern Malmquist, Harold & Bob McCreary.

Memorial Service for departed shipmates

On Saturday May 5, 2018 the names of 58 departed shipmates were read along with the tolling of the ship's bell. Many families attended to honor a member who had passed since the last reunion.



Rich Lovell awaits Piper Geffery Ffarser's final mournful notes from the courtyard.



Lisa Tancredi tolled the ship's bell for each of our departed shipmates.



Richard Wright was one of six readers, that also included Robert Wright, Gordon Smith, Rod Scurlock, Rich Lovell and Pete Selan.



The VFW bugler played taps to end the Memorial Service.

You Can Help Launch the LCI-713!

2018 has started out with a bang for the AFMM. The LCI-713 is looking great and the LCI National Reunion, sponsored by the AFMM, was a resounding success. But our job is by no means over. Our goal is to fully complete the restoration and make the LCI-713 operational and available for future generations. We need \$20,000 every single year for our ongoing operations. Our new fundraiser's efforts are starting to bear fruit and we have several grant applications in the works, but they all require matching funds to be realized. In 2018 we will need an extra \$30,000 for this purpose. On top of that over the next 2-3 years, we need the matching funds required to replace our bottom and install the engines.

Thank you for the continuing support we need to help to preserve our historic legacy. Your annual donations provide the critical resources needed to sustain our organization and restore the LCI-713. Here's how you can help:

- Make a donation to AFMM
- Help refer the AFMM to Corporate sponsors for matching funds
- Become a member or upgrade your membership level.
- Purchase a membership for your family or friends this holiday season.
- Sign up to volunteer in 2018.

Yes, I want to help launch the LCI-713!

Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum
Rick Holmes, President
PO Box 17220
Portland, OR 97217

Note: If you don't want to use the form, it's ok. However, please keep us up to date on your contact info for our mailings. Thanks!

Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____ to help get the LCI-713 underway.

☐ Lifetime Membership \$500 ☐ Lifetime Veteran \$100 ☐ Annual Member \$20
☐ Lifejacket Memorial \$250 (We will contact you for an inscription)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____ Vet (Y) or (N) _____

LCI or Ship affiliation _____ Branch/rank _____

(You may also contribute online via our website)

My Gift Is: ☐ In Memory of ☐ In Honor of

Person's name _____

Your Officers and Executive Board

Please feel free to contact any of the officers or directors listed below for whatever comments, questions or assistance you may need. We're here to serve you!

Officers

Robert E. Wright, Jr.

President/Treasurer
Son of Robert E. Wright, WWII,
USS LCI (L) 20, USS LCI (L)
996 & USS LCI (L) 997
P.O. Box 407
Howell, MI 48844
(517) 548-2326
rewrightcpa@gmail.com

Richard Lovell

Vice President
LCI 713 Restoration Project
Amphibious Forces Memorial
Museum
8014 NE 159TH Ave
Vancouver WA 98682-1539
(360) 952-8916 (h)
(971) 570-7231 (c)

Peter Selan

Secretary
Nephew of Leo Peter Selan, (KIA)
WWII, LCI(G) 561 & LCI (G) 475
875 Moores Mountain Road
Lewisberry, PA 17339
(717) 697-0294

Chaplain

Abe Laurenzo

Chaplain
WW II Veteran, LCI (L) 409
& LCI (L) 47
2610 SE 164th Ave. Unit J16
Vancouver, WA 98683
(360) 718-7994
alaurenzo@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Joe Flynn

California Director
Brother of LaVerne C. Flynn,
WWII, LCI (G) 347
4603 Collwood Lane
San Diego, CA 92115
(619) 546-7088
joeglo@msn.com

Stan Galik

Son of Stanley Galik
WW II, LCI 35
13006 Crested Ct.
Fredericksburg, VA 22408-0245
(540) 898-3567
lci35@galik.com

Dr. Michael A. Pikos

Son of Anthony M. Pikos,
WWII, LCI(L) 14
1286 Playmoor Dr.
Palm Harbor, FL 34683
(727) 410-0100
mapikos@gmail.com

Lisa Bittle Tancredi

Daughter of Robert D. Bittle
WWII, LCI (L) 944
3605 Woodvalley Drive
Baltimore, MD 21208
(410) 852-3928
ltancredi@gebsmith.com

Directors Emeritus

Rod Scurlock

Vice President Emeritus
WWII Veteran, LCI (G) 565
4445 Mustang Dr.
Boise, Idaho 83709
(208) 362 4447

Gordon Smith

Director Emeritus
WWII Veteran, LCI (L) 43
2313 Northeast 110th Ave.
Vancouver, WA 98684
(360) 256-5901
gordon.sharonsmith@gmail.com

Historians

John M. France

European Theater of Operations
Son of Frank T. France, WWII,
USS LCI (L) 540
11621 Copper Spring Trail
Oro Valley, AZ 85737
(520) 429-3792
lci540@aol.com

Dennis Blocker

Pacific Theater of Operations
Grandson of Clifford Lemke,
WWII, LCI (G) 449
6138 Border Trail
San Antonio, TX 78240
(210) 636-9068
lci449@yahoo.com

Attention LCI Veterans and Associates

We need your stories now. Write or email Jeff Veessenmeyer (see addresses page 2).

USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

C/O Robert E. Wright, Jr. President/Treasurer

P.O. Box 407 Howell, MI 48844-0407

World War II USS Landing Craft Infantry Veterans Reunion Banquet Portland, OR May 6, 2018



L-R Front: Gordon Smith LCI-43, Phil Reed LCI-35, Ralph Rayner LCI-944, Vern Malmquist LCI-948, Harold McCreary LCI-412, John Cox LCI-551, Dave McKay LCI-30 639.

L-R Back: Chris Shelvik LCI-337, Rod Scurlock LCI-565, Leroy Olson LCI-944, Delbert Hollinger LCI-470, Royal Wetzel LCI-70, David Forman LCI-36, missing is Dr. John Stanley LCI-958.