



Elsie Item

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

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

ISSUE 108

MARCH 2020



Lt Col Lester E. Brown commander of 2nd Battalion 103rd Infantry gives last minute instructions to his officers before boarding LCIs in Russell Islands. Troops in camouflage to be transported to Rendova or New Georgia. Photo taken June 1944.

Inside this issue...

- Amphibious crews to the rescue
- Memories of Keeler and McGee
- Reunion announcement



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
- AFMM-LCI-713 Alliance
- Non-Profit Status

THE STORIES

- Featured Stories
- Story Archive
- Share Your Story

THE ELSIE ITEM

- Recent Articles Available Online*
- The Archive
- Other Research Resources

THE LCI EXPERIENCE

- LCI Facts
- Combat Awards
- 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.

Contact Us



EDITOR

USS LCI National Association
% Jeff Veesenmeyer, Editor
659 Granite Way
Sun Prairie, WI 53590
(608) 692-2121

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Email TheCrew@usslci.org

"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.

Observations from Officers Country

Annual Membership Status

Late in November I mailed out membership renewal notices for 2020 to all members who are active in the LCI Association, which means that they renewed their membership for 2019. According to my counts I mailed 220 notices. LCI Veterans were sent 113. Widows and Associate Members were sent 107. As of last Friday, February 14, 2020 I had received back renewals from 88 WWII Veterans and 82 Widows and Associates. By my counts, that equals a total paid membership of 170 individuals who are still supporting the USS LCI National Association and its goal to preserve and tell and then retell the stories of these landing craft and the accomplishments of the men who manned them during those dark years of World War II.

If you have received this Copy of the ELSIE ITEM and have not found the few minutes to send your renewal form back to me, PLEASE DO IT NOW WHILE YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT IT. I am optimistic that most of the non renewing members will finally send in their renewals, and maybe we can get the total membership back to over 200.

USS LCI Association Annual Reunion 2020 Status

I am working with the director of special events at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana on the program that will commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the signing of the Japanese Surrender on September 2, 1945, which brought World War II to an end. Our Association has been a supporter of the mission of the National World War II museum since its inception when it was originally the D-day Museum. Our members have provided not only memorabilia which is currently on display in various exhibits in the museum, but also made significant donations to help the museum become established 20 years ago. Many of our members attended that Grand Opening; there are some who still remember that day back on June 6, 2000.

Because the USS Landing Craft Infantry Association is one of the last active associations of World War II veterans, we have a Special Invitation from the National WW2 Museum. The museum would like to have as many as possible of our World War II veterans participate in the Surrender Commemoration Ceremony on September 2, 2020. All veterans will be honored before and as part of the Ceremony's Events. These ceremonies will be part of our 29th Reunion. This will be a day that you can be proud when your fellow citizens recognize your service on a U.S. Navy Landing Craft Infantry, and gratefully acknowledge that you made a personal contribution toward the United States of America's victory in World War II.

Please Attended if you are Possibly Able! This may be the final event to commemorate WWII.

We are still making arrangements and negotiating costs to keep them as reasonable as possible. You will see an outline of the planned events in the back pages of this ELSIE ITEM. We currently have 8 Veterans who are planning to attend. If you can join them, PLEASE return the attached form, if you did not send one from the last issue, so that I can send you the details as soon as they are complete.

Robert E Wright Jr, President, Treasurer, also Membership and Reunion Committee
USS Landing Craft Infantry Association, Inc

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Making 2020 Count

HOLY BIBLE New Living Translation
Jas 1:5

Just a few days ago I listened to actor Tom Hanks give a provoking acceptance speech to an outstanding entertainment achievement award on the Golden Globe Award ceremonies. Hanks' talk was unusual in that he did not trumpet his own rise to popularity and did not offer a political opinion. Instead in a humble, compelling narrative he spoke of the wisdom and skill he had gleaned from others over the years of learning his acting craft. He named the names and roles of actors, directors, support staff and tech people – some expected names, others anonymous, hidden folks who had helped to fill his wisdom “bin”.

As Hanks brought this unfiltered, humble communication I could see the listeners sit forward in their seats, drawn to his simple message of humility and life-learning. As I watched I began to think of 2020, and the opportunities the year ahead will bring us.

The question that emerges is, what would it be like to adopt a posture of learning from others? What would it be like for you and me to sit over coffee with others with different temperaments, different journeys, different views, different challenges, a different age group than our own, this year – and gain wisdom, skill in living? I have to believe we would learn a lot, and be better equipped to flourish in the year ahead.

Another reality occurs to me. There will be challenges and transitions so unique to you

that this interviewing of a friend will not address them adequately. The wisdom gained will not quite be enough to grant you peace and “fuel” for moving forward. In those moments I have discovered we must turn to a Divine source. James the New Testament writer says this *“If any of you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.” Jas 1:5*

It may be that the challenges ahead this year will be a perfect opportunity to cultivate a relationship with Jesus, the Son of God, who delights in leading us and giving wisdom...when we ask.

Dan Laurenzo

Dan is Lead Pastor at Lake Church, Lake Stevens WA, Adjunct Instructor at Northwest University, Kirkland, WA

Forwarded to Abe Laurenzo, Dan's Father.

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



The Last Roundup – Remembering Bill McGee

Submitted by Joe Flynn

LCI Sailors lost a good friend Oct. 30 when Bill McGee, 94, sailed west. Bill is known for his books on LCI's, *The Amphibians are Coming*, *The Solomons Campaign*, *Pacific War Turning Point*, and *Pacific Express*, *The Critical Role of Military Logistics in WWII*.

LCI sailors have long held the opinion that the toughest little ships in the fleet and the men who sailed them were not given due credit in the war effort. Often the activity of LCI's in days before the invasions was top secret and highly dangerous. After the invasions, the attention swung to the bombing and land action by ground forces. But Bill McGee filled this gap, repeatedly, in his books and speaking engagements writing and talking about amphibious invasions and LCI's.

After Pearl Harbor, Bill had to wait a year before he could enlist. He spent that year as a welder in the war effort at Kaiser Shipyard in Vancouver, WA. In the Navy, he served as a Gunner's Mate in the Naval Armed Guard and survived air attacks at Guadalcanal and

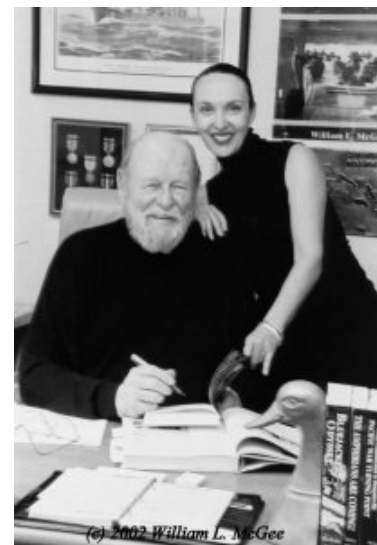


Bill McGee, like many LCI sailors, could not pass up a good photo opportunity. Liberty in Hawaii, 1943.

submarine attacks. After the war he was part of Operation Crossroads, the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

Like many WWII sailors, Bill started life a long way from the ocean – on a ranch in Montana. He spent many years before and after the War as a cowboy, then pursuing other careers. He was successful in sales, in radio, and in TV, selling features like *Lassie*, *Our Miss Brooks*, and *My Little Margie*.

Bill's writing on WWII began when he retired and immersed himself in the military history of the Pacific Theater. *The Solomons Campaigns, 1942-43*, won the Military Writers Society of America 2018 Silver Medal Award.



Bill and Sandra McGee, his wife of 38 years.

Bill and Sandra attended our 2009 USS LCI National Association reunion in Portland where Bill was our keynote Speaker. Many LCI sailors left with autographed copies of Bill's books. He always gave LCI sailors early notice of his books and a reduced rate.

He was a member of the Greatest Generation, a WWII Veteran and a very good friend. He will be missed but remembered well.



Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Hi Jeff, good evening!

Just got home from a trip to Newport, RI to do a Swift Boat presentation for several of the Officer Candidate training classes. Went very well.

When I arrived home tonight the copy of Elsie Item was here. Wow!!! Quite an article. I had no idea that all that happened...just kidding. That was a very flattering article, thank you.

I'd like to buy four more copies to send to Guy Gugliotta and a few others. Is it possible to buy additional copies? To whom would I write and send a check?

*Thanks again,
John Yeoman*

Letter posted on www.USSLCI.org

I read with interest the article titled "Brown Water Gator Navy in Vietnam." The article was written by Jeff Veesenmeyer for the December issue of Elsie Item. Mr. Veesenmeyer neglected to mention it was the River Patrol Boats (PBRs) that patrolled the rivers and canals of Vietnam. Swift Boats were assigned areas near the coast as well as bays and estuaries. We tried to stay out of each other's territory due to several incidents of friendly fire between PBR's and Swift Boats at night.

I served nineteen months on PBR's. In over 400 patrols I only saw one or two Swift Boats cruising an inland waterway. Never did I see one patrolling a narrow canal. We saw the RAG (River Assault Group) boats patrolling every day. It was the mission of the PBR's to interdict the movement of the Viet Cong on the Waterways of Vietnam. Let's give credit where credit is due.

*Thanks,
Jim Keith*

Hi Jim,

Thank you for your reply to my article in the December issue of Elsie Item. I appreciate getting feedback from those who were there. This article was intended to show another type of amphibious assault boat in another type of war. Elsie Item mostly covers LCIs in WWII. My resources were officers from Swift Boats, so PBRs were only mentioned as part of inland water patrols. I don't know much about them but would like to learn more.

Jeff Veesenmeyer – Editor

Editors Note: I sent the email response (above) to Jim. He responded with more details about the River Patrol Boats in Viet Nam. They patrolled further into the narrow rivers and channels not accessible to the Swift Boats. They also inserted Seal Teams for special operations. Another type of amphibious support deployed during the Viet Nam War. See Jim Keith's story and photos on the following pages.

SEND LETTERS TO: JeffreyMktg@gmail.com
or my mailing address listed on Page 2.

PBR Boat Commander during Vietnam War

By Jim Keith

I reported to river division 522 (Patrol Boat Riverine) September 9, 1966. Initially, we were based in Long Xuyen, then our division transferred to the YRBM 16 (Yard Repair Berthing Messing) which was posh living for us. Our “Delta Hilton” didn't last long. The YRBM 16 was sunk the morning after Thanksgiving November 24, 1967. After losing my home on the YRBM I was transferred to River Division 534 until March 31, 1968 when my tour in Vietnam was over. I was a boat commander in both River divisions.

Swift boats did a great job of patrolling the Vietnam coast and adjacent waterways. The Swift Boats stopped a lot of traffic that would have found its way into PBR patrol areas. They also patrolled areas where the water was too rough for our 32-foot boats.

“We operated in rivers, canals, and any area that would accommodate our shallow draft boats.”

The mission of the River Patrol Boats and crew (PBR's) was to interdict the movement of material, supplies, and Viet Cong troops. We operated on the rivers, canals, and any area that would accommodate our shallow draft boats. The boat crews stopped suspicious looking watercraft, checked ID cards, searched sampans, and junk boats, while trying to get a gut feeling for the occupants of those vessels. The Navy sent me to Vietnamese language school before I went on the boats so that helped with interrogation.



The 32-foot PBR could reach speeds of 28.5 knots with two 180hp Detroit diesel engines.

The PBR boats also took part in many operations with the ARVN soldiers, US Army Green Berets, and Seal teams. The PBR boats were not large enough to carry many troops but we did insert seals from time to time. These operations were always exciting because we could expect a fire fight. These operations reminded me of stirring a beehive.

Some of our other duties were mundane but fun. On our days off we would volunteer to transport the Australian nurses to the orphanages where they looked after the health of the kids living there. We were happy to provide a worthwhile service and it gave us a break from shooting at the bad guys. Those nurses were the only non-Asian women I saw in Vietnam.

PBRs performed many amphibious medical evacuations

The PBR's were called on often to provide medevac services for civilians, military, and sometimes suspected enemy combatants. On one occasion while patrolling near Can Tho I saw a large group of civilians standing on the riverbank looking down toward a

sampan at water's edge. I moved the boat in closely to inspect where I saw a young woman in childbirth. We quickly loaded her into our boat then went speeding off to the closest town with a hospital. She made it before delivering the baby on our boat. The crew was quite relieved when she was taken ashore.



A PBR stops what looks like a friendly sampan family. After an inspection that finds no military supplies, these routine stops were used to build good will.

Our PBR boats and their crews made friends all along the rivers where the boats operated. Our crews loved handing out "hand clasp" items to the kids. Hand clasp items were part of the Navy physiological warfare program. They consisted of toys for the kids and household items for the adults. "Win the hearts and minds of the people." Of course, every item bore the seal of the United States of America.

Editors Note: *The 1979 movie, Apocalypse Now, featured a fictional PBR that was code named "Street Gang."*

Landings on the Boot



Photographer George Rodger took this photo of troops coming ashore from USS LCI(L) 220. He was on the beachhead during landings at Salerno, Italy in September 1943. The photo ran on the front cover of Life Magazine March 27, 1944. It is one of many WWII cover photos in the Life Magazine Archives.

The 220 crew also participated in the advanced landings at Anzio Nettuno in January of 1944 and southern France on 15 August 1944. See other LCIs at Anzio on the following pages.

The LCI(L) 220 was built at George Lawley and Son in Neponset, MA. and commissioned on 25 November 1942. She earned four battle stars for service in WWII.

Memories of Sicily, Salerno, Anzio on the *LCI(L) 19*

by ARCHIE DALE KRAUT ship's cook

Sicily: Our ship was one of the first to go in. We had to go through a canal to reach the French Submarine and Air Base, which was on a good-sized lake about 3 or 4 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. In the canal, or channel, were two or three sunken ships which made it hard to get by. In the daytime we would tie up to the dock at the SubBase, but at night we had to anchor out in the lake because the Germans bombed us regularly every night.



USS LCI(L) 19 near Bizerte, Tunisia. She was commissioned in December of 1942 and participated in landings at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and southern France.

The Germans at this point had been driven out of North Africa. Then came the invasion of Sicily. It was a stormy night, pitch black, and the only time we could see the compass was when lightning would flash. By the time the storm was over we didn't know where we were. We saw an LST on our starboard and fell in behind it. Finally, we joined up again with the convoy. About that time a German airplane came over spitting lead and dropping bombs, but nobody got hurt during

that raid and the plane got straight out. We landed our troops at Gela, Sicily, when it got dark on July 10, 1943. We stayed there for a while as a bomb blast had knocked out our electrical system, which we repaired ourselves. Sometime during the night, we received orders to return to Bizerte for more troops.

In 1943 the role of *LCI 19* changed as it was designated a flagship. After the Sicilian invasion we returned to Bizerte, North Africa where our number three troop compartment was converted into a radio-communications room in preparation for the invasion of Salerno, Italy. Our ship was designated as the Flagship with a full Commander, Robert Morris, USN, aboard. We were one of several flagships needed as the beachhead was to be so large with many ships of all kinds involved. Our flagship was designated to direct operations on "Beach Red" and we were to stay there until the Army could secure the beachhead. Early in September 9, 1943, we loaded British troops and headed for Salerno, south of Naples, Italy. It was dark and, as we expected, the German Air Force dropped flares and bombs on us. We were lucky again and nobody was hurt. We landed at dawn and all except the *19* returned to Bizerte to bring in more troops. We stayed in our "Red Beach" area directing operations and on many occasions we would beach our ship to take on casualties and carry them out to the hospital ship. The Germans had a big gun on a railroad track that ran out of a tunnel. Once or twice a day they would roll it out and shoot at ships in the area. One day we were loading casualties when they came after us and we had to get off the beach in a hurry. A bobbed-tailed British battleship came to our

rescue and knocked that railroad gun out of commission. We were sure glad to see that battleship.

After things quieted down a bit, *LCI 19* moved to an anchorage in the Bay of Naples. Then came my brush with a renowned individual. One day while anchored in Naples Bay, General Charles DeGaulle came down to the Dock Office about fifty feet from where we were tied up. He stood and talked to several people and we thought it was a big deal.

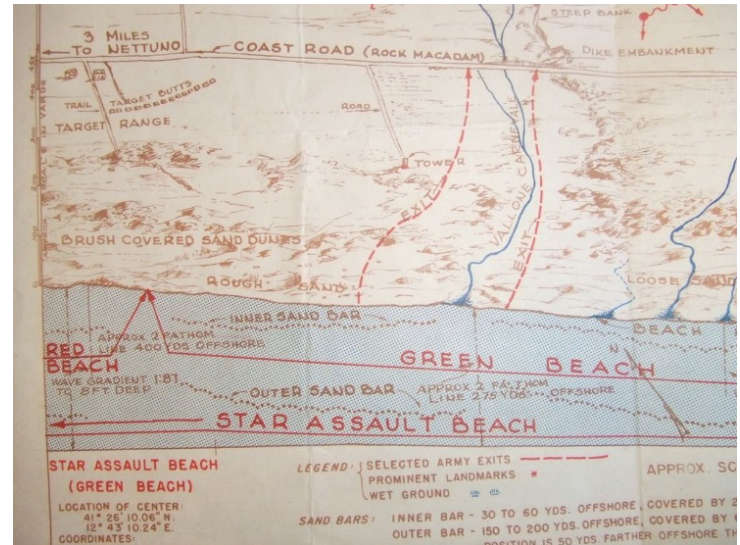
In December 1943, *LCI 19* received a new Captain and a new Ensign with interesting qualifications. ...at this time our Captain, Al Shea, was relieved and sent to England. Our new skipper was Max Roder. A new Ensign also came aboard by the name of Lusto. He had worked as a bellhop on a Great Lakes steamer for two summers!”

A week before Christmas we went to Taranto, Italy, with some British LCIs. We left Bizerte with about 20 ships and, of course, it was dark, and we had bad weather. The new Ensign was so sick he never got out of bed. We stayed at Taranto 24 hours and never got off the ship, returning to Bizerte just in time to eat Christmas dinner—turkey and cranberries. At this time Ensign Lusto was transferred off the *19* and replaced with Ensign Bill Grissom, a nice fellow from Alabama.

The Group Commander, Robert Morris, was promoted to Captain. I became friends with him. We had Captain Morris and his staff as flagship. Captain Morris was a regular Navy full Captain with four stripes and was from Muncie, Indiana. He had married a girl from Muncie who was the

daughter of the owner of the Ball Fruit Jar Industry. We hit it off well, both being from Indiana, even though he carried more rank than I did.

At Anzio, Captain Morris was coordinator with the Army beach master. The Germans shelled us during the day and bombed us at night. We would move our anchorage every night so they would not know our position.



By the end of landing day, over 36,000 men, 3,000 vehicles, and an initial stockpile of supplies—90 percent of the initial assault load—had been delivered to the Anzio beachhead with light casualties. The operation had achieved total surprise. It did not achieve a break-through in of the Gustav Line as hoped.

One day during a raid, one of Captain Morris’ staff was killed by a piece of shrapnel. On several occasions, bombs fell close. Once as we were leaving the harbor one fell under the ship on an angle and exploded, raising the ship up and it spilled everything in the galley, knocking me to the deck and breaking the oil line so that it threw oil everywhere. Captain Morris was in the companionway by the galley and said with a grin, “By God, Krout, that was a

close one!” I picked myself up and answered, “YES SIR!”



Anzio Invasion, troops and equipment come ashore on the Fifth Army Beachhead near Anzio, 22 January 1944. USS LCI-20 is burning at left, after being hit by a German bomb. With her are (l-r): HMS LCI-274, USS LCI-39 and HMS LCI-260. At right, beyond the DUKW, are USS LCI-36 and USS LCI-44.

As we left Anzio, we were replaced by a British LCI and learned later that it was sunk while on duty there. Again, it was a close call for us where we felt the protection of a higher power. We went back to Pozzuoli, near Naples, and stayed there until things were put in order for the invasion of France. While there, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal came aboard for inspection. He wanted to see how one of the expendable landing ships looked after four major landings—North Africa, Sicily, Salerno and Anzio, not to mention several other smaller ones.”

Following landings in Southern France, Archie received a great piece of news from his friend Captain Morris. Captain Morris came by my galley and asked, “How would you like to go home, Krout?” I thought he was kidding, but he was serious. He said,

“Pack your bag and go home. There is an AKA transport ship with your name on it and if you ever get to Muncie, Indiana, I’ll buy you the biggest steak you can eat!” He shook my hand with a big grin and said goodbye. And so ended Archie Krout’s service aboard *LCI 19*. But it was not the last time he was to see his old ship. He was subsequently assigned as a cook in the general mess at Key West, Florida, and while there, the *19* came through on her way to the Pacific. The *LCI 19* was refitted and a new crew came aboard. While I was at Key West I went aboard and relived a lot of memories. The new officers and crew were going to San Diego, California, and then on to the Pacific but by the time they got to San Diego the war was over. I later found out that the *19* was purchased and gutted to be used for shipping wheat. IT WAS A GREAT ADVENTURE THAT ANYONE WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD TO HAVE HAD. (Memoir excerpts are from Elsie Item #50.

Editor’s Notes: By January 1944 the Allied troops who fought at Anzio, were very experienced with amphibious warfare. Landings were executed nearly flawlessly. The Navy then demonstrated its adaptability by changing mission focus to run an immense and efficient logistical operation during more than four months of intense combat. What made life possible at Anzio was the logistical lifeline that pumped a steady stream of supplies to the beachhead. The port could handle eight LSTs, eight LCTs, and 15 LCIs simultaneously providing a continuous flow of supplies. By the time the fighting at Anzio ended, more than 500,000 tons of supplies had been delivered, a daily average of about 4,000 tons. The stalemate at Anzio finally ended in late May 1944, when Allied forces broke through the Gustav Line in Operation Diadem.

Pallbearers were the Saviors at Okinawa

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

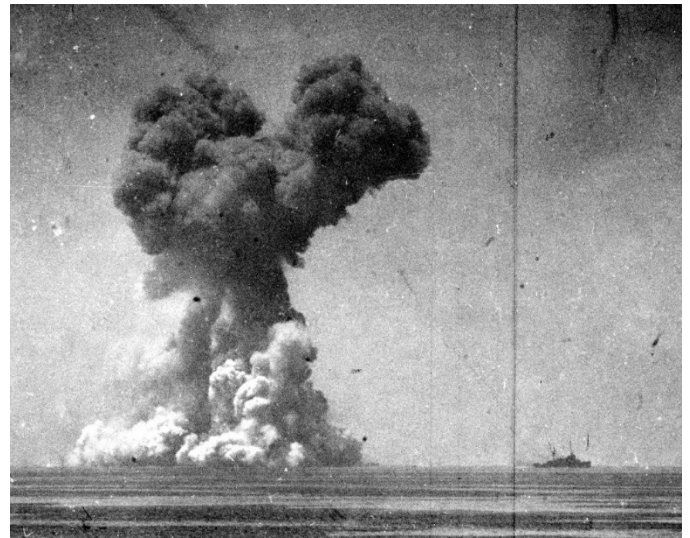
On the morning of 17 May 1945 a division of six LCI(M)s took up positions off-shore of Okinawa's port city of Naha. The city's defense formed the western flank of the 25-mile Shuri line. This was the enemy's second line of defense at Okinawa. It was built along ridges and cliffs that extended the width of the island. Thousands of Japanese and Okinawan troops had carved out a network of caves and tunnels that amounted to an enormous underground fortress. Historians have described the Shuri Line as an "underground battleship."

The army and Marines had been stopped cold by the Japanese defenses facing them. Casualties had been horrific. Another assault was planned. Now six LCI mortar gunboats were needed to soften up the bow of an anchored battleship!

This bombardment was somewhat of a relief for this amphib division that included *LCI(M) 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, and 356*. They had been on smoke laying detail at the Hagushi anchorage off the invasion beach. Smoke provided cover for the fleet from relentless kamikaze attacks. They patrolled every night. When ships got hit by kamikazes the amphibians came to their aide with fire-fighting equipment and pumps while rescuing men in the water. These "small boy" amphibious ships became known as the pallbearers.

On this day, these LCIs were part of a Call fire group commanded by the Cruiser *Salt*

Lake City. It included three destroyers, one of which was the USS *Longshaw* (DD-559). The larger ships were supposed to be standing off to provide bombardment and support for the LCIs. The mortar gunboats moved in close to shore. At 0907 they began pouring mortar shells on two targets. The 6th Marine Division wanted them knocked out prior to their next assault. Just before dawn the *Longshaw* had maneuvered close to shore too. She hit a coral reef with enough speed to become grounded near to midship. At 1105 she blew up.



This photo of the Longshaw being completely engulfed in the explosion was taken from the Cruiser Salt Lake City.

Signalman Richard Williams was aboard *LCI(M) 352*. His ship made firing runs from about 0900 to 1110. That's when the mortar gunboats in his division were ordered to "immediately proceed flank speed to the *Longshaw's* explosion area." The flat bottomed LCIs could get closer to the reef than other ships. "Ironically, the *Longshaw* had a recent change of command," recalled Williams, "and to my knowledge, no one knows why the new skipper was maneuvering so close to the reef."

Signalman Williams had no problem finding the *Longshaw*. The plume of smoke could be seen for miles. “Within minutes, Kapok lifevests and helmets were a necessity – we were driving into a literal rain of hot falling fragments from the explosion.” The *LCI(M)* 352 was among the first to arrive on the disaster scene. “We immediately began to search for survivors. My station, as chief signalman, was in the signal platform on the bridge. I sighted survivors or floating bodies and the Captain, at the helm, guided the ship through my directions.”



LCI(M) 354 preparing to change course for the burning USS Longshaw on the horizon.

The USS *Longshaw* had indeed been given a change of command. Lt. Cmdr. Clarence W. Becker assumed command on 12 May. His crew was experienced but thoroughly fatigued. They’d been on the line since L-Day on 1 April. His men had been averaging only four hours of sleep a day. On the night of 17-18 May they had fired about 500 rounds of 5-inch shells. They were underway to another firing location when the OOD miscalculated their position and ran hard aground on a reef. The young Lt.

ordered back full, with no success. Water-tight hatches were battened down. No water damage was reported. But they were stuck and within range of shore batteries at Naha.

Becker ordered the forward magazine emptied. Men began passing 5-inch shells from below and stacking them just forward of the superstructure. The USS *Picking* (DD-685) was on her way with a tow line. It was hoped that reducing the weight in the bow would free *Longshaw* with help from *Picking*. After several unsuccessful tow attempts the ocean tug *Arikara* (ATF-98) was called in to survey the situation. A bridle and tow line were rigged. It was decided to wait for high tide to begin the tow. At 1050 all crewmembers not on watch moved to the stern. *Arikara* began trying to pull the *Longshaw* off the reef as the destroyer backed full on both engines. It was now 1101 hours. That was when a shell splashed between the *Longshaw* and *Arikara*. It sent up a plume of water just 100 yards off *Longshaw*’s stern.

Normally shore batteries did not fire on ships for fear of giving away their position. But a beached ship with ammunition piled high on deck was an opportunity the Japs could not pass up. That first shell already had the range. The crews of both ships were horrified. They knew an aiming correction was being made and what was coming next. The *Arikara* crew dropped their tow cable and moved away. The *Longshaw* crew ran to their battle stations as shells began hitting the portside of the ship. One hit the forward engine room. Shells continued to rain down with one hitting the superstructure and others taking out a 40mm gun mount, a 5-inch handling room, and the bridge. The

crew managed to fire four rounds back in a futile defense of the ship. But a direct hit on a forward magazine and the stacked 5-inch shells completed the carnage. The resulting explosion disintegrated the front half of the ship.

Many “lucky” sailors were thrown out into the water. Those left on deck were burning and getting hit by shrapnel. Below deck fire and asphyxiation took its toll. Captain Becker was mortally wounded but was able to give the order to abandon ship. Damage control fought fires, but the ship was already beyond salvage.

The LCI(M) 352 patrolled around the burning hulk picking up survivors and mangled bodies. The danger from secondary explosions and Jap artillery was ignored by her crew. They pulled men from the water, cared for their wounds and gave comfort. Nobody considered the danger of having men on board who were in a state of shock.

Richard Williams: *We had been on a firing mission, and the mortars were still primed, plus there were additional powder rings near at hand. Evidently, one of the survivors, who had not been injured except for being blown out into the water was given a cigarette. When done with his smoke he tossed the lit butt into one of the powder-ring buckets. The resulting fire, was not an explosion but a Swoosh! It caused a fireball with an unbelievable ferocity and intensity. It immediately consumed all in its immediate grasp. I still do not know the total number of casualties.*

The fireball was right over the ammo hold. Williams expected the ship to explode. Williams knew that if the ship went up, he'd

be trapped on his signal stage, so he got out and moved on the upper level aft of the halyards. “I prayed that I'd be thrown out into water when the ship blew.”

Fortunately, a quick thinking Bos'un had flooded the ammo hold. Fires were put out and LCI(M)362 continued the rescue operation.

LCI(M) 356 went directly into the Longshaw inferno. Shipmate Donald Adair could see two giant puffs of smoke as the 356 raced toward the stricken destroyer.

Donald Adair: *She was blown in half so the only natural thing to do was to go and try to pick up the men in the water who had been blown clear of the ship by the explosion. There were several ships of our class on one side picking up the men, so we decided to pull around to the other side. In so doing we passed close to the stern and saw life still aboard. Two men were waving frantically for us to come for them.*

The ship was still burning furiously so the LCI(M) 356 had to maneuver around to stay clear of the flames. In their haste to get to the men they rammed one of the depth charges. Fortunately, it didn't go off. They tied up to the burning ship. Shells were exploding and throwing shrapnel. A rescue team charged aboard to get anyone who showed signs of life. There were quite a few wounded, but the dead outnumbered them. The decks were hot from fire, so they poured on water to fight fires and cool the deck.

Adair recalls having to move arms, legs, heads and whole bodies to clear paths while they searched for life. “Actually, we walked through blood and guts as shells were

exploding and shrapnel was flying. It rained metal on my helmet and small piece nicked my thumb.”



LCI(M) 365 fighting fires and removing wounded from the burning Longshaw.

Lt. Edgar B. Wicklander, Skipper of the 356 refused to leave the *Longshaw* until they had gotten all the survivors to a place of safety. For his actions he received the Navy Cross.

The Japanese made no attempt to fire on the LCIs. The 352 stayed on the scene to protect the remains of the ship until it could be further destroyed by shellfire and torpedoes. The *Longshaw* lost 86 men killed and 95 wounded, a casualty rate of 62 percent. It could have been worse had the LCI mortar gunboats not been part of the rescue.

The LCI, LCS and LSM amphibious ships played an important secondary role at Okinawa. Their primary missions of landing troops and providing close in bombardment was completed for most amphibys early in the Okinawa campaign. Kamikazes, suicide boats and suicide swimmers became the greatest threat the Navy had ever faced. During the Okinawa campaign the Navy lost 36 ships sunk (15 of them were amphibys) and 368 damaged. Most of these attacks were caused by kamikazes. The smaller ships became invaluable for laying smoke, providing extra anti-aircraft defense and rescuing sailors.

The 15 radar picket stations that encircled Okinawa were the most dangerous assignments. Destroyers with advanced radar were sent out 50 plus miles from Okinawa. They provided the fleet with early warning of attacks and a first line of defense. Many became sacrificial lambs. By early May 1945 there had been 12 ships sunk and 39 damaged while assigned to radar picket duty. Most picket stations were patrolled by two destroyers and four support ships. The USS *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774) was nearly sunk on 11 May at RP-15. Hadley's CIC officer Lt. Doug Aitken had this to say about the LCS 82, 83, 84 and LSM(R) 193.

Doug Aitken: *We recognized immediately why the support ships were called the “pall bearers.” We were sick. We were done. Two of them were tied to us and others went out and picked up all the guys in the water. They brought the ones in good shape back to the ship and transferred those in bad shape to destroyers or hospital ships.*

On 28 May a bogey was picked up 28 miles from radar picket station #15. The USS *Drexler* (DD-741) was patrolling this RP, one of the most dangerous. It was located 50 miles northwest of Okinawa and directly in line with enemy planes from southern Japan airfields. Another destroyer, the USS *Lowry* (DD-770) and two “small boys” *LCS(L) 55* and *56* accompanied *Drexler*. The *Lowry* vectored two CAP (combat air patrol) planes to intercept the intruder. They located and shot him down. More bogeys were still on radar.

Signalman Dick Miller was on his GQ station up near the bow of the *Drexler*. He scanned the sky with binoculars for more planes. Visibility was clear that day and the sea was calm. He’d scan right, then up, then left then down. That’s how he was trained for lookout duty. His GQ job was important. Sometimes planes would slip in low on the water and under the radar. A float plane made mostly of wood and fabric could not be seen on radar at all. His eyes provided the final warning of an enemy plane.

Miller was just 18. He was from Aurora, Illinois. He joined the Navy the year before at the Aurora Post Office. He went to Great Lakes for Boot Camp and then to San Francisco for Signalman school. When he shipped out for Pearl Harbor and looked back at San Francisco Harbor all he could think about was how homesick he was. He had a girlfriend back home that he loved and dreamed about marrying.

Now Miller was in the middle of the East China Sea watching for planes that were aiming to end his dreams. The first planes he saw were the gull-winged Corsairs from the Marine CAP. For a moment he was relieved.

Then he realized they were chasing a twin engine (Nick) Jap plane. It had been sighted by the Captain up on the bridge too. He swung the ship to bring all guns to bare. It was about seven miles out at an elevation 2,000 feet and approaching sharp on the starboard bow. The 5-inch guns opened behind Miller. He had his ears stuffed with cotton to dull the blasts. At first it appeared the plane was aiming for the *Lowry*, but it pulled up, passed over the *Lowry*, and with 40mm and 20mm shells tearing into it the pilot recovered enough to plow into the *Drexler*’s starboard hull above the waterline.

Dick Miller: *When the first plane hit midship, it put us out of commission. We lost all the power and the 40mm gun mount got wiped out. Burning gas sprayed the decks, metal and debris were flying, fire went up 100 feet. We began to list right away.*

Guns crews went on manual control and knocked down a second plane near the *Lowry*. Then a third plane dove on the bridge. It was riddled with shells, missed the bridge but caught a wing on the mast and spun down into the superstructure. It’s 2,000 pounds of bombs caused a tremendous explosion throwing part of the ship and men hundreds of feet in all directions. The ship began to roll rapidly onto her starboard side and began sinking stern first into a sea of burning oil. She was gone 49 seconds after the plane hit and 158 men died with her.

Dick Miller: *The second plane hit further to the stern. It blew the whole side of the ship out. I was on the bow. The explosion sent me several feet in the air. The bow began to rise, and guys were diving off. I went over the side into the water. There was oil in the water. Much of it was on fire. I got oil in my*

mouth. The waves would slap you in the face and oil would get in your nose, your eyes, your mouth. Everyone was black. Stuff was floating all around. My life vest was old, it wouldn't inflate. I tried to blow it up, but the nozzle was covered with oil. I grabbed an empty shell case and held on.

Men were really spread out and kept drifting apart. A guy near Miller told him to stay away because he was drowning and didn't want to take him down too. Miller got over to the drowning man with his ammo can and they both held on.



LCS(L) 114 was a rocket-firing gun boat. She was built on the same hull as an LCI.

LCS(L) 114 had been ordered to replace a ship at RP #15. This picket station was well known as “coffin corner,” due to the number of ships that had been hit there. They expected trouble. As she approached the picket station the air/sea battle was in progress. Her crew witnessed the *Drexler's* sinking. She was first on the scene. There were 199 survivors in the water that would be rescued by the LCS(L)s. Oil covered heads were difficult to see in oil covered water. All hands began hauling survivors aboard. Three members of the *LCS(L) 114*

crew dove over the side to rescue drowning men while the air attack was still on.

Miller and his companion were in the water for over two hours. They could see the *114* sailing away. They'd given up on being rescued but Corsairs kept flying over to direct the rescue ships to men in the water.

Dick Miller: *The LCS(L) 114 finally came along side. They sent two guys down to help us aboard. We were beat. That ship rescued 120 men. Those LCS guys were wonderful. They washed us down with something. Sailors were handing out booze, they gave us cigarettes and soup and a bottle of rum. I didn't drink in those days. I gave my bottle to another guy...I was stupid.*

The other survivors were rescued by *LCS(L) 55* and *56*. They made their way through fiery, debris strewn waters to rescue the men of the *Drexler*. Those who were uninjured were transferred to attack transports and taken to the Hagushi anchorage for processing. The wounded were taken to the hospital ship *Hope*.

Lt. Cdr. R.G. Bidwell, the *Drexler's* executive officer also remembered the care shown to his crew from LCS sailors. “My men were given old clothes and shoes and a bit of alcoholic beverages to warm them up.”

At Okinawa the human cost of war was the greatest loss the Navy had suffered in any other Pacific battle. There were 4,907 sailors killed and 4,874 wounded. Most of these were due to the horrific damage inflicted by kamikaze attacks. Those who were rescued by the “pall bearers” remember those gator sailors more like guardian angels.

Bill Keeler's Full Circle of Life

Before Pearl Harbor, William "Bill" Keeler was working on a college degree in Kansas. All that changed after Pearl Harbor when he left for naval officer training. All previous plans were put on hold and Bill was now an Ensign in the US Navy and soon to be commanding officer of *LCI(L) 432* in the Campaign in the Pacific during the War.

He returned to the Pacific in Operations Crossroads, the A-bomb tests at Bikini Atoll. He was then selected for flight training and spent the rest of his 23-year career as a naval aviator flying off aircraft carriers. Along the way he served as Operations Officer on the carrier USS *Princeton* in the Vietnam War and later served with Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C. He retired to Coronado, CA in 1966 as a Commander.

After the War, Bill married and raised a family. But in 2006 Bill lost Priscilla, his wife of 60 years. He then assumed he would spend retirement in Coronado.

Bill was active in the USS LCI National Association, and the California State group. He attended LCI Reunions in Eureka, CA at the USS *LCI(L) 1091*, and National reunions all over the country. He also participated in many LCI Pearl Harbor Day luncheons in Oceanside and San Diego LCI Reunions.

About this time, one of Bill's dance partners from College days in Kansas, Betty Price, and Bill reconnected. Betty had earlier lost her lifelong husband. Now reacquainted, Bill brought Betty to one of our San Diego LCI Reunions. One day was spent touring the USS Midway Carrier Museum where Bill pointed out a number of aircraft he had flown off the decks of the *Midway*.

Taking a break from the tour, we had lunch in the Fantail Café. Bill pointed out to the group that this was one place you did not want to put your plane – it was located directly aft and below the flight deck. He said this area was originally the "potato locker," where thousands of pounds of potatoes were stored for the hungry crews.

Bill and Betty were also telling us how they had got back in contact and were now dating. So, I asked Bill, "Have you asked this girl to marry you yet?" It may have caught him by surprise but he recovered and said, "No. But this is as good a place as any." He then proposed, and Betty accepted. They were married in Kansas the following December and they each had enough relatives there to fill both sides of the church.

After ten years of marriage Betty passed in June 2019 and Bill sailed west Jan. 2020. Fair winds and following seas. They will be missed. *Joe Flynn*



Betty and Bill Keeler vacationing in San Diego after their marriage in 2008.

In Memoriam

LCI 341
Carl B. Molander

LCI 412
Robert A. Dickinson

LCI 425
James Kennedy

LCI 432
William Keeler

LCI 530
Anthony Molligo

LCI 551
Ralph Langheim

LCI 555
Harry C. Rost

LCI 668
John "Jack" Walters

LCI(L) 689
Robert Carroll Jr.

LCI 948
Vern Malmquist

LCI 684, 981
John J. Mandara

LCI 780
Robert W. Knickrehm

LCI 1008
Clifford Epton

LCI (Unknown)
Efram Gordon

LCI (Unknown)
James Riley



Occupational Hazards – Underwater Mines in Japanese Waters Post-Surrender.

By Lisa Tancredi

Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945, but it was several months before many of the Allied forces got to go home. Japan had to be occupied, a task that often entailed, hazardous duties. Some of the deadliest hazards were the tens of thousands of naval mines laying in Japanese waters.

The mines were laid by the Allies to create a naval blockade, to starve Japan of resources. Some of the mines were only supposed to be effective for a finite period. Others, however, did not have a prescribed “expiration date.” In any event, mines in Japanese waterways continued to detonate long after the war ended.

The types of mines varied. There were acoustic, magnetic and pressure mines, and combinations of the foregoing.



Lookouts were on constant watch for floating mines like this one.

Magnetic mines were spherical, a few to several feet in diameter, and studded with short, cylindrical pegs. The spheres were

tethered to box weights and suspended between the surface of the water and the sea floor. Magnetic mines were disabled by minesweepers. Minesweepers had cables with cutters on them; the cables cut the tethers of the mines. After the tethers were cut, the spheres floated to the surface. The spheres were then detonated by small arms or guns.

After the minesweepers, a group of ships, referred to as “guinea pigs” tested channels for mines that might remain, especially pressure mines. Pressure mines were akin to depth charges laid on the sea floor, and they were triggered by the changes in pressure caused by ships passing above. A guinea pig fleet ran through the mined channels, and by doing so either demonstrated that the passage was clear or detonated the remaining mines. Guinea pigs sped over the suspect areas at full steam in the hopes that any exploding mine would catch the guinea pig astern, if at all.

One of the proudest Japanese naval bases was located in the small port city of Kure, about 25 kilometers southeast of Hiroshima. East of Kure is another port, Hiro Wan. Approximately 3,400 mines had been laid in that area.ⁱ Initially, the plan was for Allied occupation forces to debark at Kure. However, because of the proliferation of mines around Kure, the plans were changed to debark occupation troops at nearby Hiro Wan. The Sixth Army X Corps, 41st Division, the first Allied troops to occupy Kure, entered the area overland, from Hiro Wan.ⁱⁱ A Kure resident, Noboru Ota, was awed by the occupation. “When I saw a convoy of American jeeps and heavy vehicles, stretching endlessly into the distance, I thought, now I understand the reason why we lost the war.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The forces arriving overland at Kure required naval support; the harbor had to be made safe. The so-called “guinea pig squadron” assigned to test the waters around Kure and Hiro Wan was comprised of the U.S.S. *Marathon*, U.S.S. *Pratt Victory* and U.S.S. *Joseph Holt*. Each of these ships had been damaged before assuming guinea pig duties. The *Marathon* and *Pratt Victory* had both been torpedoed; the *Joseph Holt*’s keel was bent from running aground in Buckner Bay during a typhoon.

Patched up sufficiently to perform mine testing duties, the guinea pigs were manned by volunteer skeleton crews. Their engine rooms were modified so that they could be run remotely, from above deck, in order to avoid below-deck casualties from impact or broken steam lines. Above deck, the men stood on mattresses or wooden crates, and they wore helmets. Bulkheads and overheads were also lined with mattresses, giving rise to gallows humor about ending up in padded cells.^{iv}

However, before the minesweepers and guinea pig fleet had finished their work,



USS LCI(L) 944 was one of the first ships to enter the heavily mined Inland Sea of Japan.

other ships had to traverse the hazardous mine-infested waters. Along with the U.S.S. *Vulcan* (a repair ship) and the U.S.S. *Enoree* (an oiler), the *LCI(L) 944* was assigned harbor duty at Kure.

On October 7, 1945, the *944* met up with the *Vulcan* and the *Enoree* and entered the Inland Sea through Bungo Suido Point, one of the entrances to the Inland Sea from the Pacific. From there, the three traveled – slowly -- to Kure. They were told that “mines are thicker than hair on a dog.”^v

The *LCI(L) 944* led the *Vulcan* and the *Enoree*. Why? The crew of the *944* was informed that they would lead the convoy because they were expendable. The loss of the *944* and her crew would not be as great a loss to the Navy as the loss of a repair ship, or an oiler. However, unlike the crews of the guinea pigs – all of whom were volunteers -- the men of the *944* did not volunteer for guinea pig duty. There were no padded decks, bulkheads or overheads. The *944*’s motor macs continued to work below deck in the engine room -- likely the most hazardous duty station on board for the assignment.

The *944* passed into and across the Inland Sea. The Inland Sea near Kure is surrounded by hills and mountains that are so close that they give the impression of being on a very large mountain lake.^{vi} The convoy arrived in autumn, when red and yellow maple leaves interspersed the pine trees on the mountains that surrounded the water.

The men had little time or inclination to enjoy the beauty that surrounded them. Instead, the crew focused on the mines lurking below or at the water’s surface. The convoy fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition at floating mines along the way. In addition to the mines, the convoy was alert for potential hostilities. The mountains enclosing the Inland Sea provided plenty of cover for enemy guns and hold-out troops.

It was a tense trip. When the convoy finally reached Kure, on October 9, 1945, it found the military port in ruins. The

mountainous surroundings were cultivated halfway up to the peaks, but the hillsides immediately surrounding the harbor were treeless and had been bombed until their shape appeared to have been “recently bulldozed into position.” Bomb craters could be seen on the higher slopes surrounding the port. At the water’s edge lay tangled metal – girders, derricks, sheds, boilers and turbines.^{vii} A recent typhoon had completed the devastation.

A stockpile of coal at the wharves, set on fire by American incendiary bombs, still burned--and continued to burn for the next two years—emitting a black column of smoke. Kure was so desolate that British occupation troops arriving in April of 1946 nicknamed it the “City of the Dead.”^{viii} Prominent in the harbor was the charred Japanese battleship, *Haruna*, sunk on July 28, 1945. Her superstructure remained above the surface, stripped of guns. Tree limbs and branches had been fastened to her decks and appendages for camouflage. The foliage was still attached, when the *944* arrived.



The partially sunk battleship ISE XCV was bombed July of 1945 by carrier-based planes attacking the great naval base at Kure.

Hundreds of Japanese Navy ships were moored in the area, all awaiting inspection by the occupation forces. More than 650 ships were inspected there on October 17, 1945.^{ix} Some 113 midget suicide submarines were turned over to the Allies in Kure, as well as Kaitans (human torpedoes). The midget submarines were neatly lined up in rows in a dry dock; they were destroyed by cutting the hulls. The Kaitans were transported back to the United States for research.^x



Midget submarines in a dry dock waiting to be launched against the allied invasion fleet.

It was a gloomy place and time. The weather did not help; it rained and was very damp and chilly. Inside the *944*, they ran the steam generator for warmth. At night, they slept under wool blankets. The occupation forces on land were not as fortunate. They had come to Kure directly from the Philippines, and winter clothes did not catch up with them until November 10, 1945.^{xi}

The *944* traveled between the ports of Kure, Mitsuyama and Hiro during the remainder of October, while the minesweepers and guinea pig squadron continued their work around them.

The danger from mines was ever-present. On October 31, 1945, *LSM 114* triggered a mine about 500 yards from the 944, outside of Hiro Wan. Six men on the LSM suffered blast effects, and one man was reported missing.^{xii} The lost man was Ardway Miner Ross, Steward's Mate 1/c, "Lost overboard due to underwater mine explosion in Hiro Wan, Japan, body not yet recovered."^{xiii} Tragically, Ardway Ross never made it home despite surviving the war.

For many, many sailors, heroism and service continued long after the day that Japan surrendered in Tokyo Bay.

Editor's Note: Author, Lisa Tancredi visited Kure and Japan's Inland Sea recently. Her father Robert David Bittle served on *LCI(L) 944*.



The LSM 114 unloading occupation equipment and supplies in September of 1945.

ⁱ According to a map currently on display at the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force Kure Museum in Kure, Japan.

ⁱⁱ Sixth United States Army Report of the Occupation of Japan, 22 September 1945 – 30 November 1945. In the spring of 1946, the U.S. troops were replaced by the British Commonwealth Occupation Force.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robin Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine; Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Scribe Publications 2008).

^{iv} *The Ship's History of the U.S. Navy "Guinea-Pig"* Joseph Holt, April 2, 1946, Navy Department Bureau of Naval Personnel, Submitted by Paul J. Martin.

^v Diary of Leroy Fischer, Motor Mac 1/c.

^{vi} I visited the Inland Sea in December 2019, stopping briefly in Kure, and then traveling by ferry from Kure to Hiroshima. The Inland Sea was achingly beautiful, making it difficult to imagine how it must have appeared to my father in 1945, as QM on the *LCI(L) 944*.

^{vii} *Travels in Atomic Sunshine*.

^{viii} *Travels in Atomic Sunshine*.

^{ix} United States Pacific Fleet Commander Cruiser Division Twelve Action Report – Kure Covering Unit, 4 – 18 October, 1945.

^x CINPAC Report of Surrender and Occupation of Japan, February 11, 1946.

^{xi} Sixth United States Army Report of the Occupation of Japan.

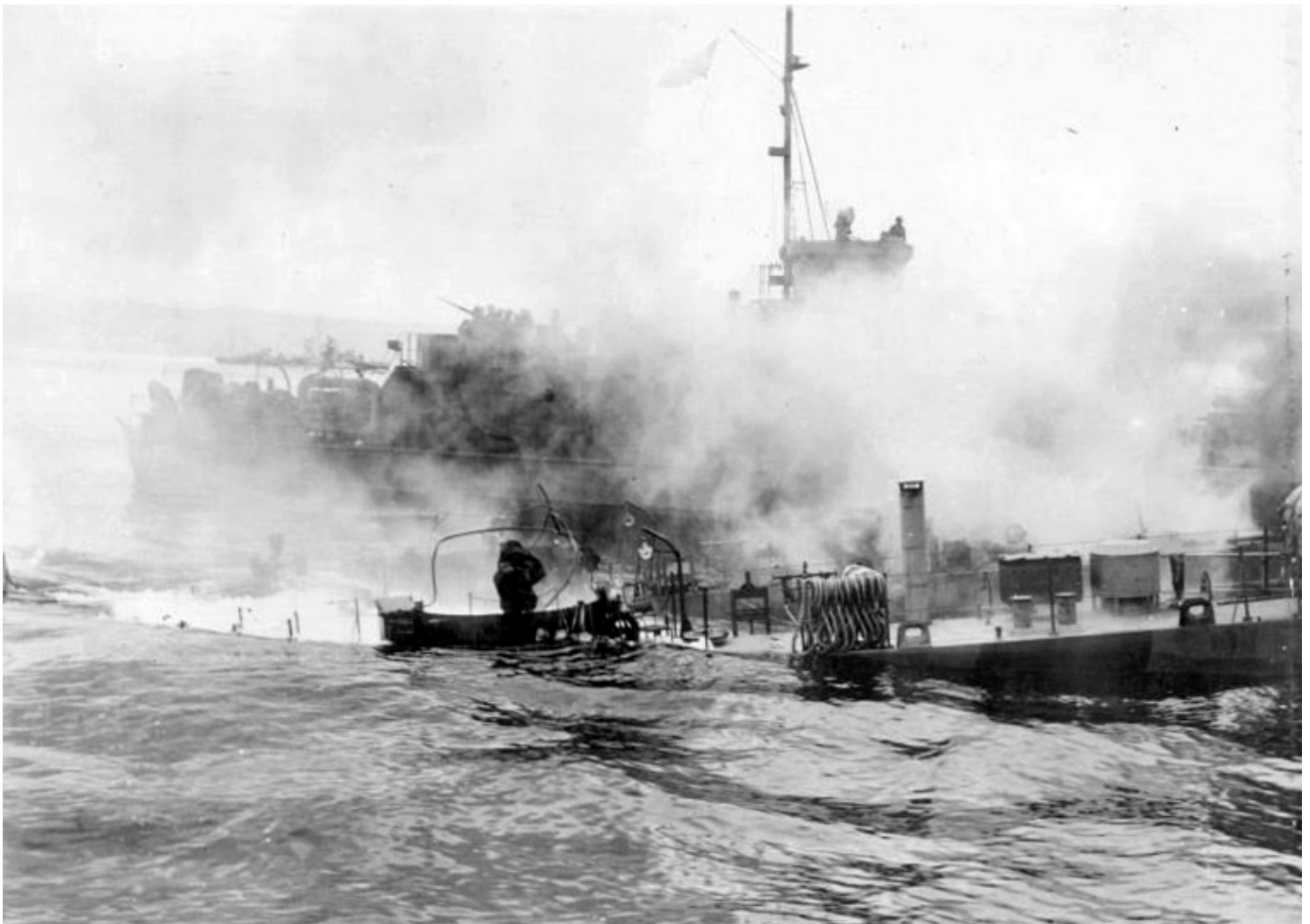
^{xii} Action Report on the Occupation of Kure Hiroshima and Matsuyama Areas, ComPhibGrp11 and CTG 54.11.

^{xiii} *LSM 114's Report of Changes for the month ended November 1, 1945, stamped December 17, 1945.*

Reality is a Matter of Your Perspective

By Robert Wright Jr.

The reason that we research different events concerning the actions of a specific Landing Craft Infantry is usually triggered by an inquiry from a relative of one of the crew members aboard the particular ship. Or sometimes it is curiosity about an old picture. Sometimes a LCI might have been mentioned in a book or a magazine article. This story began with just one picture that I had come across. Looking at the picture below we can see only a part of a ship that was going under the waves. Alongside is another ship which is obscured by smoke. The Conn and mast of the ship in the background appeared to fit the profile of an LCI. More research provided an answer. The Ship in the smoke was the *LCI(L) 1017* and the ship that was about to sink was the *LSM 20*. At that point in time, that was all the information that I required to resolve which LCI was in the photo.



The picture that prompted this research, was of LSM 20 with the LCI(L) 1017 alongside, near Leyte in the Philippines, December 5, 1944. It was determined that the picture was taken from LCI(L) 1014.

In June of 2014 the association was contacted by Pamela Harvey, daughter of one of the crew members of *LCI(L)1017*, who was attempting to obtain any information about her father experiences while serving in WWII. The family had few details except their father's ship's number. I responded because I had that interesting picture to share. I also located the Action Report Filed by the Commanding Officer of the *LCI(L)1017* dated December 4-5, 1944 which described the above incident.

The following is taken from the letter I sent her.

I am providing some explanation on the attached Action Report prepared by the Commanding Officer of USS LCI(L) 1017. It was prepared on December 7, 1944 describing an engagement with Japanese Kamikaze's on December 5, 1944. The pictures that you saw of the LCI(L) 1017 with the sinking of USS LSM 20 occurred during this engagement. I hope that it brings to life some of the experiences that your dad had in the Pacific, and maybe some of the reasons that he didn't talk about it –Robert

Pam Harvey responded in an email:

*Hi Robert,
Thank you so much for the info. I just finished reading it & am deeply moved. I can't imagine having to go through such an event and not be changed in some way. I see why Daddy never spoke of this. There is so much about him that I don't know. He was a very quiet & gentle man unless you got him riled up, and when you got him mad enough, he would explode. But never with us kids. He never laid a hand on us & was a*

wonderful father. But I wonder, how can you take a poor, cotton farmer's son out of a tiny town in Alabama & throw him into such chaos? Somehow, he was able to conform & complete his duties in an honorable way. But, what in the world was going through his mind??

Thanks So Much, Pam

The different scenes of any battle were witnessed by multiple individuals. When reporting these events, we find that, when comparing one individual's detailed accounts, it may not agree with any others description of exactly what transpired. These eyewitness accounts may only agree in general with the sequence of the event.

The stresses of battle have a way of imprinting images on the brain that are retained for long periods, but it also can have the opposite effect of erasing them entirely. The vantage point of one individual may allow them to see what others cannot see. For the men engaged in a battle at sea, their own and their ship's survival is their primary focus. For officers who are commanding the operation their broader focus may be on the successful completion of their assigned mission

What follows is the story of the *LCI(L) 1017* centered around this crew, on one ship, in one event during World War II. The event that transpired was experienced by many and reported from their personal perspective and described in their own words of what they saw happening all around them in the sea and in the air in those few minutes on December 5, 1944.

Preface

Task Unit 78.3.10 was comprised of three groups: Destroyer Squadron Five with 4

DD's, one half of LSM Group Four with 8 LSM's and a number of LCI(L) from Flotilla 8 Group 24 consisting of *LCI(L)s 1014, 1017 and 1018*. The convoy was formed to deliver U.S. Army reinforcements and supplies to the beach at Baybay which is on the Western Coast of Leyte, about 30 miles south of Ormoc where the next amphibious landing of the U.S. Army's 77th Division would take place 2 days later, on December 7th 1944 .

The convoy originated in San Pedro Bay where a large supply base had evolved since the initial landings on Leyte in November 20, 1944. This particular operation would hardly merit a footnote in the pages of the Pacific war but was an example of the effect of the desperate counter measures the Japanese would employ to prevent the United States armed forces from retaking the Philippines.

The run from San Pedro to Baybay was uneventful, hidden from view and under the cover of the nighttime darkness. The return trip would be another story.

What follows are actual excerpts from the Action Reports of December 4-5, 1944.

The Landings

Task Unit 78.3.10 Commander,

Capt. William Cole:

2330, 4 December 1944 - Having failed to establish communications with shore parties, the Task Unit Commander directed the LSMs and LCIs to proceed to the beach and unload. The beachings were successful and the unloading proceeded well with two exceptions. *LSM 20's* first attempt was on too shelving a (long shallow) beach from which she had difficulty retracting.

This LSM rebeached at a suitable location and succeeded in discharging most of her cargo before departing. *LSM 22* was heavily loaded and was unable to beach even in the same location where others had successfully unloaded. This LSM made repeated attempts to beach but was finally forced to depart with her complete load on board.

Commander LSM Group 4,

Cdr. R.C. Johnson:

Due to poor beaching conditions, unloading was not completed until 0300. *LSM 22*, being overloaded, was not able to beach, and returned to Dulag with a full load.

Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1017*,

Lt. Richard G. Jacob:

The troops from the *LCI(L)s* were unloaded first and hit the beach at 0010, December 5, 1944. At 0034 the last of the *LCI(L)s* had unloaded its troops and equipment and had retracted from the beach. The *LCI(L)s* laid off the beach near the destroyers. The LSMs were then beached and proceeded to unload... At 0330 LSMs were completely unloaded with the exception of one which the U.S. Army Colonel aboard refused to unload because in his opinion the beach was not suitable for landing his equipment, this LSM retracted from the beach without unloading.

This Author's Observations:

All parties acknowledge that *LSM 22* failed to beach successfully. The *LSM 22's* War Diary simply reports that they made 5 attempts to beach and they then retired. The *LSM 22* report did not mention the overloaded condition. However the commanding officer of *LCI(L) 1017* expressed an entirely different opinion of the reasons for the failed landing.

The Return to San Pedro Bay

Task Unit 78.3.10 Commander, Capt. William Cole:

1100 - Latitude 10°12'N., longitude 125°18' E., The Task Unit was attacked by eight suicide bombers. These planes appeared through the cloud cover without having been previously detected by radar. The first indication of the attack was when one plane, out of control, crashed astern of the formation. It is assumed that this plane was shot down above the clouds by the fighter cover. During the next ten minutes the remaining 7 suicide planes made attacks in succession. One was shot down by the fighter cover. One was shot down by the *LaVALLETTE* (note *LaVALLETTE* was part of Destroyer Division 12 sent to assist against the air attacks) and one was shot down by the *FLUSSER* when attempting dives on those two ships. Another was shot down over the convoy and crashed in the water. One suicide plane crashed squarely amidships on *LSM 20*, setting it on fire. One suicide plane crashed alongside *LSM 23* and ricocheted into the ship causing extensive damage. The last of the eight planes dove on the *DRAYTON*, striking a glancing blow in the vicinity of No. 1 gun.

1120 - *LSM 20* sunk.

Commander LSM Group 4 Cdr. R.C. Johnson:

1100 in Lat. 10° 12' N Long 125° 18' E, the Task unit was attacked by eight suicide planes. These planes appeared out of the clouds without having been previously detected by radar. The first indication of the attack was when one plane crashed astern of the formation, having evidently been shot down by fighter cover. During the next ten minutes, the remaining seven suicide planes made attacks in succession. One was shot

down by fighter cover. One was shot down by the *La VALLETTE* and one by the *FLUSSER* while attempting suicide dives on those ships. Another was shot down by a LSM and crashed close aboard the stern of the *LSM 34*. One crashed squarely into the *LSM 20* setting it on fire. (note: Cdr. Johnson was almost verbatim of Capt. Cole to this point in his report) Another attempted a crash dive on the *LSM 23*, but it fell short and ricocheted into the ship causing extensive damage, killing seven men and wounding seven more. One of the planes, evidently shot down by air coverage, made an attempt to hit the *LSM 34*, but missed, throwing parts of the plane and the pilot aboard. Several bombs hit near the *LSM 34* also, causing her to be badly shaken up, and minor damage was incurred. The last of the eight planes dove on the *DRAYTON*, striking a glancing blow near #1 gun.

1120 USS *LSM 20* sunk. Commander Transport Unit ordered *LSMs 19, 21, 22, and 318* to proceed to San Pedro Harbor at best speed. Commander Task Unit 78.3.10 directed *DRAYTON* and *SHAW* to proceed as escorts. *LSMs 18 (F), 34, and LCIs 1014, 1017, 1018* then commenced rescue and salvage operations, screened by the *FLUSSER, SAMSON, MUGFORD, and LSM 18* took *LSM 23* in tow.

Commanding Officer USS *LSM 20* Lt. John R. Bradley:

At 1100 on 5 December 1944 while passing through the Surigao Straights en route to Tacloban, Leyte, Philippine Islands, after completion of a successful amphibious operation, the force of which this vessel was a member, was attacked by eight Japanese planes

The U.S.S. *LSM 20* was hit by an "Oscar" type fighter plane believed to be carrying

two (2) one hundred (100) pound bombs. an altitude of about 3000 feet and at a very low angle of dive, striking the ship on the starboard side just aft of the conning tower about three (3) feet above the water line and passing into the engine room, at which time the bombs exploded. The bulkhead to the after-troop compartment and the port side of the engine room buckled. The main port engine and auxiliary engines and fire main and flushing system were put completely out of commission, the rudder control was frozen with the rudder put to hard left, the starboard main engine continued running. Accompanying LCI's attempted to come alongside, emergency facilities were set up

The "Oscar" power dived into the ship from and put into operation to combat the fire and the wounded were removed to the upper deck forward when the water commenced coming into the tank deck through the freeing ports aft. The ship commenced to settle down from the stern first. I ordered the ship abandoned and saw that all the wounded were put over the side into the water. The ship was in a vertical position, bow up when I dove into the water; the ship sank in approximately twenty minutes (20) in three hundred (300) fathoms of water at Latitude 10°11'7" North and Longitude 125°19' East



The LSM 20 succumbing to the damages of the Kamikaze attack. Some of her crew can be seen in the water with one diving off the ship. LCI(L) 1017 in the background and LCI(L) 1014 foreground.

**Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1017*,
Lt. Richard G. Jacob:**

At 1110 at a point just east of Cabalian Bay and south of Amagusan Point on the east coast of Leyte an enemy plane dove out of the sky and strafed the destroyer off our port quarter. This was the first plane seen from this ship. About but not more than twelve enemy planes attacked. At 1112 an enemy plane was shot down by one of the destroyers which was then a few hundred yards off this ship's starboard bow. A third enemy plane approached from astern of this ship and passed close overhead to port. This plane was hit in the cross-fire of this ship's NO 1, 2, and 4 guns, the plane was out of control but managed to crash into the destroyer ahead to the starboard. A fourth plane approached from this ship's starboard quarter, passed low over the bow where it was hit by the Nos. 1 and 3 guns. It crashed in flames about 500 yards to port. A fifth plane made a dive and very nearly crashed into USS *LCI(L) 1018*. This plane was shot down by the USS *LCI(L) 1018* and was out of control when it crashed into the water. Two other planes made suicide dives for LSM 23 and LSM 20 crashing just aft of amid-ships on each of the vessels. *LSM 23* caught fire and USS *LCI(L) 1018* which was near went to her aid, coming alongside and putting out the fire. This LSM's engines were disabled and later was taken in tow by LSM 18. The account of this vessel's assistance to *LSM 20* is covered in the next paragraph. Three or four P-38s engaged the enemy planes and helped to shoot down some of them previous to their suicide dives on the ships. Destroyer fire was heavy and concentrated and hits were made by them on the enemy planes. They were responsible for most of the planes shot down. Most of the planes that managed to crash into ships were hit before they crashed.

Rescue work was started by all the *LCI(L)*s before the attack ended. A number of men had been thrown clear of *LSM 23* when the enemy plane crashed into it and were directly ahead in the water about 1000 yards from this ship. This ship proceeded in the direction of these men to pick them up, but *LSM 18* backed down and performed this operation. As *LSM 20* had subsequently been hit by suicide plane this vessel turned around and at the same time fired on an enemy plane overhead. It proceeded to the assistance of *LSM 20*. The LSM was covered with smoke and listing to starboard. Her engines were still running and steering was out of control. She was going ahead at steerageway in a circular path to the right.

This ship made an approach and came along side *LSM 20*'s port side at 1126. It was difficult to stay alongside because of the circular motion of the ship's headway. Water was put on the fire by this ship, but as the LSM was taking water in the stern badly it practically extinguished itself. This ship moved ahead as it was evident the ship would soon sink. A bow line was passed to the bow of the LSM to hold the bow of this ship to the bow of the LSM. Passowski, J.R. S1c on a stretcher was passed to this ship and was the first man aboard. Many of the men jumped to this vessel's starboard ramp. As the bow began to rise quickly some made a desperate effort to jump, and some made leaps of at least 20 feet. The stern settled very fast, and as the bow rose the bow line was cut. In order to prevent casualty to this ship which was being endangered by the stern of the LSM, the order of full speed ahead had to be given. Several men fell between the two ships. They fell clear however as the bow of the LSM rose upward and to the right, and the bow of this vessel swung to the left when the line was cut. This ship cleared very quickly. The bow of the

[illegible]

Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1014*
Lt(jg) Roger V. Smith:

There were two (2) near misses on destroyers, and then *LSM 23* was hit just aft of the Conn, on the starboard side, Shortly after *LSM 20* was hit in much the same manner, but farther aft on the tank deck and immediately went out of control, circling slowly to starboard. *LCI(L) 1018* was ordered to the assistance of *LSM 23* by the OTC, and *LCI(L) 1017* and this ship were ordered to assist *LSM 20*. This ship stopped first to pick up a man from *LSM 23* who was floating in the water nearby and then proceeded to *LSM 20* which was still circling slowly. By this time *LCI(L) 1017* was alongside to port and trying to assist with fire-fighting equipment, but it was soon apparent that the ship was sinking rapidly by the stern, and some of the crew of *LSM 20* began jumping aboard *LCI(L) 1017*. Before

this ship could be brought close aboard the starboard bow, *LSM 20* began to settle rapidly and engines had to be backed full to clear her bow as she toppled over.

Approximate position, Lat. 10° 10' N., Long. 125° 17' E.

2. Survivors began swimming to this ship as members of the crew dove in to assist the injured into our dinghy. A total of sixteen (16) men were brought aboard, three (3) of whom were severely injured. A call was sent to *LCI 1018* to come alongside to transfer David Parker JERNIGAN, Pharmacist(T), USN to this ship, and upon completion of this, *LCI 1017* came alongside and transferred three (3) more seriously injured men to this ship.

3. At 1230, DD368 ordered this ship to come alongside in order that the casualties' might be transferred to that vessel. As soon as this was completed, the convoy, consisting now of *LSM 18* towing *LSM 23*, *LSM 34*, and *LCI(L)'s 1014, 1017*, and *1018*, was reformed and continued on its course. (See enclosure (A) for list of survivors, including those casualties which were transferred to USS FLUSSER(DD368).

Commanding Officer LCI(L) 1018

Lt(jg) T. R. Larson:

At 1110 General quarters was sounded. Two Val type planes were observed shot down by P-38's. Two similar type planes attempted to crash dive the two destroyers on the port flank - One succeeding in hitting the bow of the leading destroyer. All planes appeared first on the port quarter of the convoy and circled around the stern of the convoy to attack from the starboard side. This vessel commenced ziz-zaging. One plane passed directly overhead was taken under fire and hits were observed. It is believed because of these hits the plane missed its objective the *LSM* abeam to port and crashed into the water. One Val crash dived into *LSM 20*

which was the third ship in the port column causing the *LSM* to sink. One Val type plane attempted to crash dive this vessel was taken under fire by all guns except #1 which was inoperative. Hits were observed and the plane seemed to be falling apart and was shot down passing over the well deck of this vessel and crashing into the water within 50 yards off our port bow. Immediately after, one Val crashed dived the *LSM 23* which was the ship ahead in the starboard column. The *LSM* veered to starboard and was burning. This vessel followed in the wake of the burning *LSM* to render fire-fighting assistance. At 1135 the first stream was put over and shortly after three more. At this time no pumps were operating on the *LSM*. PHARMACIST D.P. JERNIGAN and PhM1c F.J. GREFER were put aboard the *LSM* to care for the wounded. Meanwhile two Destroyers one of which was the U.S.S. MUGFORD appeared at the scene. The U.S.S. *LCI(L) 1017* was alongside the *LSM 20* which was sinking rapidly and the U.S.S. *LCI(L) 1014* was standing by picking up survivors. At 1213 the fire aboard the *LSM 23* was extinguished Pharm. JERNIGAN returned aboard and was then transferred to the U.S.S. *LCI(L) 1014* to render medical assistance at 1245. The *LSM 23* was taken in tow by the *LSM 18* and the convoy proceeded.

The Protectors become the Victims

Commanding Officer USS Drayton (DD366) Cdr. R. S. Craighill:

1100 the Task Unit had arrived and was proceeding northbound through Surigao Strait to the westward of Dinagat Island. Cloud cover was nearly 9/10 about 6500 feet. SC radar range was restricted to about five miles because of land interference. *DRAYTON* was in condition I-Easy. Four P-38s were overhead as CAP,(Combat Air

Patrol) controlled by the *LAMSON*. At about 1103 two groups of boggies were reported over the Inter-Fighter director circuit. These plotted nearly overhead. Almost simultaneously a suicide plane was observed to crash near the *SHAW*. *DRAYTON* opened fire on a diving plane on the port quarter and shot it down in flames. Several other planes were fired, upon with unobserved results. A Val with fixed landing gear approached in a dive from the starboard quarter. All batteries took this plane under fire. Left full rudder was applied (speed 25 knots) and the plane passed down the starboard aide with the wing tip just missing the bridge. His speed was in excess of 350 knots. When it appeared, the plane would miss completely it stood up on its left wing and struck in the vicinity of gun #1. Most of the wreckage of the plane passed clear of the ship but part of the wing and landing gear caused damage to the ship. A serious fire was started from burning gasoline and the powder and projectile ready service boxes were broken open and powder and projectiles strewn around the deck within the flames. In spite of the intense heat none of the projectiles exploded. Some of the powder went off but with a burning rather than explosive force. All powder and projectiles were jettisoned immediately, and the fire extinguished using water and CO2. Prompt fire-fighting measures and the lack of thick paint minimized the damage from fire.

Upon receiving a report of fire in the forward magazines, two compartments were flooded and shortly thereafter pumped dry with only minor damage resulting. Three men were killed or fatally wounded, five men are missing of which two were later recovered, and twelve others more wounded.

While this casualty was being attended to, the ship took several more planes under fire. One plane WAS fired on while it made a

circuitous trip up the port side and was shot down by the CAP as it was diving on the *FLUSSER*. Another plane had Its tail shot off as It was heading for *the DRAYTON*. One was seen to crash an LSM which sank and another alongside a second LSM which caught fire. Other damage was not observed as *DRAYTON* and *SHAW* departed as escort for four undamaged LSMs returning to port.

This Author's Observations: There is an overall consistency in the reports of the attack. The various reports filed state that between 8 and 15 Japanese planes attacked the small task group. Some reported "OSCAR" type fighter planes; other reported "Val" dive bombers. All reports maintain that all the attacking planes were shot down by either US Army P-38 fighters, by naval anti-aircraft gun fire, or by crashing into or near ships of the task group. The destroyer screen, the LSMs and the LCIs all claimed credit for shooting down numerous planes. This is often the case where so much has happened in an intense engagement spanning very little time. And every command wants to share some of the glory.

The Task Group Commander summarized the engagement from his perspective in his last sentences where he noted that suicide planes had successfully hit 3 ships of his 17 ship Task Group and sinking only one. The Commander of LSM Group 4 and the Commanding officers of LSMs barely mention the roles that the LCI present played in the rescue operations of the LSMs. The *LSM 20* commanding officer states that an LCI attempted to come alongside. Aside from the fact that he was pulled from the water by that LCI and that both *LCI(L) 1017* and *1014* rescued almost his entire crew. Additionally, the *LCI(L) 1018* reports coming alongside the burning *LSM 23* and using its firefighting equipment to suppress

the fires that resulted from the ignited gasoline from the suicide plane. This event was specifically noted by the Commander of LCI Group 24 who was present aboard *LCI(L) 1014* at the time.

Second Attack, 5 December 1944,

Commanding Officer USS *Mugford* (DD389) Cdr. M.A. Shellabarger:

The USS *MUGFORD* was conducting active patrol in anti-submarine patrol and radar picket station "DOG" between AMAGUSEN POINT, LEYTE ISLAND, and mid-channel in south SURIGAO STRAIT, on 5 December 1944.

LAVALLETTE was patrolling to eastward toward TAMOYAUAS POINT, DINAGAT ISLAND. At 1109 Task Unit 78.3.1

composed of DESDIV-NINE (COMDESRON-FIVE OTC) (*translation:*

Destroyer Division 9, Commander

Destroyer Squadron Five Overall Task

Group Commander) escorting eight LSM's

and three LCI's on return from a re-supply

mission to the west coast of LEYTE was

observed to be under dive bombing attack

about four miles to the south. This vessel

increased speed to 25 knots and maneuvered

radically while closing the Task Unit to give

all possible support. One plane was taken

under fire with no apparent damage.

MUGFORD and *LAVALLETTE* were made

available to Commander Task Unit 78.3.1

by Commander Destroyer Division

TWELVE in *MUGFORD* and were directed

to join the screen, protecting the damaged

landing craft while *SHAW* and *DRAYTON*,

which had been damaged in the vicinity of

No. 1 gun by a suicide plane, proceeded

north with four undamaged LSM's at best

speed. After survivors from one LSM sunk

had been recovered and one damaged LSM

had been taken in tow, the convoy

proceeded north toward SAN PEDRO BAY.

LaVALLETTE was sent back to patrol SURIGAO STRAIT and *MUGFORD* took station ahead of the convoy with *FLUSSER* screening the starboard quarter and *LAMSON* the port quarter. Another air attack developed from the northeast about 1710 when the convoy had reached a point off SOGOD POINT, LEYTE ISLAND.

One dive bomber (VAL), attacked this vessel and dropped one bomb about two hundred yards off the starboard beam. The plane retired to westward and was lost to view in the haze and land background. Shortly thereafter, however, a plane believed to be the same one, appeared and made another attack at low altitude, weaving violently as it approached. Although hit by machine gun fire it was not shot down and at 1716 crashed into the port side of the ship at frame 93-94 about three feet above the main deck. Thirteen men went over the side from the amidships section to avoid being caught in the fire. These men were all recovered from the water by *LCI 1014*.

Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1018* Lt(jg) T. R. Larson:

At 1705 while passing CABUGAN

GRANDE IS. two enemy planes attacked

the convoy. These were taken under fire by

the destroyers. One crash dived into the

U.S.S. *MUGFORD* and the other was shot

down by P-38's and crashed into the water.

LCI(L)'s *1014*, *1017*, and *1018* stood by to

pick up survivors. The destroyer required no

fire-fighting assistance and extinguished the

fire in short order. The LSM 34 took the

U.S.S. *MUGFORD* under tow and the

convoy proceeded.

Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1014*: Lt(jg) Roger V. Smith:

At 1655, a task group of three (3) cruisers

and accompanying destroyer screen bearing

060° relative, distance about six (6) miles,

was observed to be under attack by suicide dive bombers, three (3) of which were seen to be destroyed. Shortly after two (2) of the planes were observed to be headed for this convoy. One (1) was shot down by a P-38, but the other managed to press home its attack and hit the destroyer, USS *MUGFORD* (DD389), just aft of the stack. LCI's were again ordered to proceed to the stricken ship and pick up survivors, thirteen (13) of whom were found floating within close proximity of each other and were brought aboard this ship. One (1) was found to be severely burned, so was given first aid treatment by the Pharmacist's Mates of the *LCI(L) 1014* and *LSM 20*. Approximate location of this attack, Lat. 20° 17' N., Long. 125° E. *LSM 34* was ordered to take the USS *MUGFORD* (DD389) in tow, and the convoy again resumed its course, Entered anchorage area at 0030, 6 December 1944, and began trying to locate *LST 464*, in order to transfer two (2) for immediate treatment. Finally located ship at 0130 and requested small boat be sent. This being accomplished, ship returned to anchorage. Remaining survivors were subsequently transferred to *MURZIM* (AKA 95) for further disposition.

**Commanding Officer *LCI(L) 1017*,
Lt. Richard G. Jacob:**

At 1705 as ships were passing Cabugan Grande Island just north of Surigao Strait the O.T.C. reported enemy planes approaching from eastward. U. S. Army planes were in the air. The enemy planes attacked two cruisers and three escorts which were about six miles northeast of this group. U. S. Army planes engaged these planes, and several were shot down by both planes and ships to the eastward. The enemy planes then proceeded to attack this group. There were about ten enemy planes and almost an equal number of U. S. Army

planes. Two of the enemy planes were shot down by U. S. Army fighters. Another was hit by destroyer fire.

At 1710 one of the Japanese planes made a suicide dive on the *USS Mugford* and struck her amidships. A fire broke out and flames rose above the destroyer's stacks. Another Japanese plane attempted a suicide dive on another destroyer but was shot down by destroyer fire before it was able to complete its mission.

The USS *LCI(L) 1014* was designated by Commander Group 24 who was aboard to pick up men in the water that had been blown off the *USS Mugford* when she was hit. This vessel was ordered to lay off the stern of the *USS Mugford* to be on hand if needed. The fire on the *USS Mugford* was soon under control, but her engines were inoperative, and *LSM 34* was designated to take her in tow. Two destroyers arrived from the north to render protection. The command was transferred by the *USS Mugford* to one of these destroyers and the vessels formed up and proceeded at steerageway for San Pedro Bay.

At 2000 *LSM 23* in tow by *LSM 18* announced her ability to make seven knots. *USS Mugford* ordered the convoy to proceed and govern its speed according to that of *LSMs 23* and *18*. *USS Mugford* and *LSM 34* dropped behind since they were unable to make this speed.

After each of the Ships Action reports was filed, this follow-up report was sent.
Commander Task Group 78.3.1 Capt. W. M Cole stated:

1. The Commanding Officers of *LCI's 1014, 1017* and *1018* have written very complete and interesting reports, which supply details not previously known to the Task Unit Commander, and not contained in his Action

Report. Some inaccuracies appear, and some of the details of the anti-aircraft action on 5 December are open to question. However, these craft were in an excellent position to observe (and participate in) the action, and their reports, considered together, presents a generally correct and vivid picture.

2. The rescue and salvage work done by these LCI's is deserving of high praise. They showed initiative, skill and valor in aiding, stricken ships and in picking up, caring for, and transferring survivors. By a copy of this letter, the Commanding officers of *LCI's 1014, 1017 and 1018*, and Commander LCI(L) Group 24 are requested to submit specific recommendations for appropriate recognition.

This Author's Final Observations:

The screening group of destroyers originally assigned to this one operation was comprised of 4 ships. Subsequently they were joined by the 2 additional destroyers. Their duty assignment was to protect the 11 ships and the men aboard of the landing force. Due to the skill, dedication and courage of these destroyer crews 10 ships completed the mission. Of the amphibious group, only *LSM 20* was sunk with a loss of 5 men missing. *LSM 23* while damaged remained afloat and suffered 7 killed and 7 wounded.

The screening group of destroyers suffered the highest number of casualties. The *USS DRAYTON* suffered 3 killed 3 missing and 12 wounded. The *USS MUGFORD* who had arrived later to assist in the defense of the damaged ships suffered 8 killed and 17 suffered burns as a result of the attack.

At this point in history we can only speculate as to what the outcome of the attacks by the Japanese may have been, if the additional Destroyers had not been close by and had not aided in destroying the attacking suicide planes that were determined to sink as many of the US Navy transports as possible.

Weeks later the world would learn little of those desperate minutes and the courage displayed by these crews. The event was simply reported in a single sentence that was destined to be, soon, lost and forgotten.

Navy Department Communiqué No. 563 December 27, 1944:

Item 2. The *LSM 20* was also recently lost off Leyte, Philippine Islands as the result of enemy action.

After I sent Pam Harvey the story of *LCI(L) 1017* she wrote back:

Hi Robert,

I just remembered something my Mom told me years ago. She said when they were first married (1949), Daddy would wake up with nightmares of the Japs & the Japanese planes flying overhead. Now that I know the story, I understand why he had the recurring nightmares & what terror he must have felt during them. My heart breaks for him & all the men who lived through these nightmares.

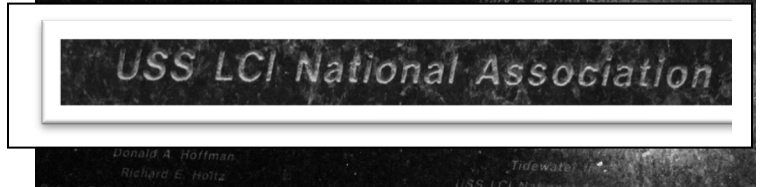
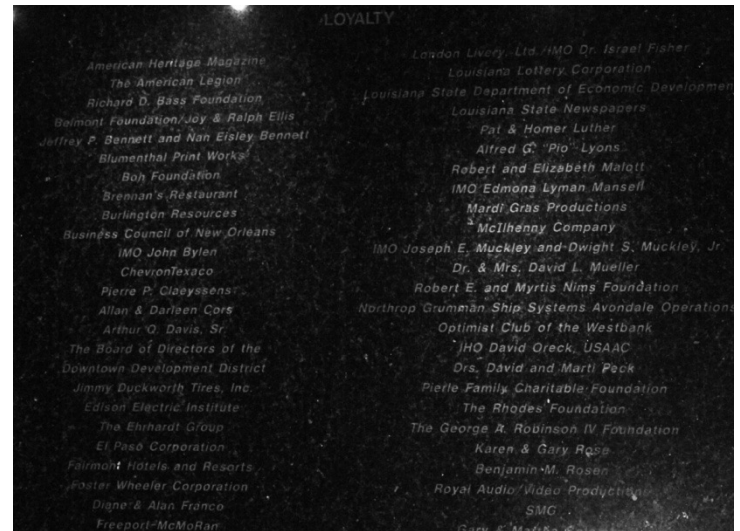
This story began as an attempt to reveal to her and her family, some the experiences of one man, her father, William Rolfe Cauthen aboard a LCI during WWII. It was during this research we discovered that her dad was actually, LT(jg) William R Cauthen the 3rd officer of the *LCI(L) 1017*.

An Invitation to Visit the:

WWII THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM NEW ORLEANS

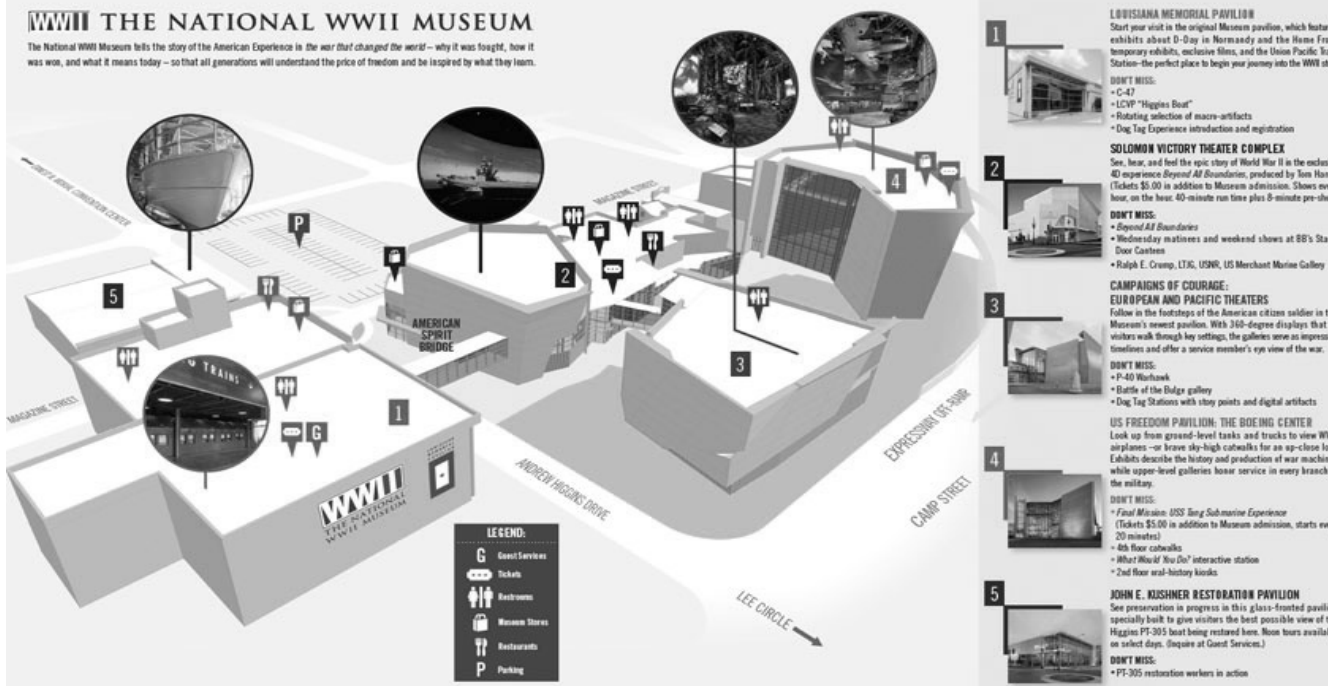
Robert Wright Jr. - My invitation came in 2015 inviting me to attend the Grand Opening of the newest exhibit of the National WWII Museum's, **The Road to Tokyo: Pacific Theater Galleries**. Initially I was inclined to send my regrets, thinking that this was just another fund raiser for the museum, but later, I decided that it was really was the time to make my first visit to this rapidly growing institution which is currently ranked as the # 3 destination museum in the country. Many of the members of the LCI Association still remember when the museum opened its first building as the National D-Day Museum. The LCI Association was one of the original organizations that provided funds to the museum. Those LCI Members who attended that grand opening in the year 2000 have great memories of celebration by the entire City on New Orleans. The museum began with a single exhibit hall which is the building in the lower left in the picture below. Over the following 20 years they have added 4 additional pavilions that house historical exhibits, restoration facilities, and restaurants with a period dinner theater. I was so impress that I have returned 3 times since 2015.

The museum's original building houses a wall plaque listing the major donors. This is where we see our USS LCI Association's contributions are being recognized.



WWII THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM

The National WWII Museum 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.



The museum singular focus is the experiences of the generation of men and woman and the events that were World War II.

During my visit last fall my wife came along, while she is not quite as versed in the events of World War II, she did find the whole experience very engaging. After explaining one display in detail to her, I noticed that a group of people had assembled behind me and were listening intently to my words. People wanted to Know!



LCI Association Historian Dennis Blocker gives thumbs up for this display. The Plaque reads:

"Launched in 1920, the Japanese battleship Nagato participated in the Battle of Midway and was badly damaged in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. She retired to Japan and remained there until the war's end as the only surviving Japanese capital ship. After the war the vessel was used in the American atomic-bomb tests at Bikini Atoll and survived the first atomic blast. The second blast cause more serious damage, and Nagato sank five days later. At various points during the war Nagato served as the flagship for senior Imperial Japanese navy commanders, including Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki. This flag represented a vice admiral's presence onboard the ship and was discovered in a storage area after the war by American occupying forces."

Gift of the USS LCI Association, 2005.078.002



You can meet and talk to other WWII veterans while you explore the Museums many different exhibits. Dennis Blocker had the opportunity to discuss the *LCI(G) 449* action supporting the Navy's UDT teams at Iwo Jima with Marine veteran, Woodrow "Woody" Williams, who earned a Medal of Honor during that battle.



Our 2016 New Orleans reunion was attended by D-day veteran Harold McCreary MoMM3/c LCI(L) 412 and 3 Younger Generations.

You may not realize how important your WWII story is to your children. Make this a family event to tell them!

LCI Assn. 29th Annual Reunion (*Preliminary Information*)

Important Information: We are currently working out the reunion program's schedule of events, costs and other details. This reunion is approximately 6 months from this Elsie Item publication. ***The Schedule of Events below is not final.*** Please note that the Higgins Hotel is across the street from the National World War 2 Museum, and allows for easy access to the Museum and all the events.

Dates: September 1 -4 2020

Location: Higgins Hotel New Orleans La.

Schedule of Activities (Tentative)

Monday August 31, 2020

Hotel group rate will apply to attendees who wish to arrive early or stay later.

Tuesday September 1, 2020

- **Morning:** Arrivals
- **Afternoon:** Check in Hospitality Room
- **Evening:** Dinner
- Executive Board Meets

Wednesday September 2, 2020

- **Morning:** Breakfast
- **Morning & Afternoon:** VJ Day Surrender Ceremonies at WWII Museum and Honors for the WWII Veterans
- **Evening:** Early Dinner and then a Play at the Museum

Thursday September 3, 2020

- **Morning:** Breakfast
- Tour WWI Museum as group or on your own
- **Evening:** Dinner & Music Show

Friday September 4, 2020

- **Morning:** Breakfast
- Memorial Service
- Business Meeting
- Lunch
- **Afternoon :** Open
- **Evening:** LCI Banquet

Saturday: September 5, 2020

- **Morning:** Breakfast
- Farewells

If there is a possibility that you will attend, Please return this form if you did not send in one previously. Complete details will be sent as soon as they are final.

LCI Veteran or Affiliate Name: _____ Rating: _____

LCI Veteran Served on: USS LCI TYPE :(_____) SHIP NUMBER: _____

Number of Additional Family Members Possibly Attending _____

Contact Name (if not the Veteran or Affiliate above): _____

Contact: Phone Number _____ Email _____

Return to: USS LCI National Assn.

Robert E Wright, President PO BOX 407 Howell, MI 48844-0407

Officers and Executive Board

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

Officers

Robert E. Wright, Jr.

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

Richard Lovell

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

Peter Selan

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

Chaplain

Abe Laurenzo

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

Board of Directors

Joe Flynn

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

Stan Galik

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

Dr. Michael A. Pikos

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

Lisa Bittle Tancredi

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

Directors Emeritus

Rod Scurlock

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

Gordon Smith

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

Historians

John M. France

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

Dennis Blocker

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

Attention LCI Veterans and Associates
We need your stories now. Write or email John France.

C/O Robert E. Wright, Jr. President/Treasurer
P.O. Box 407 Howell, MI 48844-0407



The Inland Sea of Japan is incredibly beautiful. This photograph was taken while on the Kure to Hiroshima ferry by Lisa Bittle Tancredi, daughter of Robert D. Bittle LCI(L) 944. "While in Kure, I went to the JMSDF Kure Museum, which had displays and information about the mines dropped by the Allies. The mines successfully blocked the ports so that they were of little use to the Japanese, but also made re-entry very dangerous for our men during the occupation. Being relatively expendable, LCI(L) 944 (my dad's ship) was the first ship that went into the Inland Sea after the minesweepers (although from what I have read, other ships also claim that honor). Imagine surviving the war and then contemplating being blown up by a U.S. mine." (See Lisa's article pages 20-23)