



Elsie Item

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

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PEACE – VJ Day Leyte Gulf



Inside this issue...

- 341's new Chief
- Walt Shult's war memories
- LCI training at Little Creek



Navy and Coast Guard Veterans of World War II and Korea USS LANDING CRAFT INFANTRY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

MISSION

The USS LCI National Association is dedicated to preserving the history of the World War II Landing Craft Infantry ships and honoring the sailors that manned them. In our publications and website you will find first-hand accounts from the sailors, stories about the battles they fought, the experiences they had, and historical photos.

usslci.org



To learn more about **your** LCI history, **your** collective experiences during the war, and other related LCI information, please visit **your** website. Here you will find all the information related to LCIs that we have acquired. **Enjoy your visit!!**

ABOUT US

- What We Do
- Officers & Executive Board
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- Non-Profit Status

THE STORIES

- Featured Stories
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THE ELSIE ITEM

- Recent Articles Available Online*
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- Other Research Resources

THE LCI EXPERIENCE

- LCI Facts
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- Honor, Valor, Sacrifice
- Reunions
- The LCI-713

* Note: The most recent articles and updates to the site will appear shortly after the publication of each Elsie Item Issue

Your Story



We are always looking for stories and memories of your LCI service. Although we are primarily interested in your experiences aboard an LCI ship, 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: usslci.org/share-your-story/. Any letter to the editor can be sent to **Jeff Veesenmeyer** (JeffreyMktg@gmail.com) or the postal address below.

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"Elsie Item": 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.

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

A Word from Officers Country

by Robert E Wright Jr, President

During the past 12 months I have visited four of the American World War II museums.

September 2018 **The National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX**

The National Museum of the Pacific War “*honors the millions of Americans who met and defeated the greatest threat of the 20th Century to freedom and democracy*”.

December 2018 **Pearl Harbor National Memorial, Hawaii**

“*Central to the National Park Service mission at Pearl Harbor is memorializing those who fell during the December 7, 1941, attack on Oahu.*” Currently Pearl Harbor is the largest single tourist attraction in Hawaii.

May 2019 **Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum, Portland OR**

Their “*Mission is to preserve the history of the Amphibious Forces in WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam, to educate the public on the rich naval and maritime heritage that the Amphibious Forces have played in our nation’s history, and the importance of preserving historic naval ships for the future generations.*”

August 2019 **The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, LA**

This growing institution “*tells the story of the American experience in the war that changed the world—why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today—so that all generations will understand the price of freedom and be inspired by what they learn.*” This museum is ranked the #8 Museum in the World, the #3 Museum in the United States and the # 1 attraction in New Orleans.

As Ken Burns said in his famous TV series, “The War,” it would be impossible to tell every story of the millions of men and women who served in uniform. No one single venue is able to tell the complete story of all who served, but each makes an attempt to inform and educate the public with informative static and multimedia displays. Each museum has a unique perspective and presentations of events during the War Years of which covered a period from early 1930’s through 1945. These museums are staffed by many volunteers who are truly interested in providing the public with the facts and information regarding the events of 75 years ago. Universally, the people that I encountered were interested in the knowing the facts of what occurred during those dark years, especially the events, involving their family members.

I took time to meet with the curators of these museums to make certain that the contributions of the men of the United States Navy’s Landing Craft Infantry, will continue to be presented and recorded for the future generations of researchers and museum visitors. I was very appreciative that they all are interested and committed to telling your story.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE—GOD'S WAY

Holy Bible NASB

Psalm 34: 11-16, Joshua 1:8, Isaiah 45:12,
Proverbs 3:5,6

In my last article in the ELSIE Item, I mentioned my love for the Psalms. My attention was recently drawn to Psalm 34: 11-16 printed below. It speaks very pointedly to any group of people in any period of time:

11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 Who is the man who deserves life and loves length of days that he may see good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.

16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

The way to a successful life in God's eyes is given here, and obedience to God's word in the Bible is the key. The book of Joshua echoes the same message with these words "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do all that is written in it. Then you will make your way prosperous and have good success."

I could go into a long narration of how far nations and people have departed from the

basic principles of the Bible, but it is evidenced all around us. So I will just leave you to consider how the ship of society can be redirected to its proper course. The words of the Psalmist and Joshua above point in the right direction.

Isiah 45:12 says "Come to me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other."

Solomon also has some good advice to consider in 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."

So Shipmates, navigate your course with God at the helm and be sure of a successful journey on the sea of life here, and a safe harbor hereafter.

Ebenezer (I Samuel 7:12)

RM-1/C Abe Laurenzo LCI 47, 409



In Memoriam

LCI 331
Andrew M. Ratcliff

LCI 421
Winfield Coles

LCI 519
James C. Hanlon

LCI 565
Gerald Judge

LCI 615
Lloyd Spahr

LCI 661
Richard C. Gibson

LCI 683
Gerald Rone

LCI 726
John B. Stilley

LCI 968
Erwin L. Bentlage

LCI 1080
Harold Lanfear





Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Thank you for your letters and emails

Greetings,

I have been notified that my book, "A Child's Life - Interrupted by the Imperial Japanese Army" is now available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

It would be nice if note could be made of it in "The Voice of the Angels" and "Elsie".

Cordially,

Robert A. Wheeler
Los Banos Internee
RM2 U.S. Navy - U.S.S. Avocet
MHC#16(Ex LCI(L) #653)

Editors Note: This book by Robert Wheeler is about his ordeal as a 7-year old internee of the Japanese during WWII. He was living in Manila, Philippines with his parents and younger brother when the Japanese invaded. They survived brutal conditions for 2-1/2 years until liberated.

Dear Editor,

My grandfather, Felix Bevilacqua, was aboard LCI 93 with the 453rd amphibious truck company, on the D-Day Omaha landings. He told stories often of the brave men aboard the ship that got him to the beach. He survived Omaha, and the war and lived to be 92 years old, passing away on June 17, 2014. Thank you for providing this detailed account of what happened that day, as he rarely went into specific details of the

landings, but more often summarized what happened. It was great to read the exact details in this piece. His story can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgLteAqolcU>

Joe Maiorana

Jeff,

Thank you so much for writing my dad's article. There was information in your article that I wasn't aware of. I have to admit I had a hard time reading it. It was very emotional for me. I still haven't been able to finish the whole article. Would you be able to send me an extra copy? I would like to give it to my 13 year-old grandson, William, who was named after my dad. He may not appreciate it now, but I think when he gets a little older he would appreciate having remembrance of his namesake. Thank you so much for writing the article. It meant a lot to my family.

*Kathy Handler - daughter of Bill Simmons
LCI(L) 756*

Editors Note: Bill Simmons great grandson, William, has been sent a copy of Elsie Item Issue 105 June 2019

We need veteran's stories. It is a wonderful way to preserve history and the legacy of those who served. It also provides genealogical records for your family. Many of the stories in Elsie Item begin with a photo, a letter or a single memory of an event. We can expand your story through research and data in our LCI archives. Contact a Board member with your story.

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

JeffreyMktg@gmail.com or my mailing address

659 Granite Way – Sun Prairie, WI 53590

LCI 341's slick sleeved chief

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Not many sailors make Chief Petty Officer in two years. But Machinist Mate Harry Ritzel did just that. He was called a "Slick Sleeved Chief." He had no hash marks (one for every four years of service) on his sleeve.

Ritzel's story begins in 1942. He graduated from high school and turned 18 that year. He wanted to join the Navy before he got drafted. He and his dad sat up one night discussing his desire to enlist. "Dad finally gave in with an okay, don't come back wondering why I gave you permission," said Ritzel. "I joined up on November 19, 1942. I had to enlist for six years. I did my boot in Maryland. When I got home on leave all my buddies were gone. They'd been drafted into the Army."

Ritzel was sent to Newport News Amphibious base after boot camp and then to Richmond, Virginia for diesel mechanics school. He had no previous mechanical experience. He had helped his dad with electrical work during the depression. But all he did was hand his dad tools. Some mechanical aptitude apparently rubbed off. The diesel school was all book learning. Ritzel aced the final test.

His test score earned him four weeks at the advanced machinist school. "Very interesting," he explained. "We had a running diesel engine from a submarine to work on." The instructor showed them a pin that he called the Jesus Christ pin. When asked why it was called that he told them they'd find out soon. Sure enough, someone



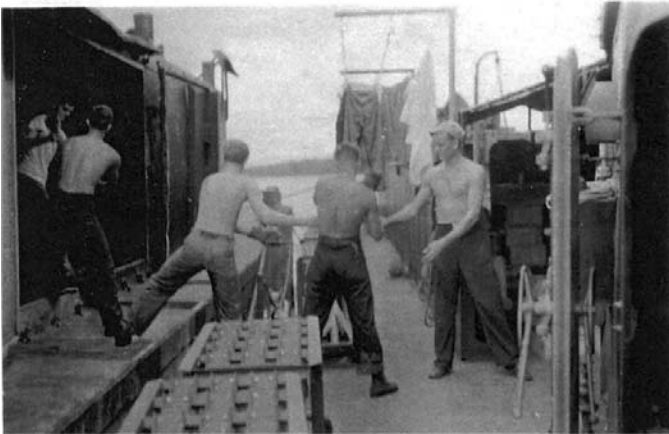
Chief Harry Ritzel, was 20 years old when he passed the Chief's test. He had just two years of service in the Navy.

lost the pin in the engine. It took them two and half hours to find it, and yes, "Jesus Christ" was muttered more than once. That pin would have ruined the engine if not found.

Ritzel picked up his first ship in Boston. He spent seven months on the *LCI 352* and participated in three invasions. During 1943 the 352 landed troops on Admiralty Islands, Bougainville and New Guinea. In April of 1944 Ritzel got new orders. He was to be reassigned on *LCI(L) 341*.

The 341 was in dry dock at Cairns, Queensland on the north east coast of Australia. On 4 September 1943 she had participated in landings at Lae, New Guinea.

While approaching the beach with troops of the Australian 9th Division the ship was strafed and bombed by Japanese planes. A direct hit killed many of the Aussie troops. These were the guys who had earned the moniker “The Rats of Tobruk” while fighting in Africa. The Executive Officer of the 341 was able to maneuver his badly damaged ship to the beach and unload the remaining troops while under intense fire. LT(jg) Robert Rolf, skipper was killed several days later while conducting salvage operations. He received the Navy Cross posthumously and had a destroyer escort named in his honor. The 341 would be out of commission for many months. The hull needed extensive repairs. While in dry dock the ship was also being outfitted for rocket racks in preparation for the invasion of Japan. The LCI(L) 341 would eventually be redesignated LCI(R) 341...but not until July of 1945.



Five-inch rockets and launchers were loaded on the 341 in preparation for the invasions of the Philippines and Japan.

During the ship's overhaul, Ritzel had ample time to become acquainted with his new crewmates. Her ship's complement increased from 21 to 31 enlisted. This was needed to man the additional armament that

now included one 40mm, four 20mm, two 50 cal. and six 5-inch rocket launchers. His duty was to keep the eight GM diesel engines running. His immediate boss was Chief Motor Mac Andy Festa.

Harry Ritzel: *“Chief Festa had been a bat boy for the A’s baseball team. He must have had connections to become a Chief Motor Mac. He knew nothing about diesel engines. He spent his days on deck drinking coffee.”*

One night, Ritzel was woken up with a battle lantern in his face. The messenger said, “Skipper wants you in the engine room now!” Ritzel realized there was no sound from the ship. Engines were always running to power everything on the ship. They were dead in the water. The skipper needed to get going. The fleet was 50 miles away and they were supposed to meet up with it soon.

Ritzel began looking for possible problems. He took the lantern and checked the oil tanks. They had recently taken on a load of diesel grade bunker oil. Turns out it had water in it. “There was an inch and a half of water, said Ritzel. I told the crew to open the bilge until they started getting oil.” Once the water was drained out, he started the engines and went back to his bunk. Problem solved, end of story he thought. Next morning Chief Festa was gone. Ritzel never found out what happened but he was assigned to the Chief's job.

Ritzel went to his skipper LT(jg) Wallin and said, “If I’m doing the Chief’s job, do I get the Chief’s pay? The skipper made him a deal. “Tell you what,” he said. “If you take the Chief’s test and ace it, you’ll be the Chief.” Ritzel thought, what the heck, I’ve got nothing to lose. He took the test. There

were 163 questions and 129 were essay. All essays laid out a problem and he had to explain how to fix it. "I aced the exam and was promoted to Chief a few days later."

There were eight men in the engine room, and they all got along fine. After the first week, Ritzel was warned to start delegating more work. If he didn't, he wouldn't remain Chief for long. One guy told him he only took orders from his dad. Ritzel said, "I'm your daddy now." There never was another problem with discipline.

Ritzel proved his ability to manage the engine room time and again. Once they took on a load of bad oil. The injectors became clogged. Taking them out, cleaning them and putting them back together is an exacting job requiring precise clearance tolerances. It took Ritzel 23 hours to complete the work. "No one else on my crew could have done the job," said Ritzel. "If the tolerance was off at flank speed you could lose an engine."

One day the Ritzel's crew was doing maintenance on the engines. There was oil on the deck and equipment. The engineering officer came down in his clean uniform and started walking around. He certainly wasn't there to help. He didn't know anything about diesel engines. One of the guys told Ritzel to get him out of there. Ritzel said, "Sir would mind leaving, I don't want you to get oil on your clothes." The LT(jg) snapped back, "Are you ordering me out of the engine room?" Ritzel said, "Not yet, but if I have to yes...get out." The junior officer went straight up to the skipper to report Ritzel for insubordination. Everyone on the ship could hear the LT(jg) Wallin ream his engineering officer up one side and down the other. He

told him when Chief Ritzel tells you to get out, you don't walk out, you fly out!

On 25 October 1944 *LCI(L) 341* was anchored in San Pedro Bay off Leyte Island in the Philippines. Over 100,000 invasion troops were already ashore and the harbor was jam packed with supply and support ships. The five LCIs in the harbor received the following message. "STAND BY TO GET UNDERWAY! IMMEDIATELY!! EMERGENCY!" Ritzel and crew were about to become saviors to sailors who fought in the historic "Battle of Samar."

In a desperate attempt to wipe out the American landings Japan had dispatched two naval task forces. One strike force had been beaten back the day before. A second task force slipped through San Bernardino Strait and stumbled into the small escort carrier group Taffy 3. The Japanese Strike force included 4 battleships, 8 cruisers and 11 destroyers. Taffy 3 had 6 "jeep carriers" and 7 destroyers. It was 18-inch guns against 5-inch guns. They were horribly outnumbered and out gunned. All planes were launched. At least aircraft wouldn't go down if the carriers were sunk. Their planes were lightly armed for ground support, not steel ships. Pilots strafed and harassed the battlewagons with anything they could fire. The U.S. tin cans turned to make suicidal torpedo attacks. It was like the "charge of the light brigade." Every ship in Taffy 3 was hit. Miraculously, the heroic efforts from the destroyermen and pilots turned the Jap strike force back. But 2 destroyers, 1 destroyer escort and one escort carrier, the *Gambier Bay*, were sunk. Hundreds of U.S. sailors were in the water trying to survive, thirst, hunger, sharks and hypothermia. Five LCIs

and two Patrol Craft were assigned to the rescue efforts. The ships formed a line abreast and made 25-mile sweeps off Samar Island. By the time *LCI(L) 341* started picking up sailors, they had been in the water for 37 hours.



This photo of the rescue was the cover photo for the book "Last of the Tin Can Sailors."

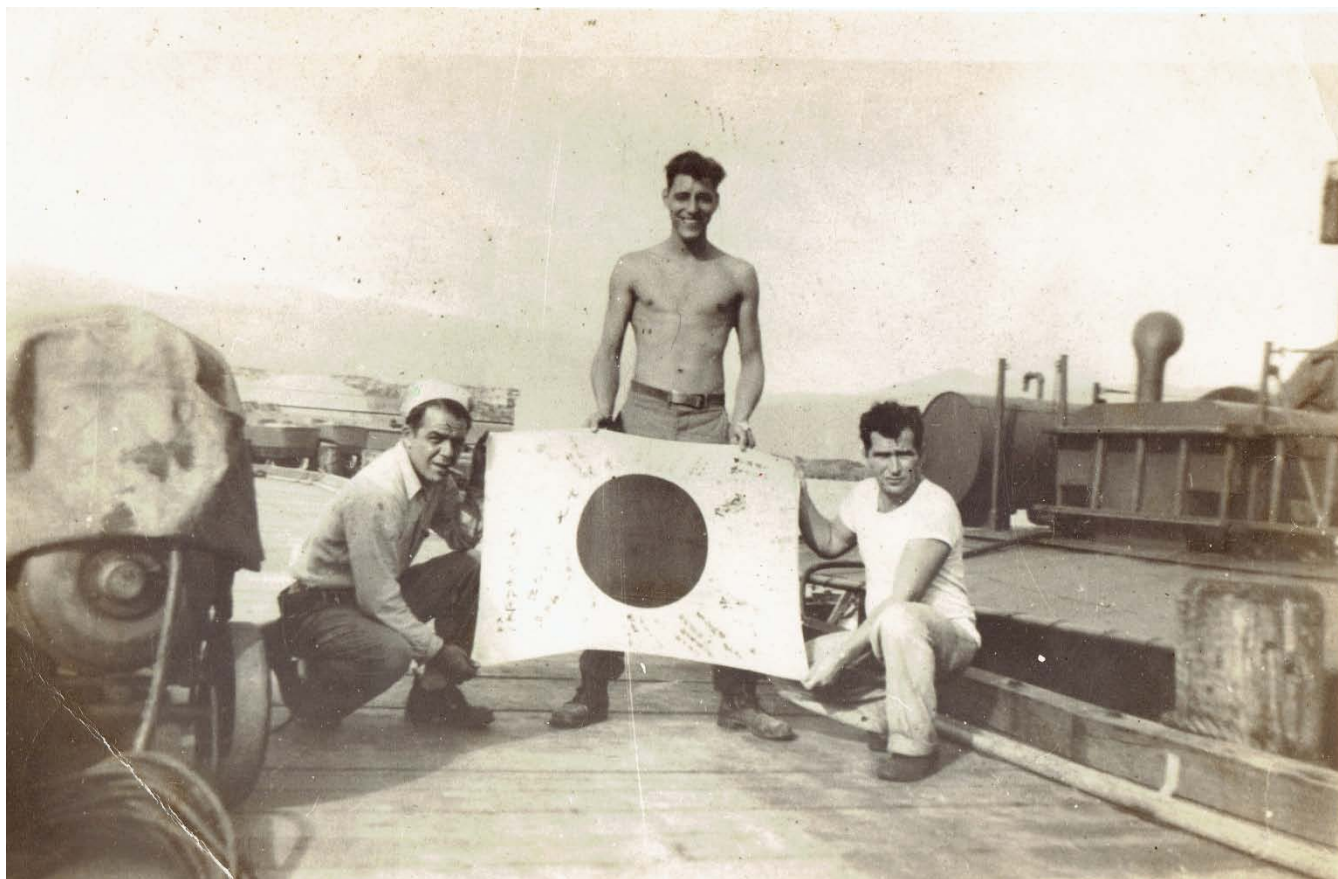
Ritzel remembers that "We rescued 90 men from the *Gambier Bay* at midnight. Then we picked up destroyer survivors the next day." The seven ships provided a remarkable rescue effort. The *Gambier Bay* had a crew of 849 and 727 were rescued. The 2 destroyers (*Johnston and Hoel*) and the destroyer escort (*Roberts*) had a combined complement of 937 men. 423 of them were rescued. The battle of Samar is considered the last great naval ship battle.

Harry Ritzel was there and takes pride in being part of the action.

On 10 July 1945 the newly outfitted Landing Craft Rocket ship was officially redesignated *LCI(R) 341*. Four weeks later the atom bombs were dropped on Japan and the war was over.

The *341* was anchored at Manus Island, Papua New Guinea when they dropped the Atom bombs. The crew was working on deck preparing for the invasion of Japan when they heard Japan had surrendered. "I didn't believe it until another guy confirmed the Japs *had* surrendered. Dropped some kind of A-bombs or something on them. I spent 24 months aboard ship without any leave," remembers Ritzel. Officers and ranking petty officers had been granted leave. Not me. I complained to the skipper. He told me, "We need you for the operational integrity of the ship. You are the most important man aboard. Tell you what though, when the surrender is official you will be the first to go home."

Ritzel thought, he'd be getting off this ship any day now. But a month later his skipper was gone and Ritzel was still on Manus Island. Others were getting shipped back. The list for being transferred to a liberty ship had a column showing how many months each man had been at war. Ritzel finally checked the list. Somebody had made a typo after his name. There was 2 Instead of 24 in the month column. He went to the new skipper and got transferred to destroyer bound for San Francisco the next day. "I was home in 11.5 days," said Ritzel.



Harry Ritzel, center with shipmates on the LCI(L) 341, displaying a captured Japanese flag.

The invasion of Japan wouldn't be needed. But all the rockets, bombs and munitions that would have been dropped on Japan needed to be dropped into the ocean. When Ritzel finally got back to the states he was reassigned to LSTs to dump ammo for the next six months. Then he went to Columbia to load up with Iron Wood. This dense, heavy wood was needed to build docks at Guantanamo in Cuba.

Ritzel's experience and training in the Navy was absolutely a post war career changer. He went to work for General Electric as a high voltage test man for 57 cents an hour. His navy scores and leadership ability soon got him into GE's three-year course for corporate training. He had a successful 32-year career at GE.

Over the years he attended five LCI reunions. He never met any of his 341 shipmates but did see some of his shipmates from the 352. Today he lives in Leesburg, Florida. His wife of 38 years is in a nursing home. Harry visits her every day.



Harry Ritzel age 95, living in Leesburg, FL

Walt Shults' War in the Pacific

By Walt Shults and Joe Flynn

On a lazy Sunday afternoon on December 7, 1941, I was laying on the floor after dinner listening to the radio with my grandparents.

Suddenly, President Roosevelt came on the radio to announce that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor and sunk a number of our Battleships and Cruisers. What was left of the Navy had been out to sea on exercises. All that was left was a few Aircraft Carriers and Destroyers. The early Sunday morning sneak attack by the Japanese had killed over 2,000 Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard service members. Almost all of our aircraft were caught on the ground and destroyed. A few of our aircraft made it into the air and shot some of the enemy out of the sky before running out of ammunition.

My parents were shocked beyond words. My uncle was there and he was not at a loss for words. He yelled, "We will get those B#@%#*%'s."

It seemed from that Sunday on, every able-bodied man was enlisting in the Armed Forces to protect the United States. Being only 13 at the time I was too young to join the military, but I started planning a way to get into the Navy. A year later, I had changed my birth certificate and I was in Navy Boot Camp at Newport, RI, at 15 years of age. After Boot Camp and School, I graduated as a Navy Signalman 3rd Class, trained in Visual Communication.

Most radio communication at that time was limited since it could be picked up by the enemy. As an alternative, Visual Communication was used; Semaphore, Morse Code and Flashing Light. Usually these

transmissions were from ship to ship and could not be easily picked up by the enemy.

As a Signalman reading these messages then giving them to the Officers, you were the first to know where we were going and why. The hard part was keeping quiet and let the Officers tell the ship's crew.

Secondary schools followed in radio communications to be used in emergencies. From there I was sent to the Amphibious Forces Training Base in Solomons, MD. Here crews were taught to operate the new Landing Craft Infantry (LCI.) Designed to run up on the beach and land Army and Marines under fire, it looked to me like we would be sitting "Ducks" for the enemy. In fact, many of the LCI's used in Normandy were badly damaged by German shore Batteries with large loss of personnel.

A number of changes were made to the LCI's as they were being deployed to the Pacific. The side ramps were removed and a bow door added to provide more protection to the troops going ashore. More improvements were made to increase armament from 20 mm to 40 mm's, and rocket launching tubes were added to provide more firepower support for landing troops.

Next came the addition of three, 4.2-inch Mortars in the well deck of an LCI. The mortars were adjusted to fire far ahead of our troops. The Army Forward Observers would be talking to the Mortar Crews by radio to give us settings to reach the enemy. At first the Mortars created problems; the shock on firing caused the welded seams of the LCI to separate. Then a smart Sailor suggested Sand Boxes to cushion the shock. Three 4 foot by 5-foot boxes were built and one foot of sand added to absorb the shock. Worked wonders.

With the addition of Mortars, the designation changed to LCI(M) for Mortars. This was the type of LCI that I sailed on during the invasion of Kerama Retta Island and Okinawa on April 1, 1945. The ship was *LCI(M) 807*.

The following is a summary of the LCI 807, after action report for 1 April, 1945, by Joe Flynn:

The 807 was detached with the 808 to provide Mortar support on the northern beaches of Okinawa Shima. At 0803 proceeding toward the beach in line, abreast with other support craft. At 0809, 3200 yards from the beach, opened fire with Mortar and 40mm, with shells falling on the beach as we closed. At 0816 a shell stuck in the barrel of number one Mortar. Other Mortars and the 40 mms continued firing. As the gunner's mate attempted to remove the shell, at 0821 a terrific explosion on the well deck. A sheet of flame covered the forward part of the ship. All "increments" (propellants) on mortars in the ready boxes burned and four cans of 40 mm shells on the foc'sle deck exploded.

Twelve men were either blown or jumped overboard. It seems at first as if the Mortar magazine under the well deck has gone off. Most of the flames disappeared immediately and a hose quickly put out small fires still burning. The cause of the explosion was not immediately determined as several men are overboard and some of those aboard are badly wounded. After maneuvering to come closer to the men in the water, we see three small hospital boats picking them up. Under orders, we proceeded to the LST casualty evacuation ship, while giving first aid to the wounded.

Remainder of the day spent in the reserve area cleaning up the ship and determining the extent of casualties reported from LST's and APA's to which men were evacuated.

Casualty report: one killed in action, three died of wounds received in action, eight seriously wounded by shrapnel, and thirteen received minor shrapnel wounds. #17. Shults, Walter E., SM3/c, Wounds, multiple, prognosis, favorable. Disposition, overboard and picked up by *LCI(M) 809*. Transferred to *LST 950*. then to *APA 95*, then to *809*, then back to the *807*. *Long way back to the ship*.

So, by War's end, Walt had fulfilled his plan to join the Navy to protect the USA, and by now he was old enough to enlist... *legally*.

After stops at the San Diego Navy Hospital and Philadelphia Naval Hospital for surgery to repair shrapnel wounds, he was released in Feb. 1946.



Walt Shults, in the Pacific in WWII. Walt must have been all of age 16 1/2 in this picture.

Challenges for Manning the LCIs

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

The Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) included several classes of seagoing amphibious assault ships. Some 923 were built starting in 1943. They were developed in response to a British request for a vessel capable of carrying and landing more troops than their smaller Landing Craft Assault (LCA). The result was a small steel ship that could land 200 troops directly on the beach. The design complement as seen by the Bureau of Ships was three officers and 21 enlisted. As variant classes were converted to gun, mortar or rocket ships the crew complements became even greater.

It was a challenge for the Navy to acquire, evaluate, train and assign to ships the 20,000 enlisted and 3,000 officers needed. LCIs were being launched at the rate of about one per day. Crews had to be ready to meet the shipbuilders schedules. The Navy policy to man these ships was to place a seasoned petty officer in each department on board. Everyone else in the enlisted ranks was a seaman. Most were just out of boot camp or had qualified only as a striker. The officers were low ranking Lieutenant (jg)s and Ensigns. Sometimes, only the skipper had any sea duty.

Navy planners realized early in the war that beach landings would be required for invading foreign shores. For it to be successful, landing large numbers of troops and equipment while under fire, required specialized training. LCIs were capable of landing right on the beach. Crews called

themselves “gators.” They’d be subjected to mortars, machine guns and small arms fire during an invasion.

Most LCI ship training was done at Little Creek, Virginia under the Amphibious Training Command (ATC). The order first went out to build an amphibious force in 1942. The Amphibious Training Command was created in March of that year. It began with an eight-man staff, no equipment or office space. The ATC base became a beehive of activity throughout the war. Over 360,000 navy and Marine and army personnel passed through the training center. Most training techniques were developed from scratch.



A Gator Newsletter from 1945 featured the physical training that was required of amphib sailors. Team sports, an obstacle course and hand to hand combat were all part of their training. LCIs were trained at Solomons Island, Maryland too.

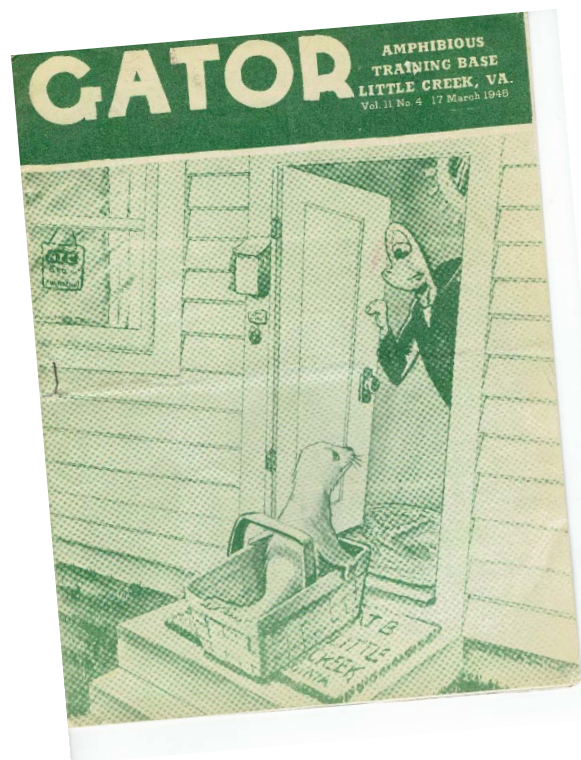
There was a whirlwind process to assign incoming officers and sailors to ships. They would receive six weeks in classrooms which were Quonset huts heated by potbelly coal stoves. The sidewalks were duckboards set in mud. ATC seldom had any LCIs available to the train on. Finding officers for these ships was a thorny problem. The Navy was in the midst of an all-out buildup for the final phases of the war in the Pacific. The four Iowa class battleships; several fleet aircraft carriers; and countless destroyers and cruisers of every description were on their ways. The Electric Boat Company and many subcontractors including one in Manitowoc, Wisconsin – were turning out fleet submarines too. The amphibious forces had to find their officer cadre in places that would not be an inconvenience the “real Navy.”

Some LCI Captains were only Ensigns in rank

Nearly every officer in the LCI fleet was a reservist. Usually only one officer – the skipper – had any sea experience. Some LCI captains were only Ensigns in rank. They came from the fleet, having served as junior division officers in the larger ships or as department heads in destroyers or destroyer escorts. The LCI billet called for the rank of Lieutenant. A few skippers were Lieutenants; many more were jgs, and some were even Ensigns who had direct promotion from the rank of Chief or First-Class petty officer. Those “mustangs” who had been in-charge of a tug or patrol boat

usually had better command experience than the rest. Other officers came from anywhere they could be found. Junior and senior Naval ROTC classes were commissioned prior to graduation and sent to Little Creek. Some were new graduates from officer candidate schools. These men were usually graduate engineers who were recruited into the Navy and sent to diesel school for the engine types used.

By the spring of 1945 Little Creek had trained an amphibious force capable of manning thousands of LSMs, LCUs, LCVPs and LCIs. Men trained by the ATC shipped out to confront and confound the Axis in over 35 major invasions.



The Gator Newsletter was a weekly publication for the amphib sailors training at Little Creek. It was designed to build morale and pride in the mission for their class of ships.

Sources include: Gator Newsletter, ATC Little Creek, VA; Alligator Alley Newsletter LSM-LSMR Association.

What we printed 20 years ago

"Only in America"

World War II Aboard a Landing Craft Gunboat

Our wars to stop aggression, both in Europe and in the Far East, are laced with tales of tragedy and heroism in the pursuit of happiness and a better life. We Americans have always had the opportunity to better ourselves if we were willing to pay the price.

This tale starts with a civilian born in the southern part of the USA. I wouldn't say that he never wore shoes, but he was of a hardworking rural family and when asked to serve the US it was a traumatic event. Navy life as an apprentice seaman in the South Pacific aboard an LCI gunboat was not living high on the hog, but he did his duties and even helped with Sunday church service when possible.

On January 18, 1945, the *LCI(G)396* was destroyed after hitting a Jap mine just off an enemy-held island. The enemy fired rifles, mortars, and a field gun in trying to complete the kill. The courage and togetherness of the 13th Flotilla performed acts of bravery and helped save some lives that would have surely been lost. We are very grateful.

In May 1946, after being wounded, our subject, the sailor Elwood Kees, Jr., was discharged from the US Navy. Upon discharge, he decided to pursue a college degree at Louisiana Polytechnic. Always having an interest in aviation, Elwood entered the school's ROTC program. In October 1948 he reentered active military service as an aviation cadet and in September 1949 received his pilot wings and commission as a second lieutenant.

He then went to Japan where he was a fighter pilot with the 36th Fighter-Bomber Squadron. He later joined the 80th Fighter-Bomber Squadron in Korea. In June 1951 he was assigned to Langley Air Force Base, VA, as a fighter pilot with the 111th Fighter-Bomber Squadron. He went with this squadron to Japan and then to Korea for another combat tour. In December 1968 he returned to South Asia for yet another combat tour. He served at Cam Ranh Bay Air Force Base in the Republic of Vietnam, first as a Director of the Command Post for the 12th Tactical

Fighter Wing, and later as a Commander of the 558th Tactical Fighter Squadron, flying F-4s.

In November 1971 he was reassigned to Headquarters Aerospace Defense Command, where he served successively as Deputy Chief for Safety, Deputy Inspector General, and Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.

In 1972 he completed the Industrial College of the Armed Forces correspondence course as a distinguished graduate with the highest average score ever attained to that date. He became Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations for Aerospace Defense Command, and Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, NORAD, in October 1974. He assumed command of the 25th NORAD Region and 25th Air Division in June 1976.

He is a command pilot with more than 4,600 hours of flying time, including more than 500 hours logged as a jet fighter pilot on 300 combat missions while serving in Korea and the Republic of Vietnam. His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross with three oak leaf clusters, Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with 20 oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Purple Heart, Distinguished Unit Citation Emblem, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award Ribbon, and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon.

Members of the LCI Association, I'd now like you to meet our subject sailor ... General Elwood A. Kees Jr. At our next LCI Reunion, please step forward to meet him-Navy trained and always proud of his Navy days. He is an inspiration to our young people as to what can be accomplished if the desire is there. The ship's company, both living or deceased, of *LCI(G)396* are very proud of him and of his Navy background. Proudly submitted by: Dick Ludwinski BM 2/C USS *LCI(G)396*.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article appeared in *Elsie Item*, Issue 30 September 1999. General Kees retired in 1979.

The Line Crossing

There is a historic time-honored tradition when a navy ship crosses the equator. It's called "crossing the line." It dates back to the days of tall-masted ships in the Royal British Navy. It's a way to initiate rookies and take a break from the monotony of weeks at sea. The following letter is from Lieutenant Louis A. Schauer from Wisconsin writing to a former work supervisor. He describes the ritual in detail while aboard a transport during the war. He was an aircrew navigator catching a ride to a new duty station, not a member of the ship's crew. He became a shellback anyhow.

Somewhere in the South Pacific
August 8, 1943

Dear Mrs. Fried,

Since I last wrote to you I have taken quite a trip by boat. Excuse me it wasn't a boat, it was a ship! Although I had been across the equator by plane twice before I had never been initiated as a shellback so I caught it on the ship.

The afternoon before the crossing we had to stand polliwog watch. A polliwog being what you are before the crossing. For this we were dressed as follows: sun helmet, shirt, wing collar with a shoestring bowtie, no pants, colored short garters, no socks, shoes, coco-cola bottle binoculars, and a mop. We were given specific instructions before going on watch what we should do. If a bosun came along we had to salaam three times and proclaim in a loud voice, "A

mighty man the bosun and greatly feared." If the ship's mess officer came by we had to stand on one leg and say, "We have no food to offer." If the executive officer came by we had to present arms with the mop and proclaim in loud voice, "clean ship isn't it!" If the chaplain came by we had to assume a pious attitude. If another polliwog passed we had to put the index finger of our left hand under our nose, raise our right hand and shout in a loud voice "Heil!" During the watch we were doused with water from many unexpected sources.

About 5 o'clock Davey Jones and his motley crew appeared and served us all with summons to appear in King Neptune's court the next morning. The night was spent in anxious wonderment of what would be our fate on the morrow.

Then we had to run through a long line of paddlers up to King Neptune's throne

The next morning dressed only in our shorts we were initiated two at a time. First we had to roll in salt water on the deck and get thoroughly wet. Then we had to run the through a long line of paddlers up to King Neptune's throne where we had to kneel and grasp a steel rod through which they shot electricity. If we let go we got paddles from behind. Then we were passed judgement on by King Neptune and had to run another gauntlet of paddlers to a ladder leading up to a platform on which we were sat in a greased chair. They made us take a bite of soap and then put axel grease on our chest, face and in our hair. Without warning the chair was tipped back and we slid into a

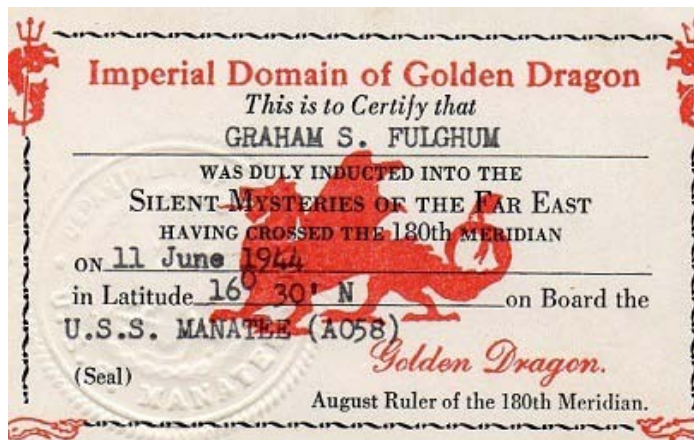
large tank of water, where we were dunked many times. We ran one more gauntlet of paddlers and we were full-fledged shellbacks.

There sure were some plenty red and sore fannies that night. For this we received a membership card for our wallet and a beautiful scroll suitable for framing. It really was a lot of fun though and broke the monotony of the trip.

LT Louis A. Schauer

Every ship, LCIers too, came up with their own costumes and ritual. The paddling, axle grease and fear of losing one's shellback card is a constant whenever the experience is retold.

EDITORS NOTE: The above letter is reprinted with permission from the book "Letters From the Front 1898-1945," by Michael E. Stevens and published by State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison 1992.



This card is awarded for crossing the 180th Meridian on the USS Manatee AO-59 on 11 June 1944. This card holder is a golden shellback.



The shellback certificate issued on the USS Diphda AKA-59 in August 1945 at the end of WWII.



The shellback crew of LCI(R) 1024 in costume for Crossing the Line ceremonies. Lieutenant Commander Edward J. Ritz USNR was captain of the 1024. The mop wigged sailor seated is portraying King Neptune. The 1024's crew was also featured in Elsie Item 103.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt became a shellback during a crossing on the USS Indianapolis.

Coast Guard Radioman Recalls Rescues at Normandy

“The water was so rough we lost a lot of people that never made it to shore,” - Don Boyd.



Radioman 1/c Don Boyd working the phones on LCI(L) 87

On June 6, 1944 Coast Guardsman Don Boyd, 24 of Michigan, was on *LCI(L) 87* off the shore of Omaha Beach. His ship carried the command staff for LCI Flotilla 4 on D-Day. Boyd was chief radioman. He worked the radios and translated Morse code messages coming in from other ships.

The landing craft in his flotilla were tasked with delivering the second waves of men and equipment onto the invasion beaches. The first waves – in wooden Higgins boats – faced mortars, artillery shells, beach obstacles, mines and heavy seas. Some swamped and sank. Many were hit by shells or mines blowing troops into the water and sinking the small craft.

Boyd remembers landing craft exploding and capsizing as underwater mines went off, and bullets pummeled decks carrying troops to shore. Men were in the frigid water trying to stay afloat while weighted down with equipment. Many were wounded. Orders were to not stop to rescue anyone while going into the beach.

It was a scene anticipated by invasion planners. In fact, President Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested that the invasion needed a rescue flotilla. There would be thousands of ships in the treacherous waters in the English Channel. Some would certainly be sunk. Thousands of men would be in the water. Every ship's captain had a job and none of their orders included pulling survivors from the water. But the Coast Guard had the time-honored task of doing just that...saving lives. Roosevelt ordered Admiral Ernest J. King to work out the details of building a rescue flotilla with the U.S. Coast Guard.

Coast Guardsmen were trained to set up medical units on the beach. They became the Beachmasters who directed traffic on and off the beach. They loaded wounded onto LCIs before they backed off after their troops had disembarked. And the Coast Guard cutters would become “Rescue Flotilla One.” The Coast Guard had 83-foot patrol boats, nicknamed the “matchbox fleet.” They provided anti-submarine patrol up and down the East Coast of the United States during the war. Sixty of them were selected and piggy backed on freighters to Poole, England. They were modified for service as rescue craft.



Don Boyd RM1/c US Coast Guard.

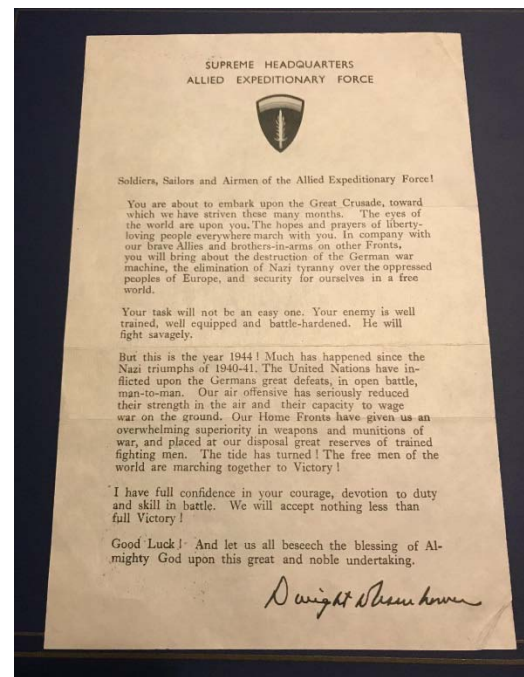
Boyd's *LCI(L)* 87 was a command ship. His did not land troops. But those in his Flotilla 4 did. His ship came in close enough to shore to see the carnage. He recalls hearing and seeing shells explode. The screaming shells from battleships would whizz over his ship.

The smaller cutters were able to go in close and maneuver through obstructions. They rescued survivors along the entire Omaha Beach. One cutter crew pulled 28 survivors from a sunken landing craft and delivered them to a Coast Guard LCT. At 0945 *CGC-1* recovered 19 survivors from the *LCI(L)* 91. Fourteen of them were part of the LCI Coast Guard crew. Two miles off the British sector a lookout spotted men in the water from a sunken British LCA. They went to their assistance and found men too cold to climb aboard. The Coast Guardsmen had to jump overboard and tie lines to the freezing survivors. They pulled 24 soldiers

and four Royal Navy sailors from the Channel.

The cutters worked closely with their CG LCI ships. Unloading waterlogged and or wounded men to an LCI that was headed out to the transport ships was faster and easier than making those trips themselves. Boyd's ship had better medical facilities and took aboard many of the survivors picked up by the cutters. Rescue Flotilla One picked up over 400 men on D-Day alone. By the time the unit was decommissioned in December 1944 they had saved 1,438 souls. The Coast Guard was instrumental in helping to keep the casualty figures for D-Day landings lower than expected. An admirable note for the United States oldest continuous sea-going service.

Boyd would serve for five years in the Coast Guard. He took his radio experience with him to a 40-year career. He worked as a lineman and supervisor for Bell Telephone.



The letter delivered to troops (Boyd) from Dwight Eisenhower on the eve of invasion.

Mediterranean: Salerno Italy

LCI's Volunteers Evacuate Wounded

September 9, 1943

By Robert E Wright Jr.

A quick history of World War II often ignores the events that took place in the North African Waters Theater of Operations; the events are ones that will never be forgotten for those who experienced them up close and personal.

The amphibious invasion of the boot of Italy followed only two months after the landings and occupation of Sicily. The Italian government signed an armistice agreement as the fleet neared the Bay of Salerno, effectively taking the Italian Army out of the war. But the highly trained and experienced German Army manned defensive positions above the beachheads. There were six landing sites, but one, Green Beach, like Normandy a year later, proved to be the most fiercely defended.

From the Action Report of LCI(L) 220

At 0400 we beached high and dry at less than one third speed. The 88mm and 155mm (guns) continued to fire at us while the troops disembarked, but no hits were scored and no casualties resulted from their near misses. Several machine guns about 200 yards from our bow opened up criss-cross fire raking the beach in front of our ramps. The troops (British) disembarked regardless but it was apparent that they suffered many casualties. From the heavy shell and machine gun fire directed at us it was evident that either our gun fire support was unsuccessful or it was directed to another beach....

Action Report of Commander LCI(L) Flot 4 on LCI(L) 350...Beached at 1329, While on the beach a British Army Medical Major requested that we evacuate wounded.

From the Action Report LCI(L) 323

1345...Ten (10) of our crew and all of our stretchers (4) immediately were ordered ashore. 1350 First casualty aboard. 1352 beach and ship being fired on by machine guns, 88mm and what appear to be (ground) bursting shells. Crew and two (2) British Army stretcher bearers hampered and harassed in the process of evacuating casualties to this unit. 1353 88mm ranging in on us. Two shell overhead. 1357 Hit through the bridge by 88mm armor piercing shell. No injury to two on the bridge except shock and slight wound to Quartermaster not requiring medical attention. ... 1404 All British Army casualties and one Naval personnel from beach, own crew and two stretchers bearers aboard. Total 23. 1405 Extracted...on beach twenty-one (21) minutes and ten (10) seconds.

From the Action Report of LCI(L) 321

1336: All troops ashore. A major of the British Army Medical Corps aboard requesting evacuation of the wounded. He reported aid station 300 yards from the water under constant fire and no avenue of evacuation open. Agreed to take as many as possible. 1337 Started taking wounded aboard. Making slow work of it under sporadic enemy 88mm fire. Called for volunteers from crew to assist. All members of the crew in hearing stepped forward. Allowed 10 men to go ashore. 1345 Eighteen wounded aboard. Retracted from beach. 1415 Two wounded died...1540 transferred sixteen wounded and records of two dead to (HMS) St. David Hospital Ship. Hospital orderly agreed to see that the papers and records of the two dead were passed to proper authorities and the men reported as buried at sea. 1925 Performed burial at sea of the two aforementioned dead, off the Gulf of Salerno.

Contained in the reports from the US Coast Guard manned *LCI(L)*'s 321,323 and 350 are the names of 35 crewmembers who left the relative safety of their ships, and under continuous fire from German positions, safely evacuated off the beach their wounded allies of the British Army that other LCI's had previously landed just hours before.

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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 John France.

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

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LCI 713 all decked out for the reunion tour in 2018



*The USS LCI(L) 713 is looking good at her mooring in the Port of Portland lagoon.
Museum ships like the 713 can provide historic tours for younger generations.*