



Elsie Item

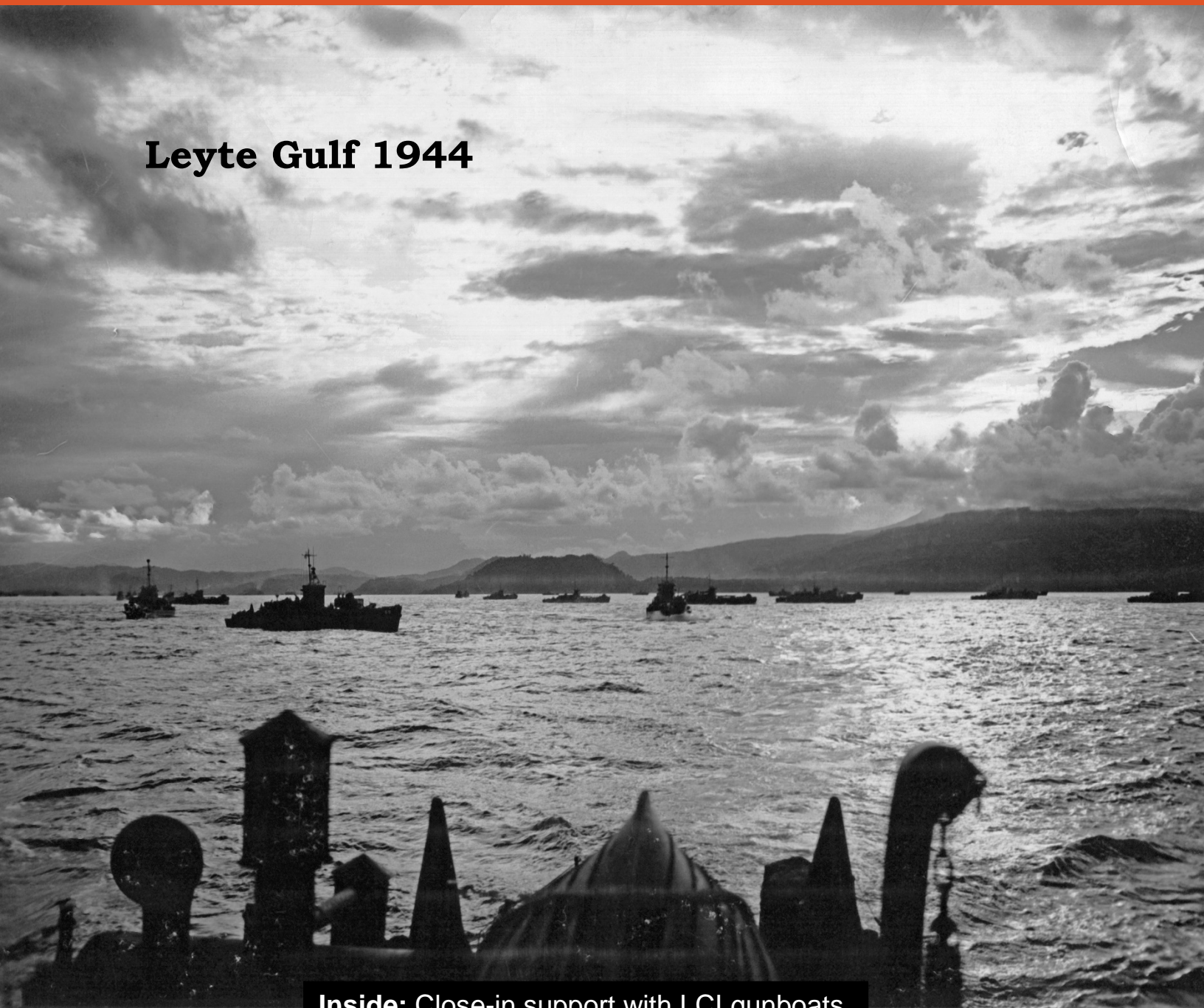
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USS LANDING CRAFT INFANTRY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION INC.

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Leyte Gulf 1944



Inside: Close-in support with LCI gunboats
LCI Landings at Leyte Gulf

“The Elsie Item”

Number 102 September 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 your 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

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Cover Photo: Picture taken 20 October 1944 at Leyte. Starboard side of LCI(G) 69 can be seen.

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

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A Word from Officer's Country

To paraphrase an old song made famous by General Douglas MacArthur in his final speech to Congress, *Old Sailors never die, they just fade away*. During this week's news coverage, I witnessed and at times I felt that I was even present at the burial of Senator John McCain. This former US Navy officer never sought glory or the spotlight for his actions during the years that he served his country. He exemplified one of the many traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation of men, and now woman, serving in the long history of United States Navy. For our generation of members who served on the Landing Craft, Infantry in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1946, it is very much the same.

In July, I was the recipient of a heartfelt letter from Mrs. Elizabeth DuBrul, who is the widow of CDR. Donald Dubrul USN (ret) who was the captain of LCI(L)-553, on D-Day. At Normandy, his ship was lost on the beach due to fire from German shore batteries. In her letter she comments that her husband never wished to discuss the events of that war. And he is like everyone else that I have had the privilege of talking with regarding their service to this county during the difficult days of World War II. Personally, I have never heard anyone take any credit for any deed of courage or accomplishment, even when I was listening to Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Hershel Woodrow "Woody" Williams, USMC, for his action on Iwo Jima. Woody, while describing the events surrounding our country's highest award for valor, he only claimed "to be doing my duty." How many times have I heard these words from the WWII generation, "I am *no* hero, the *real* heroes are buried over there."

Mrs Dubrul, made a point in her letter. We serve an important role to preserve and provide facts about the actions of the men who committed their lives to defend our country. I feel that this may not be an honor that they sought in their lifetimes, but this is a tribute to which they are rightfully entitled. This is the 102nd issue of the Elsie Item. It includes more stories about the deeds of the men aboard the U.S. Navy Landing Craft, Infantry, in WWII, so that our "*sailors never die or just fade away*".

Robert E Wright Jr., President and Treasurer

THE SEA OF LIFE

NASB Psalm 118:24, Proverbs 3:5,6, Proverbs 3:7, Psalm 46:1, Deuteronomy 33:27, Psalm 119:105, Mark 4:37-40, Matthew 14:22-27

Someone said “The problem with life is that it is so daily”. The writer of Psalm 118:24 said “This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it”. The contrast between those two statements seems to be apparent (ie: life is a problem to one and a gift to the other). I will try to draw a parallel between my voyage to England (21 days from Norfolk VA to Plymouth England during the month of March 1944). I had never seen the ocean and never been on anything larger than a rowboat or a canoe. After 20 weeks of radio training, I was hurriedly assigned as Radioman on LCI 409. On my trip to England a day later. The Radioman on that ship was put in the brig in Norfolk and yours truly was his replacement. That began a 2 year life in the Amphibious Navy. The Atlantic was rough and very turbulent. Life can be somewhat like that. At times we were thrown into situations we don’t understand and find we need to depend on others for direction and understanding or things to be done. I had never seen a ship’s radio before. I was thankful that Ensign Ahlberg knew a little and he helped me to learn very quickly. I was happy that the skipper and other officers and crew knew their roles.

That put me at ease with no real fear as the ship rocked, pitched and rolled on the turbulent Atlantic Ocean to our destination-the landing of troops on Omaha Beach, Normandy, France and the invasion of southern France.

Life ahead is virtually unknown to us.

We make plans, but things happen unexpectedly to cause a change in course. We arrived in England on schedule in spite of the need to take salt water showers and suffer the discomfort of seasickness. We made the invasion on and off Omaha Beach safely. However, something quite unexpectedly happened while coming alongside a LST to drop off Infantry for treatment. Our ship collided with it and we sustained considerable damage. This necessitated dry dock repairs in England before continuing our mission at Normandy. Needless to say, the skipper was replaced by the Exec LTJG J.P. Gilligan. He was a good skipper and a friend.

“The only things sure (on earth) are death and taxation”. We did not travel without the help of

others onboard a LCI. We depended on each other. I personally was thankful for LTJG John L Gurney, our first skipper who got us safely to Plymouth, plus on and off Omaha Beach. He could not have done so without the other Officers and crew. At 93, I could never have reached this point of life without the direction and help of so many people; not Navy life nor my career. Today I read Proverbs 3: 5,6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight”. We need wisdom and understanding to truly find the way through life. Solomon again offers advice in Proverbs 3:7 “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear (honor) the Lord and turn away from evil”. Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (wisdom)”. We need wisdom and knowledge to get through the dark places of life just as it was necessary to get through the dark and rough waters of the Atlantic. We had those who were given understanding and knowledge by God, so we could be successful in our mission. I thank God for those who were part of my life aboard two ships. In conclusion, Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble”.

Deuteronomy 33:27 “The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms;” As we sail on the dark waters of life, it is comforting to know that God is in control. Our ship passed through dark nights without light, but our Captain got us there. On the sea of life we need one to pilot us through dark places. Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path”.

I believe that He who calmed the wind and waves when his disciples were terrified will do the same in the storms of life if we call upon Him. Mark 4:37-40, Matthew 14:22-27.

Ebenezer (I Samuel 7:12)

RM-1/C Abe Laurenzo LCI 409, LCI 47



In Memoriam

LCI 196
Edward Barnes

LCI 347
Patrick A. Gallo

LCI 351
Robert Q. Stanton

LCI 416, 420
John P. Leffingwell

LCI 458
Paul M. Sonnier

LCI 462
John A. Hay

LCI 471
Donald Wingrove

LCI 482
Harold E. Hesse

LCI 487
Patrick O'Donnell

LCI 538
John "Jack" Jeffries

LCI 603
John "Jack" Ring

LCI 697
E.A. "Jack" Schutler

LCI 777
Robert D. Johnson

LCI 990
Frederick R. Anderson

LCI 1017
James McHugh

LCI Flot 2(?)
Dr. William J. Morgan

LCI Officer
John L. Miller



Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Membership to the USS LCI National Association is not limited to the U.S. We have several members in foreign countries. The following letter is from Charlie Ritz who lives and teaches in Japan.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Hi Jeff,

My father, Ed Ritz commanded LCI 1024(R) at Okinawa and elsewhere in the Pacific. My father died in 1954, but I've managed to track down a few crewmen who gave me some great oral recollections. Fred Greene of Tulsa is the sole surviving crewmember. He mentions witnessing kamikaze assaults at Okinawa. I teach at Tokai University here in Japan. I've toured two former kamikaze bases at Kanoya (IJN) and at Chiran (IJA). Both are now museums. I thought I'd share a few photos I took.



The remains of a Zeke Navy fighter plane that was raised up out of Kagoshima Bay.

The last remaining U.S. Army base in Japan is Camp Zama. Before the war it was



Exterior of a concrete plane shelter used to hide and protect planes from U.S. bombers.



This is the interior of the plane shelter shown above. Over 5,000 planes were kept in hiding for use as kamikazes.

a training facility for Japanese officers. When Americans entered the base in 1945 they were astonished to find a network of caves stocked full of weapons for a national redoubt. Included were thousands of bamboo spears for civilian use against invading U.S. forces. Many of my older Japanese friends, recall being trained as kids for such a last-ditch effort. Today the cave entrances are all sealed.

Good luck with Elsie Item!

Charlie Ritz.

Fond memories of LCI 35 and a dance floor in Brighton, England

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

There was a strange silence on board the *LCI 35*...and on the streets of Brighton too. The Normandy invasion had begun.

Over 280,000 men were crossing the English Channel uncertain of what lay ahead. In the near empty pubs and dance halls of Brighton, on England's south eastern coast, locals awaited word of invasion news.

Phil Reed, MoMM2/c, LCI 35: *We left our port of Newhaven about 8 pm on June 5th. We had 190 British troops on board. It was quiet, but the sea was rough.*

LCI 35 was part of Flotilla 2. They would be landing a second wave of British troops on Sword Beach near the French town of Ouistreham. Their sector was marked by stately villas that had been seaside vacation homes. Some were torn down by the Germans to make room for pillboxes and shooting lanes. Taller villas became observation posts and sniper hideouts. The crew of *LCI 35* remained at General Quarters throughout the night. Sailors were issued chemically treated protective clothing, gas masks and helmets. With over 5,000 ships crossing the Channel, the danger of being spotted and attacked by German submarines, torpedo boats, the Luftwaffe or hitting a mine was very high. All crews were on high alert. Phil Reed's General Quarters



Phil Reed joined the Navy in 1943. He was trained to be a Motor Mac on LCIs.

was in the engine room with 17-year old George Berkley. Reed was 25 and experienced in all things mechanical. During the 10-hour crossing he had some time to think of home and family.

Reed was from the upper peninsula of Michigan. He helped his dad overhaul their Model-T and was driving it by the age of ten. He was a natural mechanic. When the war broke out he was in California working at Douglas Aircraft and living with his sister. He could have sat out the war by working in the defense industry. But he drove back to Michigan to join the Navy. His younger brother David decided to join up too. They went to Great Lakes for boot camp and both ended up on *LCI 35* at Bezerte, Tunisia on the northern coast of Africa. That's where David got reassigned to *LCI 188*.

Phil Reed, MoMM2/c: *Africa is where we got separated because of the Sullivan Brothers. (all 5 Sullivans died during the*

sinking of the USS Juneau). By the end of the war I was assigned to a minesweeper and David was back in Baltimore, MD.

Reed's thoughts also drifted to the young lady he had been dating from Brighton. He met Joy Taylor at the Regent Ballroom Brighton. The city of Brighton was the place to go for liberty. It was about 10 miles from Newhaven Harbor where LCI 35 was



LCI 35 berthed with Flotilla 2 at Newhaven Harbor, England.

preparing for the invasion. English people loved ballroom dancing. The Regent had been built on the rooftop of the Regent Cinema in 1923. The huge dance hall could hold up to 1500 dancers. The floor was on springs. The hall was described in a newspaper column as an "explosion of primary and secondary colors flung in an interesting criss-cross of light." Local girls saved their money for Saturday nights at the Regent. That is when the Regent was a must. It was an escape from the war.

Joy Taylor Reed: *When we moved from London, we went 60 miles south to Brighton on the coast. That's where my mother was from. It's only a short train ride from Newhaven where Phil's ship was docked. Newhaven being a quiet village - and Brighton a busy town - so all the service*

men congregated there. Brighton had three dance halls and lots of pubs, so where else would a service man go? I loved to dance. My favorite band was Ted Heath who played many Glenn Miller songs. I wasn't interested in anything but dancing, hence I was at the Regent dance hall when I met Phil...and he can't dance, he just hops up and down!

Joy Taylor was born in London. She remembers being sick with chicken pox when war was declared on September 3, 1939. Her mother thought they would be attacked immediately. So, her family went down into the cellar of a mortuary. The bombing blitz of London didn't begin until the next year on September 7, 1940. Strategic bombing of Britain's industrial and military targets had been unsuccessful. The RAF Spitfires always seemed to know where the next bombing raid would be. The Luftwaffe losses were too high. Germany changed strategy and unleashed a merciless terror bombing campaign against London and Britain's major cities. Even the mortuary basement was no longer safe. Joy's family moved south of London to her mom's hometown of Brighton. It was safer, but not much. The city of Brighton and ports along the southeast coast were being bombed too. This area would have been the primary beachhead for the German army's invasion of Great Britain. There were 198 people killed in Brighton during the blitz and hundreds more were injured.

Joy Taylor Reed: *We were bombed in Brighton too. The Germans dropped two bombs on the Wild Park Hills on their way back to France. We all went to look at the large craters the bombs made.*

The Battle of Britain was over by the time Phil Reed had arrived at Newhaven, England. The port town was at the mouth of the Ouse River at Seaford Bay. Seahaven Naval Academy was outside of town. Two huge piers and a breakwater formed a safe berthing for cargo, fishing and now naval ships. The port had been the kicking off site for the ill-fated Dieppe Raid in 1942. Six Thousand Canadian troops were sent on the raid. Only 2300 returned. Lessons learned at Dieppe had been part of the planning for D-Day.

The nightly Luftwaffe bombing raids had ended, but there were still air raid alerts. German scientists had invented two types of long range missiles. They were known in German as Vergeltungswaffen which is hard to say and harder to spell. They became the V-1 or V-2 missiles to the military. To the English citizens who were targeted by them, they were Doodle Bugs. Their short wings and buzzing sound reminded people of these silly little bugs.

Joy Taylor Reed: *One night I looked out my bedroom window and saw the flames shooting out the behind of a Doodle Bug. The buzzing was getting closer. When they ran out fuel, they'd go silent, dive to the ground and explode. It was still buzzing but my mother ran me, my sisters and brother all down to the cellar anyway.*

Joy's dad was in the Air Force working on balloon barrage. These were the huge helium balloons that were sent up on cables to protect airfields and harbors and other targets. They made low level air attacks more dangerous to German pilots. The cables could clip off an airplane's wings.

These were used extensively on ships during and after D-Day landings. Her dad had also served during WWI in a Highlander Regiment. "He wore kilts" said Joy, "but he was too old to serve in front line combat for World War Two."

The LCI 35 had participated in landings in Africa and more recently Italy. Sailors found those countries to be dirty. They struggled with foreign language and customs. In contrast, England was clean. The girls spoke the Kings English. They welcomed the Yanks. When Joy met Phil at the Regent Ballroom in April of 1944 she lied about her age. She was just 16. He was much older. But they hit it off. He asked her out on a date and they went to the Gaiety Cinema to see a movie. They continued to date until all liberties were cancelled in June. Joy's mom knew she was dating an American sailor, but they didn't tell her dad.

On the morning of June 6, all thoughts of home, family and girls vanished as ships funneled into the lanes that had been cleared by mine sweepers. At 1030 all hands were at beaching stations. LCIs in Flotilla 2 Group 4 started towards the beach with ramps in dropping position. Phil Reed was now up on the bow in charge of the ramps. He was the only one of their 20-man crew who was able to start the finicky ramp motors.

Phil Reed MoMM2/c: *Ramps were lowered with a one-cylinder engine. When they got wet they wouldn't work. I was the only one on board who could get the motors to work. I had them both going about 15 minutes to the beach. The motor would take the ramp straight out and then I'd release a latch that would let the ramp drop down.*



LCI 35 was assigned the code number 424 for invasion day on 6 June 1944.

The LCI 2 Flotilla would be hitting the most easterly Queen Red Sector of Sword Beach near the Orne River. During the final approach to the beach each ship was on its own to maneuver through obstacles. They had to avoid defensive stakes, sunken tanks, and wreckage of landing crafts to find a patch of bare sand. Shelling was coming in sending up geysers of water and shrapnel. Underwater stakes tipped with land mines would blow up under landing crafts. The impact of small mines did little damage to the 300-ton LCIs but were a frightening nuisance to troops cooped up below deck. They'd feel the full impact of the blast. They were glad to finally get up on deck and get off this slow-moving target.

Phil Reed MoMM2/c: The invasion had already started so it was pretty hectic. I was

in charge of the ramps. I was up at the bow and could see all the action. I was preparing the landing ramps to allow the troops to disembark.

The stern anchor was dropped for retracting from the beach. Phil Reed lowered his ramps. Snipers opened-up from the villas on top of the dunes. Every 20mm in Flotilla 2 Group 4 opened-up on the snipers. Devastating fire from the Oerlikon guns perforated the building facades and silenced their attackers.

It took only 2 minutes for 190 troops to descend from the port and starboard ramps. Reed raised the ramps and locked them back in place. The stern anchor was being hauled in to help retract *LCI 35* off the beach. That's when disaster hit. The ship was afloat, but the stern anchor had become fouled on a sunken tank. She was now drifting to port toward obstacles and other LCIs.

Shells from 88s and mortars were exploding closer and closer.

They had to clear the snagged anchor or *LCI 35* would be joining the wreckage on Sword Beach. The Captain ordered the cable cut with an axe. Once free of the Army tank 35 began to maneuver back out to sea. Moments later two shells exploded where the bow of *LCI 35* had been bobbing helplessly. Clarence Robbins reported that the German 88 artillery fire came close to the *LCI 35*. So close in fact that he thought the ship had been "bracketed." Enemy shells had landed on both sides of the ship. When Skipper Lewis made the decision to cut the cable and move the ship, the next shells landed in the 35s wake.

By noon, LCI 35 was back off the coast of Normandy and forming up with a convoy to head back to Newhaven, England. Beaching stations were secured. Pilot house and engine room watches were relieved. "All's well" was reported in the log. On the way back to Newhaven the crew began cleaning the four troop compartments. They would be loading reinforcements and heading back to Normandy on June 9th.

Phil Reed MoMM2/c: *On the way back to England we were cleaning up the ship. We found a Brit soldier hiding in the head down below. I don't know what happened to him. There were British military personnel waiting for him when we got into port. In WWI deserters were executed. That only happened to one American soldier during WWII.*

For the next two months the crew was busy taking troops and supplies to Normandy. A couple dozen more trips between England and Normandy were made during June and July. Opportunities for liberty while in Newhaven were limited. When Phil had liberty, he'd head over to Brighton to see Joy Taylor. He never told her about what he saw during D-Day. She didn't tell him what she was doing while he was gone.

Phil Reed MoMM2/c: *I knew what she was doing while I was off fighting the war. She was dancing with other sailors.*

Joy Taylor Reed: *There was nothing else to do but go dancing. Six of us girls, all buddies went to the dance every night. The Regent was on the top floor of a theatre. It had spring flooring. It cost 2 & 6, a half crown per person to get in. We never had*

enough money for all of us. The girls would give me enough for one admission. There was a stairway fire escape in the back. Once inside I'd sneak down the creepy cement stairwell to the alley. I'd open the back door and let my friends in. We did that every night.

American sailors had more money than the English. They would go to the bar and stockpile shots of whiskey and beer until the bar was sold out. This left nothing for the Brits to drink and gave the Americans an edge for meeting girls. "They'd fill their tables with shots and bottles," said Joy. "I didn't drink, I was too young. I was only interested in dancing."

By November of 1944, beach landings in Normandy were no longer needed. Major ports had been taken by the allies. LCI 35 was sent back to New York. Reed was sent to advanced Diesel School at Richmond, Virginia and assigned to the minesweeper 365.

Phil Reed, MoMM2/c: *When my ship left Newhaven for New York I didn't think I'd ever see Joy again. We were all being assigned to other ships. I went on a minesweeper.*

As the war wound down the relationship between Phil and Joy continued by mail. "We wrote letters to each other. I had written to his mother and she wrote back." After Phil was discharged from the Navy, he had no desire to go back to work for Douglas Aircraft. He wanted to own a business. He bought a small gas station with one pump and a hoist. Six months later somebody offered to buy the station, so he sold out. He worked at several jobs, always

intending to own another business. He helped his brother in a metal plating shop. He worked on the assembly line at General Motors installing glove boxes. "You had to work fast, or a car would continue down the assembly line without a glove box" said Phil.

Joy sent Phil a new photo of herself and let him know she'd like to come to America. In 1946 they decided to get married. That was about the only way to get into the U.S. during the post war period. Phil applied for and got a visa for Joy. He sent her \$500 and she flew to California on TWA. They got married in David Reed's house surrounded by Phil's family and none of hers. Their honeymoon was in Palm Springs for one day and one night. Phil's brother-in-law was playing in a band there. Next day Phil was back to working his two jobs. "I'd get up 6 a.m. to work one job, get off at 4 p.m., go to the other, get home about midnight, catch a few hours sleep and then start all over." They lived on about five to ten dollars a week. "I had a good cook. She'd feed us with the little money we had," says Phil.

Phil never stopped dreaming of owning a business. One day he met a guy who needed a specialty part plated. Nobody could do it. He told Phil, "If you can plate this, I'll give you all my business." Phil knew he could do it and had the part plated by the end of the day. In 1956 he got a loan, a small building, a truck and started his chrome plating shop in Santa Fe Springs, California. He handled the sales and plating and Joy drove the delivery truck. Today, his two sons run

Electronic Chrome & Grinding Co. with 17 employees. But Phil still goes in to work every day.

They both enjoy fond memories of the past. Phil collects antique cars. In 2008 they drove his 1927 Model T Ford 3,000 mile from coast to coast. It took them 23 days averaging 35 mph on seats never intended for luxury.

In December 2018, the Reed's will celebrate 72 years of marriage. To think it all began with a war, an LCI, and a dance floor on springs. As they look back at their chance wartime meeting they agree on one thing. Those were the good old days. Joy admits that it is awful to look back at war this way, "But these were really the good old days. My sister and I talk about it often. Compared to today we were all so innocent."



Phil and Joy Reed attended the 2018 Reunion tour of the LCI 713. Here they join LCI members for Navy Bean soup and refreshments in the ship's galley.

The Birth of the LCI Northwest Association



Rod Scurlock

In the fall of 1996, I saw an article about an LCI that someone had in Eureka, California. It would be available for the public to see. I thought that LCIs were long a thing of the past and I wanted my wife to see one. Ruth and I drove down there, and as we went into town, there it was in all its glory, sitting beside the dock. I soon found out that it was connected to an organization that was having a reunion the next day. We went to the building the next morning, and when they found out I had sailed on one of those ships, welcomed us into the group. A tour of the ship was part of the agenda and I was able to show Ruth what an LCI was, inside and out. It was the highlight of my year!

During the day, I had a chance to meet with the president of the group, which I found out was the California LCI Association, and a part of the National LCI Association, which I didn't know existed. He looked like an old sailing-ship captain. Stocky, husky, and a beard that Santa Claus would be proud of.

His name was Jim McCarthy. He was jovial, friendly, and he took time to sit down with me and tell me about the ship, and about their organization. It was a group of WWII sailors who had sailed on LCIs during the war.

There was a banquet that night and we had a chance to meet a lot of the sailors and their wives and had the time of our lives. One of the men I met was Lloyd Hansen. It turned out he was from Bend, Oregon and had read the same article I had, and he and his wife had come down to see the ship, as well. We became fast friends immediately, and during the evening, got together, and in our conversation, decided that such an organization would be great for the Northwest. We decided that we would see if we could put one together, and both sat down with Jim McCarthy to see how to go about it. Jim gave us some contacts in the National Association.

I made the contacts when I got back home, obtained a list of the LCI'ers from the Northwest, and started making phone calls. We were able to get about twenty that indicated they would be interested in going to a reunion. Lloyd and I got together and agreed on a date. He agreed to put a reunion together in Bend and I re-called the interested LCI'ers, told them there would be a reunion and gave them the date, and in October of 1997, we had our first Northwest LCI reunion in Bend, Oregon.

Those attending the first reunion were Chris Shelvik, Lois Shelvik, Donald Bishop, Irene Bishop, Vear Hanson, Coleen Hanson, Clyde Allen, Alice Allen, Glen Koester, Ruth Koester, Paul Bird, Betsy Bird, Lloyd Hewitt, Bonnie Hewitt, Bernard Swift, Marilyn Swift, Rex Barber, Mrs. Barber, Hollis Ottaway, Clara Ottaway, Steve Besse, Dyna Besse, Hal Bleyhl, Florence Bleyhl, Calvin Tigner, Dale Kirkham, Kenneth Zollner, Don Barnick, Joseph Ott, Vic Pourpouree, Mary Rose

Pourpouree, Don Reinke, Jack Van Dam, John Cox, Betty Cox, Lloyd Hanson, Beatrice Hanson, Rod Scurlock, and Ruth Scurlock.

Alan Star, A Navy Seal, was the speaker, and we toured the High Desert Historical museum, and the historical flower gardens. The Red Hat Ladies dance group provided the entertainment for the banquet.

In 1998, we held the second reunion in Boise, Idaho. Thirty of the LCI's returned, and indicated they enjoyed themselves and wanted to continue the Association. We could at last lay claim to being a valid association! In 1999, we held our reunion in Bremerton, Washington, in 2000, in Astoria, Oregon, in 2001 in Reno, Nevada, 2002 in Vancouver, Washington, in 2003 in Lake Chelan, Washington, in 2004 in Portland, Oregon. The Northwest Association hosted the National Association at the meetings in Astoria and Vancouver. During this time, our membership continued to grow as word got out of our existence.

In 2005, Gordon Smith was elected president of the Association. It thrived and grew under Gordon's administration. We became a part of the restoration of the *LCI 713* and, eventually, bought it from the former owner, then made it a national historic museum.

Gordon is a very deceptive individual. He has a laid-back demeanor, a ready smile, and is a friend almost before you get to know him, but under that friendly approach, there is a man of steel. When he gets the bit in his teeth, things start to happen. For many years, he has been a member of the group of associates that meets every Saturday to work on the ship and have turned it from a rusted hulk that sat on the bottom of the Columbia River to a ship that looks better than it did when it

was new.

Several years ago (I'm not sure of the date), Gordon had to resign as Northwest president, due to health problems, and for operational purposes, the Northwest Association has, in a way, merged with the Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum. Rick Holmes, the AFMM president, and his wife, Sue Cosper, and many of the other hard-working, dedicated associates have carried on the tradition. The Association continues to thrive with great reunions, great speakers, and a continued chance to get with the remaining sailors and talk about old times. They are doing one heck of a good job!

Time has worked its changes on the organization, as it has on us who served in it. Where it was a means for the sailors to get together, renew old acquaintances, relive some of the times we went through, as our numbers faded away, so did the purpose of the organization. It has gradually changed from one of reliving the past with old friends to one of honoring those who have passed on and, in this case, centering on a symbol of those times and people, the *USS LCI 713*, and those who are fighting to preserve it

Submitted by Rod Scurlock LCI(G)565



Gordon Smith

Guns behind Palagi Rock

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Action Report: USS LCI(G) 365, Flagship, Division Fifteen – The actions on W-Day 21 July 1944 during the initial assault landings on Agat Beach, Guam. The mission of this vessel, and of LCI(G) Division Fifteen, was to precede the first assault wave into beaches Yellow 1 and 2, White 1 and 2...to support these landings by an intense barrage of 20 and 40 MM fire and two salvos of 4.5 CIT barrage rockets.

At 0630 the LCIs closed formation and assumed their assigned stations. The left flank was Flagship LCI(G) 365 with 366, 439, and 440. The right flank included LCI(G) 442, 450, 474, and 475. It was raining hard and visibility was low. Five-inch shells from fire support destroyer DD-557 screamed overhead.

As the LCI ships entered Agat Bay the rain subsided. Some smoke could be seen from the offshore bombardment. The town of Agat lay in ruins just beyond the beach. At 0805 LCI 365 and the seven other gunboats began their approach. They led approximately 250 yards in front of the first wave landing craft. Their speed - just 4.5 knots – made for easy targets. At 0815 and 2,000 yards from the beach all eight gunboats opened-up with their 40mm batteries. The Japanese opened-up too. The LCI 365 was bracketed in a crossfire of 75mm batteries located on Bangi Point and Palagi Rock.

In addition to the 70 crewmembers on board LCI 365 there was the Flag Staff of Rear Admiral Richard “Close-In” Conolly.

He was a 1914 Naval Academy graduate with a background in destroyers. He earned his nickname due to his insistence that fire-support ships must get in close to the beach during amphibious assaults. Rear Admiral Conolly had ordered the LCIs to line up parallel to each other and 120 feet apart. With shell bursts and geysers of water rising-up all around the LCIs he continued his steady “close-in” approach to the beach. His rockets were armed and ready. The first rocket salvo would be launched at 1100 yards and the second at 800 yards.

John Lawson MoMM2/c was part of RAdm Conolly’s staff. Lawson was 3 days



shy of turning 30 years old. He was an old man to a crew whose average age was about 19. He’d been assigned temporary duty on the 365 only two months ago. Lawson was from Brooklyn, Iowa. He attended the University of

John Lawson MoMM2/c

Iowa for one semester, but then, to start earning money, worked as a telephone lineman. After the war broke out he went into the Army, got an honorable discharge in late 1942 and joined the Navy in April 1943. He graduated from boot camp (Company Honor Man) in Farragut, Idaho, then went to Class “A” diesel school, Advanced Diesel school, Landing Craft school and finally Rocket Training. He was older, married, had two children and was a more experienced.



Rear Admiral Richard “Close In” Conolly

and educated sailor. Conolly requested Lawson for his flag staff on *LCI 365*. It was being fitted with rocket launchers, cannons and machine guns during May of 1944. Lawson’s purpose for being on the ship was to help with the conversion, training and setting up of the rocket launchers.

As the 365 was preparing to launch their first salvo of rockets, past experiences certainly kicked in for Lawson. His ankles were already scarred from rocket blast exhaust. Firing procedures were critical for all batteries...especially the rockets. At 0821 the *LCI 365* fired her first salvo of 168 rockets. They devastated everything from the beach to 150 yards inland.

Jap gunners responded by zeroing in on the 365. Direct hits wiped out two 20mm gun batteries. “This ship is now taking direct hits,” wrote LT(JG) Fortson in the Action Report. “We continued to take hits and near misses until 0826.” The second salvo of 285 rockets were fired. They exploded well behind the coconut trees and among the ruins of Agat town. Cease fire was given. The ship was on fire and taking on water. It was time to retreat. With a full right rudder, starboard engine back full, and port ahead full, the 365 turned tail. She was just 500 yards from the beach and only 75 yards from the reef. Her bow was down and listing badly to starboard. There were fires in the bo’s’n locker and No. 2 troop compartment.

As the ship turned to starboard a heavy burst of machine gun fire ripped into the pilot house and conn from astern. The helmsman went down from the blasts and the ship yawed towards the reef. A seaman grabbed the helm and swung the ship back around. All engines were now full ahead. The 365 needed help. Her forward well deck was awash to a depth of six inches. The ship was difficult to steer and yawing to 15 degrees. An order was given to throw overboard the rocket projectors and any loose gear to lighten the ship.

By 0840 all water tight doors in the forecastle had been dogged down and fires were brought under control. But the 365 was a mess. She had taken 9 direct hits from both the port and starboard sides. Her decks were littered with bodies, body parts, blood, wreckage and shell casings. The ship was brought alongside the *USS Fayette* (APA 43). A total of 26 casualties were transferred

to the Fayette for medical treatment or burial. Seven sailors were killed in action. Thomas Wilkinson GM3/c died in the arms of his buddy Wallace Coates. It is believed that Wilkinson was hit by 20mm friendly fire while 365 was making the abrupt turn north towards the *Fayette*. Clayton Schouten MoMM2/c and LT H.P. Rabenstein from Admiral Connolly's staff were among the wounded. LT Rabenstein's wounds were minor and he returned to duty the following day. *LCI 365's* wounds were major. There were shrapnel holes throughout the ship causing damage to radar, radio room, wiring, life rafts and the mast. Four Rocket launchers and two 20mm guns had been destroyed. One shell passed through the galley and crews head and out the port side of the ship. It damaged the refrigerator, shower and two coffee percolators. Seepage of water was coming through seams in the troop compartments. A thorough overhaul would be needed.

The 365 was out of action. *LCI 439* became LT Rabenstein's flagship. His staff including Jack Lawson transferred too. On 23 July a small unit of Marines in their amphibious vehicles entered the water off Agat Beach. They headed north through boat lanes then turned toward a small beach located between Neye Island and Palagi Rock. This was the same area where the 365 had been hit two days earlier.

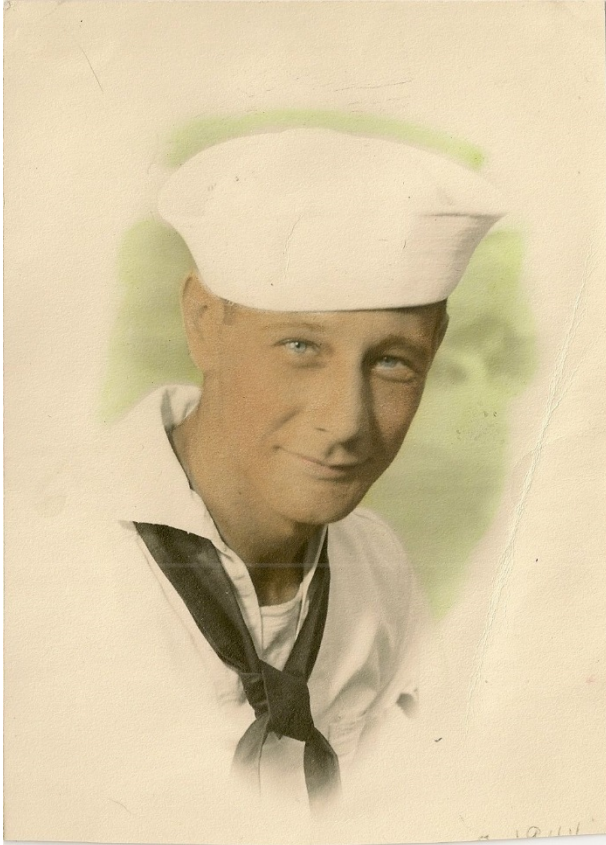
Gunnernsmate 2/c Adolph Brusig was on early morning watch aboard *LCI 366*. He was already at his General Quarters 40mm gun position awaiting his five-man crew. The ship was anchored off Agat Beach and had been patrolling the area without incident

for two days. "I noticed the unit of Marines enter the water at Agat Beach," reported Brusig. "They went around Palagi Rock and were heading towards the beach when machine guns and mortars opened up on them. The withering fire was long and intense. There were no survivors. I yelled and cursed at the Japs."

These guns were firing from the same hidden location behind Palagi Rock that had caused many casualties on 21 July. They had to be silenced. RAdm Conolly devised a plan for a strafing mission at Palagi Rock. His staff officer LT Rabenstein ordered the LCIs to form up in a line behind the 439. They would pass close by Palagi Rock and draw fire, so spotter planes above could locate the guns. Many of the LCI crews considered this mission to be a suicide strafing operation. LT Rabenstein would forever be considered the culprit.

The seven LCIs lined up in single file. They would strafe the shoreline between Neye Island and Palagi Rock. The ships proceeded in at slow speed making them perfect targets for the Japs. Division Commander Conolly's 439 was first to get hit with mortar fire. "The water all around 439 and 366 was covered with exploding mortar rounds," said Gunnernsmate Adolph Brusig. "When the 439 got hit I saw its mast and ensign get blown off and fall in the water." Shell blasts were hitting all around. Two sailors were killed and 13 injured on the 439. The 366 followed close behind. As the 366 reached the point of fire, it was also hit. Five sailors were killed and 13 wounded. Now *LCI 440* was next to run the gauntlet. Her skipper, LT Keyes saw where

the Jap mortar shells were falling and turned to starboard and out of range. Navy planes circling overhead located the Jap gun positions and quickly destroyed the site. The guns behind Palagi Rock had claimed seven more lives. The crew of the 366 blamed LT Rabenstein for their losses. But those still patrolling the Agat Beach sector knew those guns wouldn't be a danger to them anymore.



John Lawson MoMM2/c 1944

Jack Lawson had seen enough "close in" combat. He was glad the 439 was sent back to Hawaii and was hoping for a furlough. Instead, he got reassigned to the flag staff of the USS *Appalachian*. He served on her until the end of the war and was discharged in October of 1945. While awaiting refit of the USS *Appalachian*, Lawson's wife



John Lawson at home in Iowa with his wife and son in 1942.

came out to meet him. They attended a party with Admiral and Mrs. Conolly. Lawson had been promoted to MoMM1/c. He hoped to be rotated home soon. The Admiral wanted Lawson to reup before that and remain on his staff. He would have promoted Lawson to Chief. Admiral Conolly became Commander of U.S. Navy forces in Europe after the war. It would have been good duty. Lawson turned it down because he had a three-year old son, two-year old daughter and another baby due in two months. It was decision he regretted years later. In 1962 both Admiral Conolly and his wife were killed in a plane crash. The Lawsons were shocked and saddened to have lost their friends.

Fighting an Unseen Enemy with FEDCU One in Korea

Note: Most LCI's completed their Navy service at the end of WW II, but a few, renamed LSI's in 1947, continued through the Korean Conflict. One of those, LSI(L) 1091 served in Korea as a Fleet Epidemic Disease Control ship, FEDCU – One. This article details that service.

One day early in March 1951, the Communist-controlled radio at Pyongyang, North Korea, went on the air with propaganda charges that the American Navy was conducting biological warfare experiments on prisoners of war off the coast of North Korea. Other lurid reports declared that the United Nations forces were engaged in “germ warfare” and that this warfare had resulted in the deaths from bubonic plague of thousands of North Korean civilians as well as Red troops. U.N. commanders in the field, hearing the propaganda broadcasts, were worried. They were worried not so much because of the broadcast itself—they had heard many similar broadcasts as bad or worse.

They were worried about the mention of the words “bubonic plague.” The Reports titled Fighting an Unseen Enemy Intelligence had already reached the U.N. officers that some kind of an epidemic was running rampant among North Korean civilians and Red troops. Could this epidemic be the dread plague? If it was, every soldier in the U.N. armies, and perhaps South Korean civilians as well, would have to be inoculated to prevent the plague from spreading through the Allies’ own lines. There was only one thing to do: Find out. Since U.N. medical men lacked details of the symptoms of the epidemic, it was necessary to get firsthand accounts from North Korean victims. To do this, a qualified

observer must be sent back behind the enemy lines to find out for himself. Brigadier General Crawford F. Sams, the Army’s Chief of Public Health and Welfare, was selected to get the facts and present them to the U.N. commander in the Far East. One of his first moves in planning the audacious expedition was to call on the Navy to get him there. He had heard of the unique disease prevention ship, *LSI(L) 1091*, the Navy was operating in the area. Could the Navy take him and a Korean Army doctor and an interpreter to a beach some 50 miles inside the lines and bring them back? “Affirmative,” came back the answer. The Navy was well prepared for its part in the mission. Remembering that typhus and allied diseases have caused more military defeats than all the generals in history, both Army and Navy medical authorities had stressed effective control measures even before the Korean struggle began. The result was a new floating medical research laboratory installed aboard a landing craft, the *LSI(L) 1091*. Her staff of 26 officer-scientists and enlisted technicians was designated Fleet Epidemic Disease Control Unit One (FEDCU ONE). General Sams and his Korean aides boarded *LSI(L) 1091* at Pusan and the ship got underway for Wonsan harbor to the north. As they headed for the objective, Cmdr. Joseph M. Coppoletta (MC), USN, and his Navy medical staff, and Lt. George P. Miller, USN, skipper of the ship, joined the General in a discussion of ways and means. Cmdr. Coppoletta assured General Sams that the landing craft had all the facilities necessary to analyze any specimen smears that he might bring back from infected patients. Lt. Miller outlined his plan to get the ship to the right spot at the right time. Reaching Wonsan harbor, then behind enemy

lines but protected to seaward by the power of the U.S. Navy, General Sams and the two Koreans transferred to a U.S. destroyer which took them some distance south to a small island off the coast. Here the General recruited 14 native volunteers to go behind the enemy lines and “visit” sick Red soldiers and North Korean -civilians “infected” with the “plague.” The plan was for the 14 to return to a spot on the coast where they would meet with the General’s team and tell the doctors what they had seen. The native volunteers were put ashore on the mainland according to schedule. Several days later-to allow the South Korean volunteers time to get inland and back to the coast again -the destroyer left the island and proceeded north to the predetermined point. The ship came to a stop and her motor whaleboat and crew was lowered into the water with the General and the two Koreans in it. The General carried a special medical kit. An inflated rubber raft was also placed in the boat. About 200 yards offshore, and after what seemed to the party to be “many hours later,” the prearranged light signal was received from the beach. The three-man task force clambered into the raft and began paddling through the choppy sea, hoping that the signal was not a Communist trap. The quarter-moon gave a dim outline of the beach and hills ahead. They knew that the area was “hot” with enemy troops. Would they be seen and apprehended?

As the raft approached the beach the party was met by a small group of dark figures, almost lost in the shadows of the bluffs. The leader of the group ran splashing into the surf to greet General Sams. A huddled and hurried exchange of whispers assured the General that the contact was “perfect.” The

man who led the “welcoming committee” was one of the native volunteers. He quickly told the medical task force that he was the only surviving member of the 14-man volunteer team. The other 13 had been captured and executed. The mission party was led to a cave which the General planned to use as a “jump-off place for a possible trek inland to collect specimen smears. He learned from the volunteer that the nearest village with a Communist hospital was 15 miles inland. The area was swarming with enemy troops. That didn’t make a trip inland sound very promising. Actually, it didn’t matter. From what he learned the trip would be unnecessary. Through the information which the Korean obtained, the General was able to determine that the epidemic definitely was not bubonic plague. His informer gave a careful description of the sick peoples’ reactions to the disease, including the key information that their faces and bodies were covered with running sores. Doctor Sams knew that bubonic plague did not cause such facial eruptions. The disease which caused the facial lesions described, he felt, was hemorrhagic smallpox, a kind of disease new to the area, probably brought into North Korea by the Chinese. The deadly disease had taken firm root in North Korea, he reasoned, because of the filth in which troops and civilians lived. The Communist doctors did not have the equipment, hospital facilities or serums to combat it effectively. It had gotten out of control and they were helpless to stop it. The General now felt sure the United Nations’ armies need not be inoculated against the bubonic plague. The three men paddled their raft back to the waiting whaleboat and then made their way to the destroyer, bringing to an end a unique operation of the Korean

conflict. In a letter to Cmdr. Coppoletta, Admiral C. Turner Joy, USN, then the U.N.'s senior member of the armistice team,

commended the top-secret operation with these words: "I wish to express greatest appreciation to you, to the officers and men of your unit, to Lt. Miller and the officers and crew of the *LSI (L) 1091*, for the splendid and outstanding performance you have done between 4 and 14 March 1951 in carrying out a very important and hazardous mission. "The story of this performance, when it can be told, and it will I am sure, be not only an inspiration to those who read it and a credit to the naval service, but also a record of an undertaking unique in the history of military medicine." The idea for a Navy Epidemic Disease Control Unit which could be called on for immediate action was advanced by Capt. Albert T. Walker, (MC) USN. Before being called to Korea, the unit, embarked in the *LSI (L)*, had been busy combating diseases in Japanese waters. Military medical authorities know from the lessons of history that the common body louse, transmitter of typhus, was a major killer in the first World War. The Austrian Army feared to invade Serbia in 1915 when a raging epidemic of typhus killed 150,000 people in six months, Again, in Russia, 25,000,000 cases of typhus with 3,000,000 deaths aided the spread of the Bolshevik revolution and the complete collapse of Russia's army. Typhus, known for centuries as "war fever," "camp fever," "ship fever," "poverty fever," "jail fever," and other well-deserved names, cannot be accurately diagnosed by physical symptoms alone, doctors point out. Laboratory tests must be made on the victim's blood before proper treatment can be decided upon. In Korea and

some Pacific islands, it could take days or even weeks to obtain these tests from laboratories in Japan. The Navy's floating laboratory could provide a life-saving short



The unique disease prevention ship LSI(L) 1091 anchored at Korea.

cut to such disease control in the forward areas. As pioneers in this new phase of medical warfare against disease, Fleet Epidemic Disease Control Unit ONE has logged an outstanding record of accomplishments-a credit to its staff of officer-doctors and hospital corpsmen. In its role of medical missionary, FEDCU ONE has had the benefit of the service of top Navy scientists who specialize in preventive medicine in fields such as bacteriology, parasitology and epidemiology. For another example of the unit's work, consider Koje-do. There, on a prison-camp island, 90,000 North Koreans, Chinese Communist soldiers and Red guerrillas were housed in temporary compounds. No one knew just what facilities would be needed to hold the unknown number of POWs when the camps were first hurriedly set up. An epidemic of dysentery spread rapidly. Soon more than 200 cases a day were trying to get into the small dispensary. Not enough doctors could be spared from the front lines to take care of the situation.

Remembering the Navy's floating epidemic disease control laboratory, *LSI(L) 1091*, the Army called for its assistance to help meet the outbreak. The Navy answered the call and beached the lab ship on Koje-do in May 1951 where by that time a joint Army-Navy Medical Project had been established to meet the emergency. The epidemic disease control staff and ship's crew immediately began to unload 45 tons of medical supplies and equipment to set-up an emergency dispensary. Countless hours were spent by Navy and Army doctors in each of the compounds examining and treating the thousands of POWs and civilian refugees. Trucks loaded with medical supplies rolled into the compounds day after day. Not a single day could be counted as easy for the weary doctors and enlisted men. Some of the Navy men became ill themselves and had to receive treatment. But finally, the epidemic was brought under control.

Another life-saving incident in the unit's record began on 27 June 1952 when the 1091 sailed from Yokosuka, Japan, bound for Ullung-do. A typhus epidemic was reported to be in progress here too. A number of South Koreans, refugee orphans and adults, previously had been shipped from the Taegu combat zone to Ullung-do for safety and housing.

Enroute to the island, however, the landing ship developed engine trouble. And the unit had to be transferred with essential supplies and equipment to USS *Unudilla* (ATA 182) for further transportation.

At Ullune-do the Navy men found the epidemic was caused not by typhus fever but by typhoid fever. Institution of sanitary

measures and treatment of patients were undertaken, and no further cases were reported. In an operation like Ullung-do, the Navy ships several vehicles in advance of the FEDCU's arrival. These vehicles are equipped with insect killing powder sprayers and drainage gear. When the unit arrives on the scene, 45 tons of epidemic control supplies including large quantities of DDT powder is ready for immediate use. The entire operation is mapped and planned in advance.

At Ullung-do, the Navy men had to search for and treat the infected people in the village of Cho Dong. The dwellings of the entire town were subjected to fly control by residual applications of DDT. The people of the town were indoctrinated in the necessity of sanitation and told how to obtain drinking water from safe sources. When FEDCU ONE completed this task, every patient had been cured. There are numerous other successes credited to FEDCU ONE in combating disease in the forward area. The unit has been highly successful, since 40 of the refugees were seriously ill with prolonged high fever and diarrhea. Three deaths had already occurred. Investigation revealed that a force of medical men, doctors and bluejackets, are prepared to examine and inoculate the native people for any of several diseases successful in its mission to assist in safeguarding the health of servicemen serving in the Far East.-

Harvey H. , Mitchell, JOL, USN.

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Submitted by Joe Flynn

By Sgt. BILL ALCINE,
YANK Staff Correspondent

BATABAGNON, THE PHILIPPINES—

It was a beautiful day. The Philippine sun reflected on the wave-dimpled surface of small Opong Bay. We had landed the day before at Batabagnon, 30 miles from Tacloban through the San Juanico Straits, which separate Leyte from Samar Island.

LCI gunboats and LCMs had taken the First Squadron of the Seventh Cavalry up from Tacloban to beach in a landing as gently unwarlike as a picnic outing. It was a peaceful invasion and highly regarded by the Batabagnonians. Yesterday the Filipinos of the village, from old men to boys, had pushed aside the GIs in their eagerness to unload the LCMs.

Pvt. James M. Matthews of Memphis, Tenn., watched them sweat under ammo cases, boxes of C and K ration, 4.2 mortar shell loads and all the odds and ends of an invasion. He shoved his helmet back from a perspiring face.

"Mumph," he said. "I never thought I'd see no Ms unloaded like that. These people must be crazy." They were crazy with relief after three years under Japanese rule.

Now today was beautiful in the still morning. One of the gunboats had lazily wharfed up to the miniature concrete jetty. The crew, a few Army men and a couple of correspondents were chasing their breakfast pancakes and a mug of coffee. Some Filipinos loitered around the jetty, shot the breeze in understandable English with the

beach guard, or just looked out into the bay. The three other gunboats idled, waiting for orders to return to Tacloban. Some Ms milled around. The sun was beginning to burn.

From nowhere a Jap plane, a Zeke (fighter), flattened out of a glide and dropped two bombs near one of the boats, then swung out of the harbor with his tail in the lead of some belated 20mm fire. He disappeared in a sharp bank around a small hill on our left.

Cups of coffee were dropped, sailors ran for their gun posts, the skipper yelled to get the hell away from the wharf.

With a shrill whine and a staccato pound of its guns, a Val (dive bomber) streaked in at us from over the hills behind the beachhead and headed for our wharfed boat. Tracers etched thin white lines over the ship, ripped a chunk out of the mast. The plane screamed over our heads, starting to smoke, and dropped two wing-racked 250-pound bombs at the stern. It looked like a hit.

The Val slipped away from the blast and wavered away still smoking.

We cast off from the wharf and pulled alongside the blasted ship. Lines made her fast to us and hose was broken out for the fire below decks. Astern on the starboard deck three denimed sailors were crumpled, their blood clotting on the blue painted metal.

The entire crew of the 3-inch rifle had been wounded. One sailor had been blasted or had fallen out of the position to the main deck where he sprawled with horrible limpness, his face hidden by a chalky hand. At the 40mm gun

***A lucky Jap dive-bomber spoils the day
for the LCI(G) 23 Gunboat***

position a sailor still sat in the trainer's seat, blood running down his face, his dazed eyes fixed on the loader's body huddled under the steel tractor seat at the left of the gun. There was a large jagged hole in the loader's back. A big bomb fragment had hit him full in the chest. A sailor on deck called, "Throw me a blanket. I want to cover Joe." As he stood over one of the dead, his voice was harsh with helpless bitterness. He and Joe had been below arguing about a Stateside furlough 10 minutes before.

Two more men died. The splinters from the feet-away miss had shredded the entire deck, the superstructure and the conning tower like a load of buckshot aimed at a water can.



The Batabagnon raid was Coxswain Kirkbride's fifth without getting a scratch.

The Batabagnon raid was Coxswain Kirkbird's fifth without getting a scratch.

An LCM came alongside and took off the wounded—nine of them. One more died on the way in to the beach, 100 yards away. When the hoses were rigged, the crew of our boat worked feverishly to flood the smouldering hold. One man went below and began plugging the holes in the waterline with bits of wood. His hammering

sounded dully under the excited chatter of the gasoline auxiliary pumps. Skeleton crews manned the guns aboard our craft against the threat of the Jap's return.

Those of us who had no specific duties started to pick up the dead, put them in chicken wire stretchers and pass them over the side into an LCM. At the door of the miniature galley we stopped. One man said, "Oh Christ!" over and over. Finally, we edged inside.

The chief pharmacist had been getting a second cup of coffee when the bomb hit and the biggest part of the splinters had hit that part of the boat. We dug his body out from under an unimaginable mass of debris—coffee, flour, cooking utensils, scraps of aluminum, canned goods split open by the concussion. As we worked to get the body into the stretcher, I slipped in a can of spaghetti. Then I saw it wasn't spaghetti.

Aloft on the tiny gun deck, a sweating, swearing sailor was checking the guns. The 3-inch was out of commission, two 20s and two twin .50s on the starboard side were bomb pitted and gouged with shining pock marks. They wouldn't fire. The sailor was swearing with concentrated bitterness while he alternately trained and elevated the 40. Finally, he said, "She's OK. thank Christ."

He left the job and started to roll up a bomb-slashed tarpaulin, being very careful to square the ends meticulously, like a boot rolling his dress blues. Then he carried it to the side and threw it overboard.

"Been gonna do just that goddam thing for days," he said. I asked him the usual question. "Me? I'm from here. Same goddam islands." He wiped his hands on his shirt.

"Had a wife and a kid in Manila. I was in Pearl when the Japs hit, the family was in Manila." I asked another question. He

nodded. The wife and kid would always be there in Manila. He was coxswain Francis D. Kirkbride.

"I've been through five of these things," he said. "Never a scratch. Hell, everyone on that 3-inch was wounded and I was right beside 'em. Charmed life, I guess." He looked around. "Hell of a mess isn't it?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he



LCI(G) 23 bomb damage. Note the wooden plugs sticking out of the hull.

looked up and yelled: "Hey, skipper. This 40 is OK. But we got no goddam crew to man her."

Aboard our ship Wallace L. Cook PhM2c of Seattle put his medical aid stuff back in a little tin box. He'd treated five wounded men, then he'd tagged the dead with their

names given to him by the wounded men. It was the first time he had been through a strafing job.

"Well, yeah. I guess I was scared. I dunno but I'd go through it again. I'd like to get even a little."

He looked a little pale. Who didn't? Later the little gunboat was beached and camouflaged with a welter of tree branches and palm fronds. She careened slightly as the tide went out. She looked like a drunken whore in night court.

Finally, we went ashore in an LCM that pushed across the calm waters of Opong Bay. It was still a beautiful day. The sun was shining and the blood dried into narrow streaks on the sides of the little gunboat beached in the bay.

Story reprinted from 1944 issue of "Yank Magazine," the Down Under Edition.

The first issue (of Yank) was published with the cover date of June 17 1942.^[4] The magazine was written by [enlisted rank](#) (EM) soldiers with a few officers as managers, and initially was made available only to the US Army overseas.^[5] By the fifth issue of July 15 1942, it was made available to serving members within the US, however it was never made available on the newsstands for public purchase.^[6] YANK's circulation exceeded 2.5 million in 41 countries with 21 editions.^[7] The last issue was published on December 28 1945.^[8] Joe McCarthy remained the editor of Yank until the official closure of the office on New Year's Eve 1945.^[9]

Yank history source: Wikipedia

Submitted by Robert Wright Jr.

Preface

I have often asked the question of the Association's WWII Veterans "What did you do during the war?" That usually results in the same response, "*Nothing special just did my job and tried to not to get killed.*" It seems quite implausible that all of these men did little or "nothing", but at the same time the Armed Forces of United States were able to defeat two of the most powerful military machines the world had known.

I feel that the words "I did my job" is an acknowledgement by these men that they were individuals, Citizen Soldiers of a democratic society, where no one man was more important than any other man. These individuals formed the crews of ships that were then part of the Divisions, Groups, Flotillas, Amphibious Forces and Fleets. All of these components of this total structure relied of the each individual to do their respective job, be it a Motor Machinist, a Gunner or the ship's captain. For total victory, every individual was required to do their part.

This story follows only one ship and one man's time aboard for 30 days. The ship had already been serving in the Southwest Pacific since 1942 as part of Flotilla 7 and had been involved in many of the invasions that had eliminated the Japanese threat in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. By doing "*nothing special*," Chris and the ship were another part of the final chapters concluding World War II.

Day 1 October 2, 1944.

Christopher Shelvik S2/c had received his orders, he was to report aboard USS *LCI(R)*-337. This was his first shipboard assignment and it was to be his last until the war ended. These first 30 days were just an introduction to what the next 11 months would bring.

Chris Shelvik had joined the United States Navy just 10 months prior to this assignment on November 26, 1943. He had said his good-byes to his brothers and sisters. Now a young man of 17 years and 9 months of age was just another of the 2 million men in a Navy uniform at that time. And he was headed for places that you could hardly find on a map, even if you knew where to look.

Chris lived in Hartford Washington in his early years and later moved to Lake Stevens Washington where he had graduated from high school. Both towns were just 45 miles northeast of Seattle. For Boot Camp he was sent to Farragut Idaho, where he spent the winter of 1943-1944. After completing basic training, he was given a 10 pass before reporting to Signal School. By May 1944 Chris had successfully completed the 16-week course where there was a 50% wash out rate. However the Signal Man rating was not to be, due to a "slight infraction of Naval Conduct." The officer in charge thought that a Seaman 2nd class rating was appropriate considering the circumstance. A 10 day leave helped to relieve some of his disappointment.

He then reported for temporary assignment at Bremerton Washington where he was assigned to Gate Escort duty at the Bremerton Navy Hospital. Later with about 400 other men Chris went aboard the USS *Attu* CVE-102 for transfer to Alameda.

The USS *Attu* was built in 1944 in Portland Oregon. An example of the United States industrial capability, her keel had been laid on March 16, 1944 and was commissioned on June 30, 1944. On July 19, 1944 she docked at Bremerton WA loading the supplies of war, before getting back underway to Alameda, CA. For part of the trip from Washington they were provided an antisubmarine escort by a blimp that was based at Tillamook, OR.

Arriving in San Francisco Bay, Chris and the other in the group were disembarked at Treasure Island and later transferred to the adjoining Yerba Linda Island to await forwarding orders. Those

orders arrived and on August 8 1944. He joined 2,866 Navy and Army personnel going aboard the USS *Rochambeau* AP-63, which prior to war, provided service as a French ocean liner.

In 1941 the *Rochambeau* was manned by supporters of the Vichy French Forces. It was berthed in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. A group of US Navy fliers from Patrol Wing 10 and French sailors not sympathetic to the Vichy Government took over the ship and sailed it to New Zealand and then to the US west coast.(but that is a whole other story)

After the USS *Rochambeau* was loaded, she set a course for the South Pacific on August 13. But the trip was cut short 12 hours into the trip, and the ship had to return to San Francisco for engine repairs. The excitement of returning home ended quickly. All hands were confined to the ship for the duration of the repairs, which took until August 17. The USS *Rochambeau* sailed immediately to the Southwest Pacific. They were finally off to the real War.

August 27 failed to occur that year due to crossing the International Date Line. Chris said that the traditional initiation into the Order of Neptune was a bit “rough”. Some men even barricaded themselves below decks to avoid the “ceremony”

Finally, on September 5, 1944, after travelling 6,247 miles, the transport arrived at Milne Bay New Guinea and debarked all passengers following 18 days at sea and an additional 10 days of loading and repairs at San Francisco.

Chris Shelvik was assigned to the Amphibious Base at Milne Bay. He volunteered for guard duty. His specific assignment was to TP detail, which was important because TP was a scarce and valuable commodity in the Southwest Pacific. From Milne Bay he was transferred to US Naval Base 3115 at Hollandia, New Guinea, which only months earlier had been seized from the Japanese. Chris remembered that this trip to his new base was

pleasant, like you would picture, a tropical cruise.

Chris Shelvik is now 18 years old and is on the other side of a world from where he was raised. This begins the story of 30 days on a LCI.

Day 2 October 3, 1944



LCI(R)-337 prior to the Philippine Campaign

Day 2 Chris boarded his new ship the USS *LCI(R)-337* and they were back at sea. Their destination was the large naval anchorage at Manus in the Admiralties 200 miles north of Hollandia, where the US Seventh Fleet had assembled. They were accompanying other members of Flotilla 7 *LCI(R)*'s 230, 34, 338, 340, and 341. During the trip he received instructions and practiced as an ammunition loader on the aft port side 20MM gun. All LCI crew members were expected to perform multiple jobs proficiently if the need arose. There were always more tasks to perform than the number of specifically rated and trained crew members. Now just days into this assignment he was a Signal Man and a Gunner. As he went to his rack in the aft troop compartment, he couldn't help but notice that this war was being fought by a bunch of 18, 19 and 20 year old kids.

Days 2-11 October 3-12, 1944.

After the planning meetings at Manus finished the 337 and the other members of Flotilla 7 returned to the Naval Base at Hollandia to prepare their ships for the next planned invasion.

Day 12--16 October 13-17, 1944.

The ships of Flotilla 7 by Operational Plan 101-44 departed Hollandia. They included *LCI's* 28, 447, 448, 361, 363, 364, 429, 71, 72, 73, 74, 31, 34, 230, 331, 337, 338, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 430, 29, 227, 228 and 432. Their destination was Leyte Gulf in the Philippine Islands, a distance of 1530 miles. It was the middle of typhoon season but the seas remained calm and the weather was sunny and pleasant. The whole cruise was remarkably uneventful, unlike what the next months would bring. The pre-invasion calm was only broken by the occasional air raid warning as the fleet approached their target in the Philippine Islands.

Day 18 October 19, 1944.

It was early Thursday morning in the Western Pacific. Back home it was already Thursday evening. Wives, sweet-hearts, and family members were hurriedly mailing last minute Christmas gifts, in the hope that these presents would reach that special man in their lives before Christmas. They were completely unaware that this task was being made much more difficult for the Fleet Post Office to accomplish because the United States Navy was on the move.

A week earlier, the Seventh Amphibious Force had sailed out of their anchorages at Manus and Hollandia. They had become another part of the thousand ships that were part of Operation Musketeer-King II; whose purpose was take back the Philippine Islands, after they had been lost to the Japanese just 30 months earlier. The first landing targeted Leyte Island on its North East coast. General MacArthur knew that the Japanese were anticipating this invasion; he intended to strike them first where they were the least prepared. Now the experienced crew of the little Rocket Ship prepared as they had done so many times before.

Day 19 October 20, 1944.

When the beach bombardment group of *LCI* Flotilla 7 entered Leyte Gulf it was 3AM. The Invasion was a go! By 6AM the Japanese Air

attacks on the fleet had begun, but it has little effect on the movements of the ships of the Seventh Fleet. At 7AM the heavy bombardment by the battleships, cruisers and destroyers of the landing beaches and surrounding areas had commenced and continued until the landing craft were formed up and were ready for their assault of Leyte's beaches.

USS *LCI(R)*-337 had been assigned to White Beach at San Ricardo in the Northern Attack area. They were supporting units of the 1st Cavalry Division. Earlier that morning, they had loaded 480 4.5inch rockets and at 9AM they formed up with the other *LCI's* of Flotilla 7 and headed toward the target to deliver their deadly barrage. After the 1st rocket barrage they took a fire support position off White beach. But the landings for the most part were unopposed. MacArthur had been right on this point. By 11AM the initial landing was over.

But the Invasion had just begun!

Day 19-22 October 20-23, 1944.



Tacloban, Leyte Air Field 1944

On Leyte, just southeast of the City of Tacloban, was an airstrip that the US Army wanted for air operations to support the troops that had landed. It was captured and air operations began almost immediately. The US operations from the air base attracted the attention of the Japanese and it became a target for constant night attacks. War time air operations often result in fire from burning

planes and burning aviation gasoline. Chris pointed out that one of the items that is not normally loaded on LST and Attack Transports is fire equipment and firemen to fight those fires.

When the LCI's of Flotilla 7 were converted to Rocket Ships in the Southwest Pacific, they also added additional firefighting and salvage equipment. One additional officer and 17 men were also assigned to the Flotilla who were fire fighting specialists. Their task was to train the men on how to properly fight various types of fires.

Then every night from October 20-24 the Japanese attacked the air field. Their planes always managed to start several fires. When the Army requested help from the Navy, the Navy would then order the Firefighting LCI(R)'s to the scene. The LCI's nosed on to the beach adjacent to the airstrip and ran 2 ½ inch hoses to the point where they could fight these fires. Some nights it would take hours to bring these blazes under control. During that time the tide would fall and a few unlucky LCI's became stranded until the next tide.

Day 24 October 25, 1944.



USS LCI(R)-72 port side of the USS Sonoma

At 0845 the morning of October 24, 1944, the fire fighting ships of Flotilla 7 were ordered to respond to the aid of the USS *Sonoma* (ATO-12). The fleet tug had been crashed dived by a Japanese BETTY bomber. The LCI(R)-72 was the first ship on scene and immediately began fire fighting and rescue operations. She was soon joined by the fleet tug USS *Chicksaw* (ATF-83). LCI(R)-337 came

along side the LCI(R)-72 to provide assistance in caring for the wounded evacuated from the USS *Sonoma*.

Just on October 25, 1944 the ship's logs record 3 separate air attacks on the ships of Flotilla 7. During the previous evening, all hell had broken out in the seas around Leyte Island. In the Surigao Strait to the southeast the old Battleships of the US Navy had retribution for their loss at Pearl Harbor by destroying an attacking Japanese battle fleet. That morning, northeast of Leyte, another US Navy Task Group comprised of escort carriers and their screening destroyers and destroyer-escorts, had taken on another Japanese battle fleet and turned them back. During that engagement 5 ships of the US Navy had been sunk.

Early in the morning of the 25th a request was sent up the chain of command to organize a search and rescue task group to find the any possible survivors of the ships that had gone down. It took a second request later in the day of the 25th before the orders were cut and Task Group 78.12 was formed. It consisted of 2 Patrol Craft (PCs) and 5 LCIs. The officer requesting the LCI's as part of the task group, reasoned that the bow ramps on the LCI would be helpful in getting men out of the water, and the troop compartments would provide berthing for the wounded and other survivors. This was the Navy, and snafus had been known to occur. The LCI(R) attached to the search and rescue group had neither the bow ramps nor the troop compartments because they had been removed during their conversion to a Rocket Ships. At 1900 (7PM) the LCI(R)s 34, 71, 337, 340, and 341 with PC 623 and 1119 set course for the area off Samar Island to look for the survivors.

Day 25 October 26, 1944.

At 6AM the Task Group arrived in the area where they determined that the survivors would be based on the information that they had received. With 2000 yard intervals between ships they began a north south sweep at 10 knot speed for 25 miles before changing to the opposite direction. The

process continued though the daylight hours. At 2127 *LCI(R)*-337 spotted debris and oil but no signs of life. They had been on this mission for over 24 hours. Any of the crew who were not on watch were topside peering out into the waves searching for any possible survivors.

Day 26 October 27, 1944.

0055 the crew spotted their first survivor
0142 brought another survivor aboard.
0215 Life boat with survivors spotted and rescued
0654 4 survivors spotted and rescued
0745 58 Survivors from the USS *Hoel* (DD-533)
0840 Located additional survivor
0900 Rescued 1 from USS *Johnston* (DD-557)
0905 Rescued 5 from USS *Johnston* (DD-557)
0930 Rescued additional group of 85 men



A Rescue off Samar

During a period of 8 hours, 172 survivors were brought aboard the *LCI(R)*-337. 25 were stretcher cases from wounds that they received in battle. 60 others had other wounds ranging from major to minor and all suffered from exposure from the 2 days they spent in the waters off Samar after their ships sank. Even after giving up all the bunk spaces of the officers and crew on the ship, there still wasn't enough bunk space to accommodate all the wounded. At 1000 the Task Group retired from the

search and set course for Leyte Gulf. There were hundreds of survivors aboard the 7 ships that required immediate medical care. At 1840 (6:40PM) the *LCI(R)*-337 maneuvered along side of DE-47 to transfer their doctor to treat the more seriously wounded.

Day 27 October 28, 1944.

LCI(R)-337 comes alongside the Hospital Ship *LST-464* at 0850 and begins the process to transfer all the injured sailors and airmen that had been rescued. Following the evacuation the ship proceeded to the transport area to offload the remaining survivors. Then the crew turned to the task of cleaning the ship of blood, bandages, oil and sea water.

Day 28 October 29, 1944.

A "Moderate Typhoon" was predicted to arrive at the anchorage at San Pedro late in the day. By evening it was a full gale. "Ships in the harbor were slipping anchor and attempting wild maneuvers to prevent collisions with other ships." It was a preview of events that would occur 1 year later at Okinawa.

Postscript

Chris Shelvik was selected as the subject of this story because he is one of the oldest original members and the highest seniority in the USS LCI National Assoc. He has Membership #9, which was assigned originally by Tiny Clarkson, long before the days of computerized record keeping.

When I interviewed Chris, I asked what he was doing during all these events. He explained that he was a trained Signaller and was stationed on the Conn with the ship's captain, just doing what he was ordered to do.

During the 30 days in this story, not a single member of the crew was cited for any action above and beyond the call of duty. Action Reports stated only, "Performance of the officers and men was of the highest order". Just "*Nothing Special*" for a bunch of 18, 19 and 20- year old kids.

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!

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Attention LCI Veterans and Associates

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

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On 16 March 1942 the Amphibious Training Command was set up to train men for invasions in landing crafts. This embroidered patch was worn by Gator sailors.

