Elsie Item

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

• *Established May 14–18, 1991, Norfolk, VA* •

ISSUE 116 SPRING 2022

The Leapfrogging Advance Begins

A Marine Corsair lands on the newly developed airstrip on Vella Lavella. US forces bypassed heavily defended islands for this northern most base in the New Georgia group. A dozen LCI(L)s participated in landing 4,600 troops there in August of 1943.

Inside this issue…

The Elsie Item Number 116 – Spring 2022

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

Your Story

We are always looking for stories and memories of your LCI service. Although we are primarily interested in your experiences aboard an LCI ship, we are also interested in the circumstances leading up to your entry into the Navy and the impact that your WWII experiences have had on your postwar life.

General guidance on sharing your story can be downloaded from the Association website: **usslci.org/share-your-story/**. Any letter to the editor can be sent to **Jeff Veesenmeyer (JeffreyMktg@gmail.com)** or the postal address below.

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QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Email TheCrew@usslci.org

Observations from Officer's Country **from Robert E. Wright Jr.**

USS LCI Association Annual Reunion 2022, a continuing saga…

The number one question from veteran members is, WHEN IS THE NEXT REUNION? The current pandemic, and other factors, makes it so difficult to plan future events. We can always be optimistic. Please read the Reunion Notice in this ELSIE ITEM

Membership Renewals 2022 Note: I will mail the renewals for LCI Widows in March 2022. As of 2/2/2022, there are 42 members who have not returned your renewal forms. Please take some time and do that today!

For the majority who have renewed, I want to express a sincere "Thank You." I also appreciate the many notes expressing your appreciation that we have been able to keep the association active.

As of February 01, 2022 we have had 50 of the WWII veterans re-up their enlistments for 2022. Our USS National Landing Craft Infantry Association, as far as I am aware, is one of the few remaining and still active WWII Veteran Associations.

This year donations made by members to the Association, has remained steady. As a result, we shall continue to provide the expanded version of the ELSIE ITEM that we started two years ago. I need to thank our editor, Jeff Veesenmeyer, for his expertise and assistance in getting each issue out the door, and also his patience in dealing with my still crazy schedule that Covid made even worse.

As part of the EXPANDED ELSIE ITEM, we are trying a new concept for covering the events of WWII. I have written a more detailed article covering just some of the events that impacted the Amphibious Forces in the South Pacific in 1943. I hope that you enjoy it. If so, let me know. If you don't, send your "complaints" to our editor Jeff.

I also want to thank everyone who has contributed information for the many articles that were included for publication. There are still so many amazing stories left to be told.

Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

This issue, Number 116 Spring 2022, starts my fifth year as editor of Elsie Item. I first met Peter Selan and Royal Wetzel at the 2017 LSM/LSM(R) Reunion in Norfolk. They are both gone now. But that chance meeting introduced me to the USS Landing Craft National Association, the LCI veterans, and their stories.

Elsie Item began publishing 30 years ago in August 1991. After 115 issues one would think there are no more stories to tell. Not true. There is a story to be told for every sailor who ever swabbed the deck of an LCI. Many are no longer with us to tell their first-person sea tales. But their stories are still being discovered and told.

In this issue I was able to include the forgotten story of Exercise Tiger. I found a first-person account in an American Legion magazine. It was a reprint provided by the Exercise Tiger Memorial website. I researched further and found other accounts of this tragic event. One eyewitness was Leroy Brown *LCI(L) 83*. He told his part of the story during an oral history interview that is now available at the Library of Congress.

Another story in this issue was submitted by John Harvey for his dad's *LCI(L) 1074*. Harvey obtained the complete deck log for the *1074*. A six-week portion of the hand-written log book covers the training and shipboard life the *1074* crew experienced in preparation for landings in the Philippines. The deck log provided just enough details for Harvey to create a readable and informative story.

LCIs participated in many smaller landings that get little coverage compared to big invasions. Their information is harder to find but is available. Robert Wright has been researching and writing those stories. Part Two of "The Forgotten War" (the Solomons) is in this Spring issue.

The stories will keep coming as long as there are readers like you to read and enjoy them.

Finally, the past two years have been devastating on military reunions. Many associations are now saying "Damn the torpedoes…full speed ahead." There is never a guarantee in this new Covid virus world, but we hope to see you at an event this year. See the reunion notice in this issue and respond quickly as though there were two "fish" off your port bow.

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Dear Jeff:

I congratulate you on your uncanny and unique ability to present issue after issue of life aboard the LCIs in a most informative, educational, and sometimes humorous way. Whether at sea, in combat, or life as usual, it always draws the reader's attention and satisfies their inquisitive nature. Keep up the great work and thank you!

Harry W. Ritzil CMoMM LCI(L) 362, 341

SEND LETTERS & PHOTOS TO: JeffreyMktg@gmail.com or my mailing address (Contact Us) inside front cover.

In Memoriam

LCI 70
Royal Wetzel

LCI 70
Leo Wilcox

LCI 77
James McConnell

LCI 188
Clarence Gadson

LCI 336
George C. Quinn

LCI 367
William Kirkland

LCI 638
John T. “Jack” Healy

LCI 712
Albert Becker

LCI 995
Warren Gillum Jr.

LCI 976 / 684
Warren French Jr.

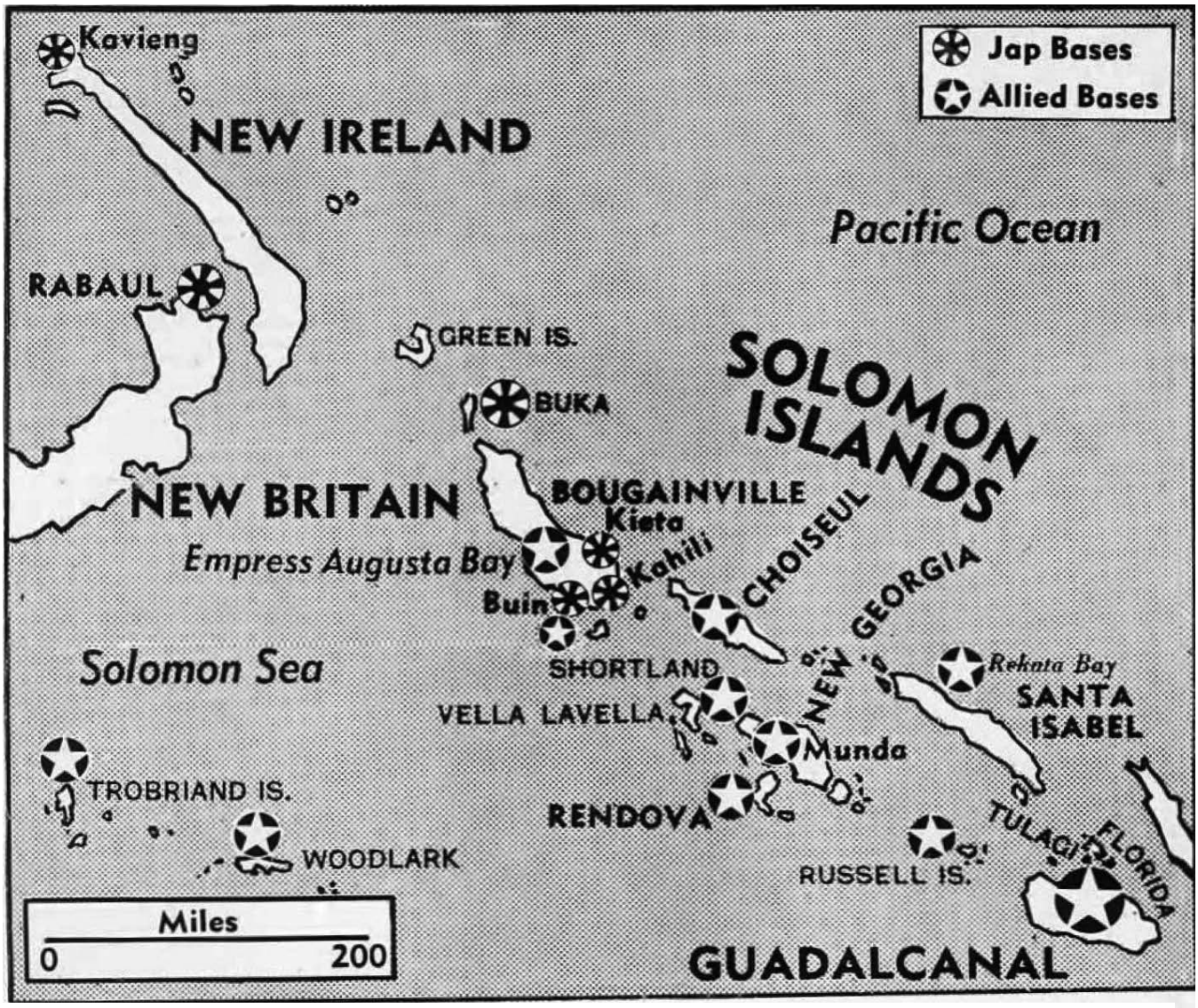
The Forgotten War by Robert E Wright Jr

Part 2

On the nights of February 7-8, 1943, unknown to the Americans, the Japanese Navy evacuated their surviving troops from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. Essentially, they surrendered the island to the U.S. Marines and Army that had carried on the six-month bitter and costly battle for control of that vital piece of real estate. The allied forces in the South Pacific were now only 3,388 miles from Tokyo with the entire Japanese Navy and Army ready to oppose any further advance.

Earlier in January of 1943 Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill together with their military staffs, met in Casablanca, French Morocco in the newly captured territories of North Africa. During these meetings, they finalized the strategic plans for the defeat of the Axis powers with the ultimate goal of their "unconditional surrender." By July 1943, the Allied forces in European Theater, assembled the largest amphibious force of the war and landed American and British Armies on the coast of Sicily during Operation Husky.

On the other side of the world, the decisions made at Casablanca would have consequences for the men fighting the Pacific war. During the Casablanca conference, both sides agreed in planning meetings to the goal of eliminating the Japanese military bastion at Rabaul in the islands of New Britain. In March 1943 meetings were held in Washington D.C. where General MacArthur's staff laid out their plan for the assault on Rabaul. It required the addition of six additional infantry divisions and 24 air groups in addition to his current American and Australian Army and U.S. Marine units. In addition, it would require a much larger allocation of the navy resources to support the movement and supply of this new force. The Washington war planners were taken aback at the size of the request. The planners finally agreed to limited aspects of the plans which ultimately would become Operation Cartwheel. The Supreme Commander in the South Pacific would only receive two additional Army divisions and some additional air groups to carry out the



World War 11 era map showing the location of American and Japanese bases at the end of 1943

assignment. Before Guadalcanal fell to the Americans, military planners began to look for the next stop on the Road to Tokyo. Their focus became New Georgia and specifically the airfields at Munda which had only been discovered by reconnaissance aircraft in December 1942.

Just 30 miles north of Guadalcanal and 60 miles from Henderson Field in the Solomon chain was the Russell Island group. Intelligence reports indicated that they were unoccupied and suitable for the construction of an airfield. In January 1943 they began to plan the operation which was to be named, Cleanslate. Its goal was to occupy the Russell islands to

establish radar facilities and bases for PT Boats and landing craft which would facilitate the future movements up the Solomon Islands chain. Planners were given nine days to make all the plans and preparations for the landings

In late 1942, shipyards across America had been delivering the new Landing Craft Tanks to the Navy. These had been put aboard transports along with their crews and carried to the South Pacific. Many arrived in sections and had to be welded together at forward bases, like Milne Bay, New Guinea before they would be operational. In early 1943 the other amphibious landing craft such as the Landing Craft Infantry and Landing Ship Tank were just starting their long journeys from the various stateside shipyards to the Pacific Theater.

Task Force 61 was organized for the Russell Island landings from the ships that were available and were commanded by RADM Richmond Kelly Turner. It comprised of seven DDs, destroyers, four APDs which were old destroyers converted to troop transports, four DMS's old destroyers converted to fast minesweepers, eight PT boats, the logistic support ship *Bobolink*, and Landing Craft Tank Flotilla Five comprised of 12 new LCTs. Crusher Division 12 was to provide cover if the Japanese sent a naval force to oppose the landings. The short story of the operation was that the troop movements were made from bases on Guadalcanal to the beaches on the Russell without any major transport issues. It was unopposed by the Japanese ground forces because they had been evacuated earlier, by the Japanese Navy.

From February 21 through March 15, 1943, a force of 15,500 men together with 45,000 tons of supplies and base construction materials went ashore. At the end of March, there were three squadrons of fighter planes based at the new airfield. At Renard Sound there was a new Patrol Torpedo base which became the stopping point for many of the LCI's later in 1943. Lastly, the Marines established a base on Pavuvu Island, which had little for the Marines to recommend, and left a plenty to complain about. Operation Cleanslate, especially without Japanese opposition, had provided valuable lessons in the conduct of the landings that would be needed in future operations to eliminate Rabaul.

At the same time Operation Cleanslate was being conducted in the Solomon Islands, General Kenney's V Army Air Force based in New Guinea had located a convoy of 16 ships carrying Japanese Army troops from Rabaul on New Britain to reinforce their units which were opposing MacArthur's forces that were moving up the New Guinea coast.

The action that ensued became known as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. The irony of the name was that it wasn't a "naval" battle in the classic sense and it took place mainly in the Solomon Sea.

With the typical American habit of modifying anything if you can make it better, General Kenney's fliers were modifying their B-25 medium bombers to fight the Japanese and not the Germans. The first major change was to replace the bombardier in the nose cone of the plane with six 50 caliber machine guns to be used for strafing. The second was the change the 500 lb. bombs with a 5-second delay fuse, so they would act as a naval mine and not explode on contact with the target ship but underneath it. The force of the underwater detonation would break the seams of a ship causing irreparable damage. The third was the development of skip bombing attack which was designed to deliver the bomb load to the side of the ship where it would then sink and detonate. The modified B-25s would attack a ship with the forward-facing machine guns firing causing the anti-aircraft gunners to duck for cover; they would release the bomb which would skip along the surface until it struck the side of the ship. This tripped the detonator and the bomb would sink. The plane would immediately climb out at just over mast height and the delay fuse would allow them to escape the explosion.

On March 1, 1943, General Kenney received a dispatch: "Convoy of 14 vessels, north of New Britain." The convoy was tracked for the remainder of the day until contact was lost after 9:30 in the evening. At 8:15 the following morning of March 2nd, a formation of twelve B-17s took off to intercept the convoy. Their bombing run resulted in one transport that was sunk and two others suffering hits. Despite the attack, the Japanese convoy continued toward its assigned destination. The following day the convoy had air cover high above when it was met again by V Air Force heavy, B-17 bombers, but this time they were accompanied by medium B-25, and light A-20 bombers. To provide air cover for the bombers there was a flight of 16 P-38s twin-engine fighters. First, the P-38s engaged the convoy's air cover, and then the bombers began their coordinated bombing runs. The B-17s made a mid-level attack. The Japanese destroyers and transports maneuvered hard to avoid the bombs raining down from the B-17s right into the path of the low flying B-25s as was planned. Twenty-eight 500 lb bombs hit their targets. High overhead additional Australian P-40s had joined the air battle. The destruction of Japanese aircraft, continued over Lae when Allied fighters

intercepted the retuning Japanese fighters who were low on fuel and were trying to land at their airfields.

The following days more bomb runs were made on the ships that had been disabled in the attacks of the 3rd of March. In the night hours, PT boats based in New Guinea patrolled the area looking to eliminate any Japanese survivors or ships that were sent out to rescue them. It was an operation where no mercy was given. Of the 18 ships in the convoy, only four destroyers escaped and returned to Rabaul after plucking as many survivors as possible out of the sea and from the damaged vessels. Post-war reports confirmed that the Japanese had only been able to rescue 2,734 men, just slightly less than half the force of which 3,000 were listed missing.

It was the end of March 1943. The two-pronged attacks to encircle Rabaul were about to be launched with General MacArthur's combined forces in the west, eliminating the Japanese threat as they worked their way up the New Guinea coast. In the Eastern prong, Admiral Halsey had assumed command of the allied forces in the Solomon Islands. But there was a major problem. The Americans had essentially been waging a limited offense in the Pacific up to that point in 1943. The tools of war, to wage any advance were in very short supply. So, they were forced to just wait for them to arrive.

By the end of June 1943, the Navy had now established bases "all over the map" of the South Pacific whose only goal is to supply and support the upcoming operations including Operation Toenails. This was to occupy New Georgia and capture the Airfield at Munda. July 1, 1943, D-day on Rendova, was a success. The Japanese were again caught off guard by the landings. The amphibious force put ashore 6,000 men and their supplies in the first echelon of the landings. That was about the only thing that went right in what US Navy historian, Samuel E Morrison called "The Most Unintelligently Waged Land Campaign." It had taken over a month to capture the airfield at Munda which was originally slated for the fourth day of operations. And that only happened because the Japanese force withdrew the night before.

Ten days after the Marines occupied the Munda airfield, which was the primary goal of the operation, the Navy SeaBees had turned it into a serviceable emergency landing strip. A short time later, Marine air squadrons arrived, including the VMF-214, the "Black Sheep" of Major Gregory Boyington.

The U.S. Marines unloading supplies during the initial landings on Rendova, New Georgia Group from the LCI(L)s 335 328 and 336 of LCI Flotilla Five Group 14 on July 1, 1943.

This landing was covered extensively in ELSIE ITEM of May 2014, and is omitted from this article

"John Miller, Jr a former Marine, a veteran of Guadalcanal, and after the war an Army historian, considered it '*one of the worst possible places" to fight a war. All the islands had much in common and much that is common is unpleasant*.' The islands were mountainous, jungle-covered, pest-ridden, and possessed a hot-wet tropical climate. There were no roads, major ports, or developed facilities. New Georgia was all of this, and more."

On the ground, the American forces had ultimately committed three Army Divisions and multiple Marine units to the campaign. The American units suffered greater casualties than the Japanese defenders. On the waters around New Georgia, in several night actions in

the Kula Gulf north of the Islands the US Navy lost three destroyers and the cruiser, *Helena*, while failing to prevent the Japanese from reinforcing their other bases on the nearby islands. In addition, the cruisers *St Louis* and *Honolulu* were torpedoed and would require an extended period of time to repair their battle damage.

The war in the Pacific was a series of events that often resulted in drastic changes made by the combatants

The war in the Pacific was evolving as the two, now bitter enemies, began to change tactics as a direct result of the battles as they had previously fought. This applied not only to the enemy's actions but also to the actions of their own forces. Because of their terrible losses in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, the Japanese would never again make large-scale troop movements where the Allies had control of the skies. The Japanese also determined that the places that the Americans were most likely to land were where they could take over an operational airfield which had been the case at Guadalcanal and New Georgia. With that insight, they began to heavily fortify the islands between New Georgia and Rabaul where they had airbases. The Japanese now adopted new battle plans that called for a series of defensive positions that would attempt to inflict as much damage as possible on the advancing Americans, before falling back to their next line of defense.

In their arrogance, U.S. naval officers still dismissed the superior capabilities of the Japanese Long Lance Torpedo. This refusal to acknowledge any Japanese technical capabilities was the direct cause of the losses of so many ships and their crewmen. The Americans were learning too. The Allied commanders quickly learned that the tactics taught to them in the war college of how to win World War 1 just did not apply in the Pacific conflict. Marine Corps Major General Vandegrift stated simply, "*landings should not be attempted in the face of organized resistance if, by any combination of march or maneuver, it is possible to land unopposed and undetected."* They learned that placing an undersupplied landing force ashore could result in disaster. The landings in the Russell Islands proved to the planners that it wasn't necessary to capture an airfield when the Naval Construction Battalions could quickly and more easily build a suitable one. Older Navy task group commanders learned that the new Radar actually worked.

Why Vella Lavella?

The battle to take the Solomon Islands had begun a little over a year earlier. The fighting to capture Guadalcanal and New

Georgia had been costly to the Allies in both men and ships. By August 1943 approximately six Army and Marine divisions had been taken out of any immediate action from casualties and disease. They required the *Three-R's;* rest, relaxation, and replacements to bring them back to fighting strength. The navy had lost 29 ships, but these would soon be replaced with newly launched ships from U.S. shipyards. With the ground battle on New Georgia in its final phases and the Naval Construction Battalion had turned the airfield at Munda into an advanced fighter base, Operation Toenails was over. The allies were now 450 miles air miles from Rabaul. Admiral Halsey's and General Macarthur's planners had already picked Bougainville as their next primary target.

One commander observed, US forces had taken a year to advance just 150 miles, at that rate the final 3,300 miles might take forever

For the Japanese protecting Bougainville there were several now even more heavily reinforced and fortified Japanese bases. These were on the islands of Kolombangara, Choiseul, Buka, and the Shortlands. Kolombangara was initially chosen for the next amphibious landing because of its airfield at Vila. However, reports from intelligence estimated that there were approximately 12,000 defenders on the island, more than twice as many as had been on New Georgia. Admiral Halsey wanted no repeat of what had occurred while taking Munda. Admiral Nimitz had in July 1943 suggested that Kolombangara be sidestepped and that an amphibious force land 12 miles to the northwest of that island on lightly defended Vella Lavella, repeating the tactic used earlier by landing at Attu which had by-passed the more heavily defended Kiska in the Aleutian Islands. Adm. R. K. Turner who opposed that idea was suddenly replaced by Rear Admiral Wilkinson as commander of the III Phib Force. Message received! "Island Hopping" was to become a strategic component of the campaign

A total of 4,600 men were assigned to the Operation were loaded aboard seven APDs which comprised the 1st Transport Group, twelve LCI(L)s of the 2nd Transport Group, and three LSTs which were the 3rd Transport Group. The landing force departed from Guadalcanal in stages beginning at dawn on August 14, 1943. The slow LSTs were followed by the LCIs and finally the APDs. At daybreak, the APDs which had arrived in the dark at the Vella Lavella rendezvous area, launched their landing craft, embarked their troops, and sent them toward the designated beach. By 7:15 am

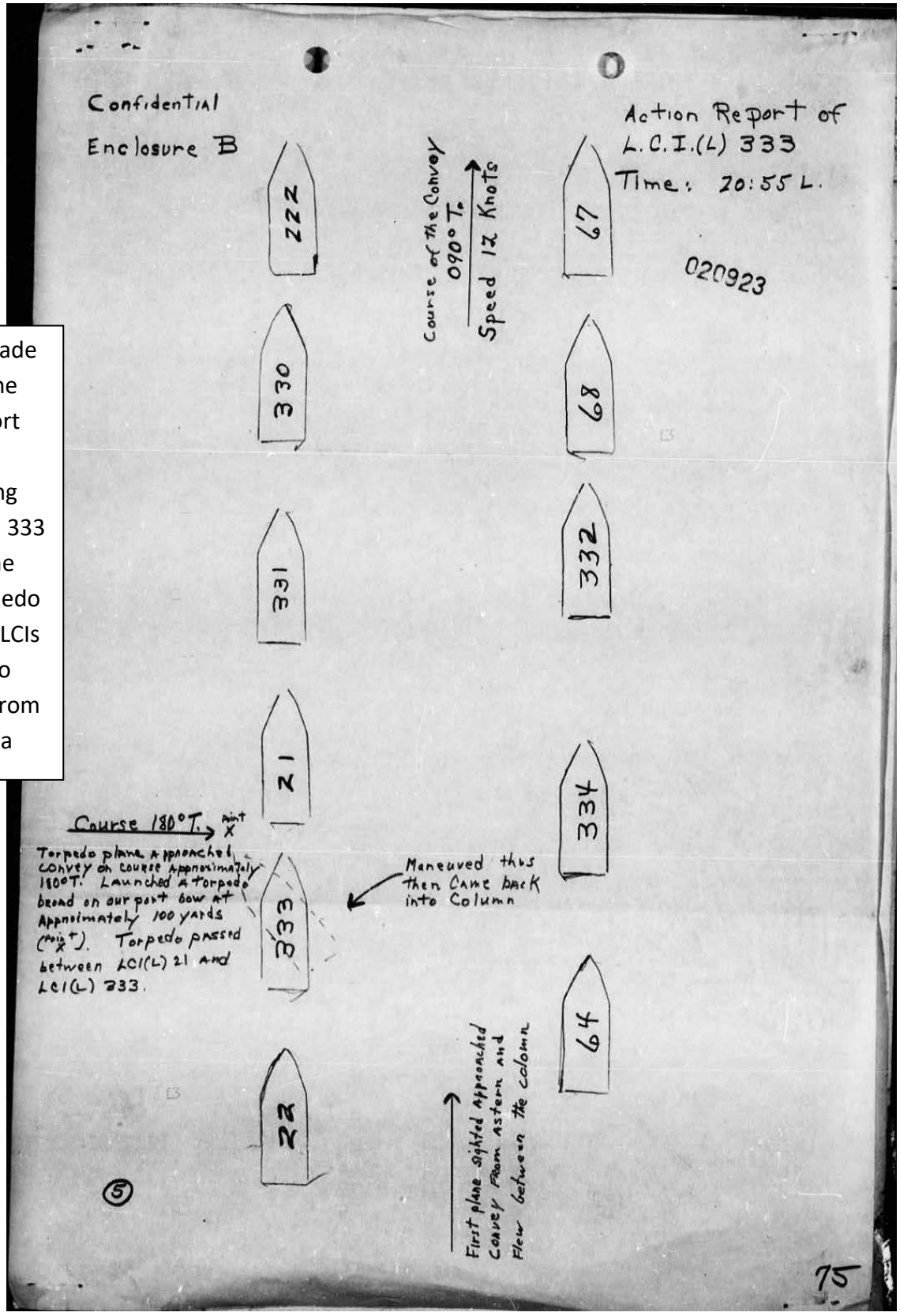
their boats had returned and were loaded aboard and the APDs departed with their destroyer screen.

At 7:10 am, as soon as the 1st Transport Group had completed their landings, the LCI(L)s of Flotilla Five headed to their assigned beaches. The 2nd Transport Group was made up of *LCI's 21, 22, 23, 61, 67, 68, 222(Flotilla Flag) 330, 31, 332. 333 and 334.* An issue arose that the beach was able to only able handle 8 LCIs at one time. The first group of 4 landed. The remaining 8 LCIs stood off waiting for the first group to back off the beach before they could land their troops and unload their supplies. All of this was completed by 9:10 am. About halfway through the unloading process for the Second Transport Group the Japanese made their first air raid of the day. About 15-20 fighters and dive bombers of a 54-plane attack group made it through the Combat Air Patrol and attacked the landing force. Fortunately for the loaded LSTs and beached LCIs, the attackers concentrated on the landing force screening Destroyers. Within a short time, Japanese attackers headed back to their base without suffering any losses or inflicting any damage. The crews of the LCI's could do nothing except to watch what was happening off in the distance. While LSTs of the 3rd Transport Group were unloading on the beach the second air raid of the day occurred. This time eight bombers penetrated the air cover, coming in over the water, and headed directly for the LST's stranded on the beach. While *these bombers scored some near misses* during the attack, the gunners on the LST's claimed three of their attackers were shot down. Within minutes the second wave of fighters and bombers approached for the land again toward the beached ships. Between the destroyer fire and the anti-aircraft fire from the LSTs, the attack was driven off. Just prior to sailing the LST of this group had tripled their number of anti-aircraft guns. In his Action Report filed after the landing, the LST Group Commander claimed 10 confirmed kills for the day.

The Japanese claimed a great victory too when their aircraft returned to their base. They had only lost 17 planes that day while defeating the Americans in the great air battle.

But the Japanese were not through with their attempts to destroy the ships of the landing force. Japanese spotter aircraft located the LCI's of the 2nd Transport Group as they were returning south towards New Georgia.

The Sketch made as part of the Action Report from the Commanding Officer of LCI() 333 showing the Japanese torpedo attack on the LCIs returning to Guadalcanal from Vella Lavella



From the War Diary of LCI(L) 333:
At 2055 August 15, 1943, U.S.S. LCI(L) 333 was attacked by enemy torpedo bombers. The first enemy plane approached the convoy from astern on course approximately 090° T. The second plane was sighted at approximately 100 yards broad on our port bow on course approximately 180° T. At the same time this plane was sighted it launched a torpedo which porpoised once and went across our bow midway between this ship and the LCI(L) 24 ahead. The course of the torpedo was approximately 130° T. This ship opened fire on two enemy torpedo planes and although both were probably hit neither was sighted to come down. (The sketch, from the report, is on the following page.)

The Area Commander of the Japanese forces decided against a counter landing on Vella Lavella for fear of losing more of his troops that he knew would be needed to repel his predicted landing against his base at Kolombangara. The battle for Vella Lavelle would be fought mainly in the air. During the month following the initial landings, the Japanese conducted 108 air raids against the island and the ships bringing troops and supplies. Their attacks failed to stop the airfield and the advanced base from being built. At the end of the battle, the Japanese Navy performed another successful evacuation of the majority of their forces off Vella Lavella in the dark of night.

September 9 through 13, 1943
European Theater of Operations
The Allies landed on the mainland beaches of Italy during Operation Avalanche. By D-Day +6 amphibious operations had put ashore approximately 150,00 men of the US 5th Army and the British X Corps.

Next: The Treasury Islands

Bougainville was still the principal target with a scheduled D-Day of November 1, 1943. Halsey's planners still wanted to keep the Japanese guessing as to where and when the next assault from the sea would occur. To create a diversion from the main landings to come, it was decided by Halsey's planner that Allied forces would occupy the lightly defended Treasury Islands. Once there, they would construct an airfield to provide fighter cover and a small boat base for PT operations.

Several days after the initial landings had secured a beachhead on Vella Lavella the assault troops of the US Army 25th Division was withdrawn to prepare for the Bougainville operation. They were replaced with Allied soldiers of the New Zealand 3rd Division. The

3NZ troops had been training on Guadalcanal for jungle fighting, after completing amphibious training with the US Navy. Vella Lavella was their first assignment under fire and they had demonstrated their ability to engage and defeat the opposing enemy forces.

Halsey's planners required as many troops as they could muster for the upcoming Bougainville landing so they assigned the Treasury Islands to the 3NZ Division. And the entire ground operation was to be under New Zealand command. For the New Zealand force, it was to be their first opposed landing since the disastrous Gallipoli landing during WWI where their force was decimated. The Treasury Islands would not be a repeat of that event.

LCI(L) 24 being loaded at Guadalcanal by the New Zealand 3rd Division (3NZ)

LCI(L)s of Flotilla Five. LCI(L) 24) (foreground) LCI(L) 222(middle) LCI(L) 334(background) being loaded for the Landings on the Treasury Islands

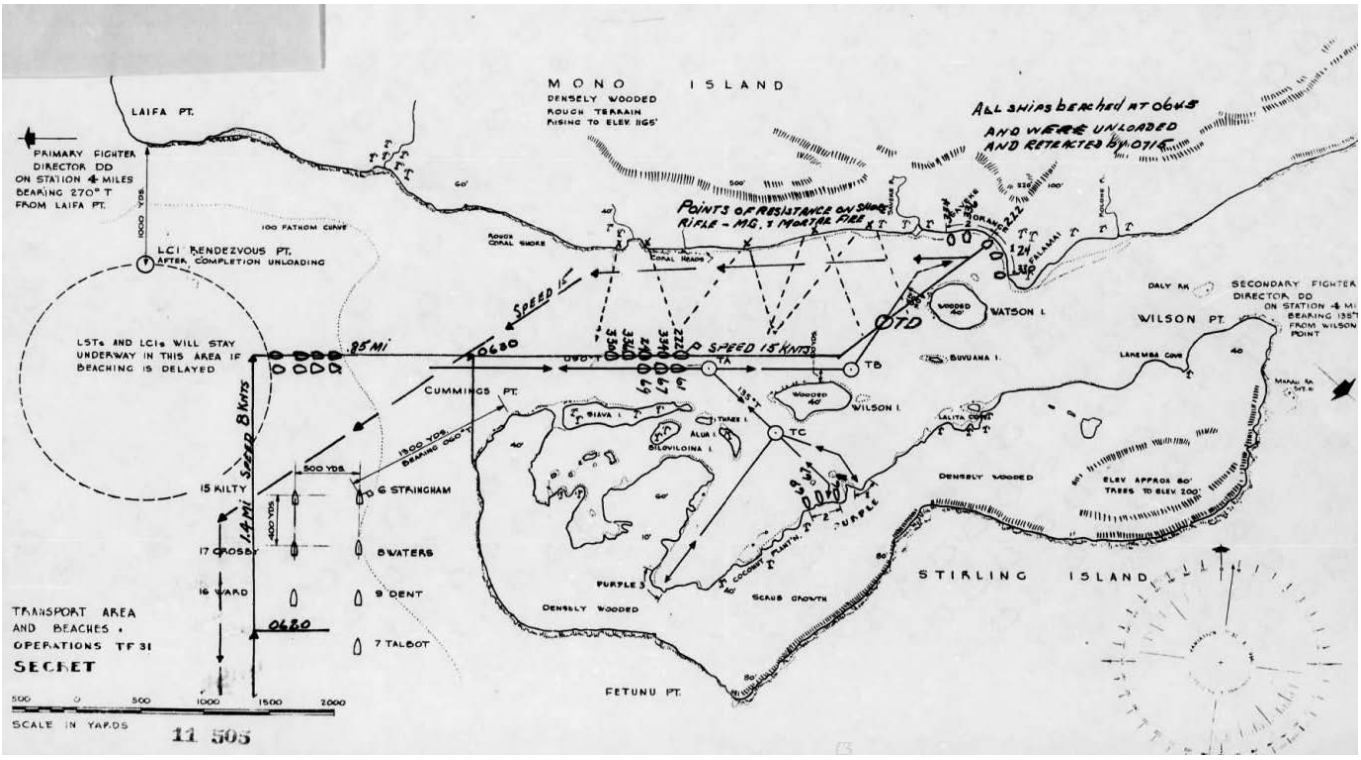
The attack force was under the operational control of the 1st Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) for Operation Goodtime. The assault force was comprised of 4,600 New Zealand troops and 1900 support troops from IMAC which included part of the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion (CBs). The US Navy Third Fleet was chronically short of transport shipping. For Operation Good time they could only provide eight APDs two LSTs eight LCIs and three LCTs to transport the invasion force. For this operation that would only move 3,800 of he 7,700 man force in the 1st Transport Group. It would take 20 days to move the entire force.

D-day on the Treasury Islands was scheduled for October 25, 1943. It was hoped that the reality of the landings

would draw the Japanese into responding and thereby diverting their attention from the main invasion forces that would be moving against Bougainville for the next five days. There were two main islands in the Treasury group. The largest was Mono Island. It was separated by a channel called Blanche Harbor from the smaller and flatter Sterling Island. The Japanese had been using Blanche Harbor as one of the ports for their barges sailing between Rabaul and their bases on New Britain and Bougainville. Reconnaissance patrols that had gone ashore before the landing, had determined that there were limited fortifications and only several hundred Japanese troops manning the supply base.

Eight LCIs of Flotilla Five were assigned the Second Transport Group. These were LCI(L)'s 222(flag) 334, 24, 336, 61, 67, 69, and 330.

Mono Island Assault LCI(L) 334 (left)approaches Orange Beach LCI(L) 336 (right) is barely visible in the smoke form gunfire



Map showing the movement of the LCIs and their assigned landing beaches during the occupation of the Treasury Islands October 1943

The following are excerpts from:

LCI(L) Flotilla Five

Action Report of LCI(L)s at Treasury Islands,27 October 1943.

1. Operating under reference (a), LCI(L)s rounded the west end of Stirling Island at 0630, 27 October 1943 in two columns, as follows: Port column, U.S.S. LCI(L) 222 (flag), 334, 24, and 336; starboard column, U.S.S. LCI(L) 61, 67, 69, and 330. The two newly converted LCI(L) anti-landing craft gunboats, the U.S.S. LCI(L)s 22 and 23, left the formation during the night and escorted the landing boats from Transport Divisions TWELVE and TWENTY-TWO into Blanche Harbor at 0550.

2. Tracer fire was immediately visible from shore installations on the south shore of Mono Island-between Saveke River and a point approximately 2,500 yards to the westward. Some fire came from the water's edge and some from way up in the jungles.

3. As the LCI(L)s proceeded parallel with the beach, shore fire seemed directed toward the converted anti-landing craft gunboats (U.S.S LCI(L)s 122 and 23), the YMs, and at the landing boats returning from the beach, all of which vigorously returned fire. LCI(L)s opened fire in order of station in column as they came abreast of installations, with the exception of 61, 67, and 69, which turned to the right and proceeded to Purple Beach on Stirling Island.

4. LCI(L)s ceased firing before

Mono Island LCI(L) 24 on Orange Beach a member of the 3NZ looks on a fallen member from their landing force.

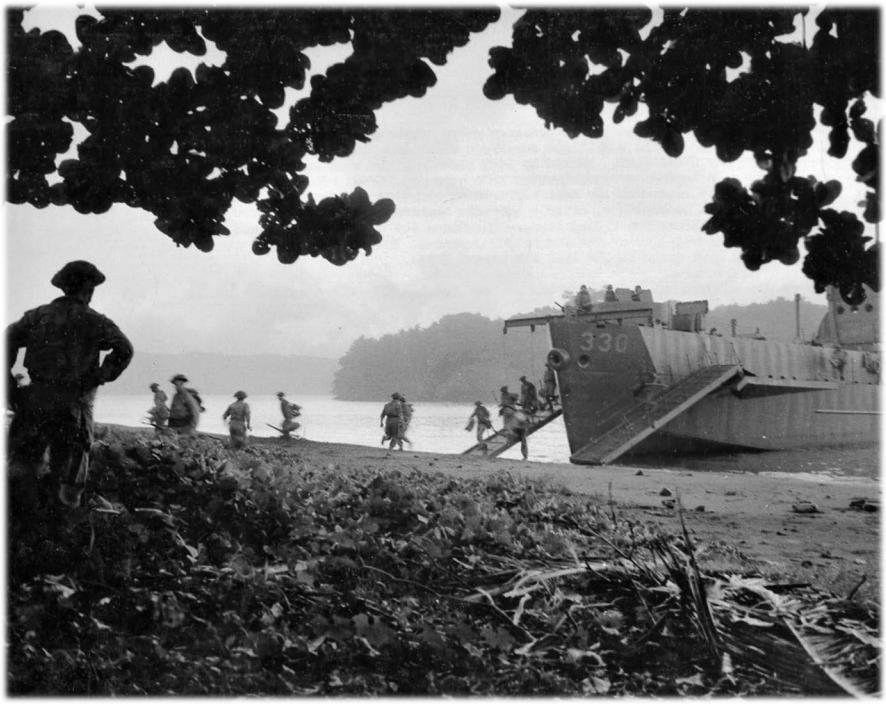
turning into Orange Beach, except 336 and 24, which continued firing until within approximately 75 yards of the beach. Continuous rifle and mortar fire was observed while LCI(L)s were on the beach unloading. Four shells exploded near 334. One landed in the water dead astern and about 200 yards off the north beach of Watson Island. The second landed approximately 75 to 100 yards on the port beam. The third struck approximately 75 yards inshore and about 200 yards on the port bow. The fourth exploded in the treetops approximately 25 to 35 yards inshore. Two shells landed near the stern of the 330 as she was retracting from the beach. No damage or personnel casualties was suffered by any ship.

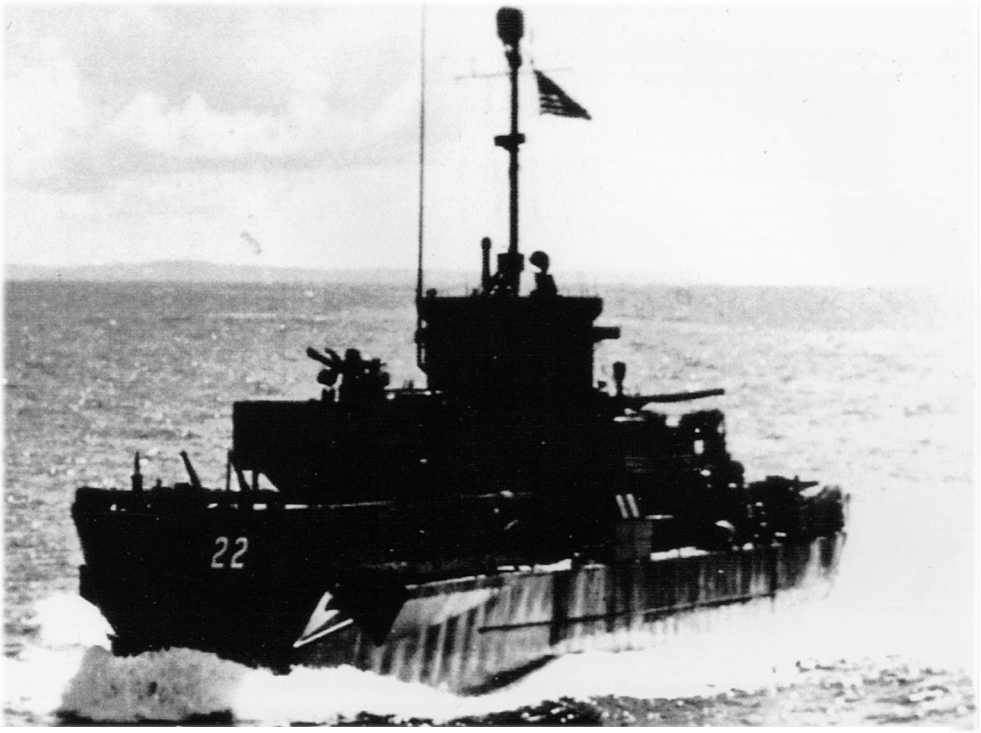
5. The effect of the LCI(L) fire could not be accurately determined, although shore installations were steadily hit. It is probable that some of the emplacements had been silenced prior to the LCI(L) approach, but upon retracting from the beach the LCI(L)s stood out of the harbor along a course running parallel to and about 200 yards off the south shoreline of Mono Island and no opposition was encountered.

6. LCI(L)s retracted from their beaches in the following order: U.S.S. LCI(L) 330 first, at 0705, followed by the 336, 24, 222, 334, 67, 61, and 69, last, at approximately 0720. LCI(L)s then formed in cruising formation at rendezvous and proceeded. U.S.S LCI(L) 22 and 23 remained in the area for further duty.

Mono Island in the Treasury Islands Solomons Group
(Above) LCI(L) 222 (flagship) has finished unloading. In the background (left) is another LCI(L) probably 334

(Right) LCI(L) 330 unloading members of the 8th Brigade 3rd New Zealand Division





LCI(L) 22 off Noumea, New Caledonia after completing the conversion to a Gunboat. Navy Historian Samuel Elliot Morrison stated the conversions were the idea of Captain Roy T Cowdrey, repair officer on Admiral Halsey's staff

The development of the rearmed LCI(L)s more suited for island warfare would impact the conduct of all future Amphibious operations

TASK GROUP THIRTY-ONE POINT ONE: Report of Occupation of the Treasury Islands, *Item 30. The first use of the recently converted LCI "Gunboats" was made in this Operation and they proved very valuable. Having been converted in Noumea, they arrived only one day prior to departure of the LCI(L)'s on this operation The armament was increased to 1 – 3"/50 cal, 1 – 40mm single mount, both centerline, 4 20mm and 6 .50cal machine guns, with additional crew to man the greatly augmented battery. It was immediately decided to add the two which were ready to the Task Group to protect the assault wave and render close in fire support.*

Item 31. *...there were very few casualties in the assault wave prior to landing, which was undoubtedly due in large measure to the excellent work of the LCI Gunboats.*

Rear Admiral Wilkinson, Commander of the 3rd Phib Force concurred with the conclusion above and ordered 4 additional LCI to be converted to Gunboats. That would make the total eight with the LCI(L) 21, 22, 23 and 70 already completed.

S E C R E T

SUMMARY OF LCI(L) GROUP FOURTEEN OPERATIONS PARTICIPATING IN CAPTURE AND OCCUPATION OF RENDOVA, NEW GEORGIA, VELLA LAVELLA, KOLOMBANGARA AND TREASURY ISLANDS.

30 JUNE to 2 NOVEMBER 1943

LCI(L) SHIP NO.	NO. TROOP MISSIONS	NO. TROOPS CARRIED	NO. WOUNDED EVACUATED	NO. PILOTS RESCUED	SHIPS DAMAGED IN ACTION #	CASUALTIES IN ACTION	ENEMY PLANES DAMAGED	ENEMY PLANES DESTROYED SURE	ENEMY PLANES DESTROYED PROBABLE
327	10	1658	4	1	-"-	- -	1	*	*
328(gf)	8	1477	17	-	Bombed	- -	"	*	1
329	14	1947	180	-	-"-	- -	*	2	-
330	11	1730	-	-	---	- -	-	1	-
331	12	2030	-	-	---	- -	-	-	-
332	11	1790	-	-	---	- -	-	2	-
333	7	1187	-	-	---	- -	-	-	-
334	12	2034	1	1	---	- -	-	-	-
335	12	1978	-	-	---	- -	-	-	-
336	12	1773	-	-	---	- -	*	*	*
23 (Gunboat)	8	1113	142	-	Bombed	2	-	2	-
24	7	1297	1	1	Bombed	6	-	1	-
T O T A L S -	124	20014	366	3	3	8	1	8	1

NOTES: (a) # Damage to 328 and 23 repaired without loss of operating time. Damage to 24 repaired with loss of nine days operating time.

(b) * Vessels so marked assisted in destruction or damage of enemy planes.

(c) LCI(L) Group Fourteen vessels have been present in areas raided or attacked by enemy planes 87 times during this period.

Lastly, I have included this report from the War Diary of LCI Flotilla Five Group 14 to show the utilization of the LCIs in the South Pacific War. During this four-month period, LCIs of Group 14, participated in the Initial Landings at both Vella Lavell and the Treasury Islands which we covered in this story. Reported above are a total of 124 missions to move 20,014 Allied troops. In note (c) they report that the LCIs were subject to 87 air raids. And note (b) claims that these LCIs downed 8 of the attacking planes. This report omits the tonnage of war materials that were transported to support the troop movements during the same period.

- Just young men far from home, fighting their forgotten war.

Observation from the Forgotten War

The genesis of these articles occurred when I was writing about Lt Fay Begor, Flotilla Seven's Medical Doctor, who was killed in the Japanese air raid on LCI(L) 339 at Lae, New Guinea. It was during that research, that even though I thought that I was knowledgeable about the Pacific War, I found that there were many events that I knew little or nothing.

As a WWII Veteran organization, we have a stated purpose to honor the men who served in WWII. And we especially remember those who gave their lives to secure the freedoms we cherish today.

Author, Alan Rems, in the preface of his book, South Pacific Cauldron wrote, "Nearly Forty years ago Guadalcanal veteran and author James Jones lamented how little was remembered about the WWII battlefields of the South Pacific. He wrote 'Almost all of them names people in the United States never heard of.' The same could likely have been be said about how much was remembered by Australians and New Zealanders, whose nations fought alongside America. Since Jones lament, the situation can only have gotten worse with the deaths of so many who served there."

Of the numerous books that provided a basis of these articles, the primary ones are:

Allen Rems, *South Pacific Cauldron* (c) 2014

Robin L. Rieley, *American Amphibious Gunboats in WWII* (c) 2013

William L McGee, *The Solomons Campaign 1942-1943 from Guadalcanal to Bougainville* (c) 2002, (former LCI Association member)

Reg Newell, *Operation Goodtime and the Battle of the Treasury Islands* (c) 2012

Reg Newell, *Pacific Star 3NZ Division in the South Pacific in WWII* (c) 2015

Samuel Elliot Morrison, *The History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume VI, Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier 22 July 1942-1 May 1944*

U.S. Navy Officers in WWII*, Action Reports, and War Diaries during WWII These* provide many of the details of those events that we have today.

SNAFU at Slapton Sands

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Situation normal all fouled up, became a deadly epitaph for 749 men on the mornings of 27-28 April 1944. The D-Day training operation code named Exercise Tiger was a tragedy of planning, communications, and assumptions.

Large scale rehearsals for the D-Day invasion of Normandy took place during the early months of 1944. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander of the allied forces knew most of his troops had never experienced combat. He wanted them to hear, see, feel, and smell the realities of a landing under fire.

A wide expanse of beach in southern England called Slapton Sands was chosen for the rehearsal. There was no sand on this beach at the edge of Lyme Bay. The beach at Slapton is composed of small wave-polished, pebbles. The cliffs behind the beachhead provided characteristics of Omaha and Utah beaches as well.

The Crew of LCI(L) 83 was among the landing craft participating in Exercise Tiger. Boxer, Jack Dempsey, a commander in the Coast Guard visited the crew in Dartmouth.

A full scale nine-day final rehearsal was scheduled from April 22 to April 30, 1944. It included 21 LSTs - Landing Ships Tank; 28 LCI(L)s – Landing Craft Infantry (Large); 65 LCTs – Landing Craft, Tank; hundreds of smaller vessels and an escort of British warships. In all 221 vessels were in and around Lyme Bay for the exercise. An audience of top brass that included Eisenhower watched from a flagship. The first six days were for "marshalling and embarkation" drills. During the "buildup phase" on April 28th, a force of 25,000 men and 2,750 vehicles were to be embarked.

At 0730 British heavy cruiser Hawkins opened fire on the beach

On the morning of April 27th the first wave of Higgins boats was scheduled to begin their approach to the beach at 0630. Rear Adm. Don P. Moon commander of the task force learned that one flotilla of LSTs was behind schedule. He postponed the landing by one hour. In a complex operation that included army, navy, air support from both British and U.S. forces, communication breakdowns happen. Some of the Higgins boats were already loaded and circling. They didn't get the message and proceeded to their landing beach in accordance with the original schedule. At 0730 British heavy cruiser *Hawkins* opened fire on the beach, as per the revised schedule. *Hawkins'* 7.5 inch-shells rained down on the landing craft and troops already on the beach. There were over 100 friendly fire casualties. Exercise Tiger had become more realistic than planned. It was about to get much worse.

That same morning a convoy of LSTs and LCIs were getting underway for the buildup landings on 28 April. This second wave assault force included eight fully loaded LSTs dubbed convoy T-4. They carried the 4th Infantry Division's combat - ready engineers. Before leaving port, LST crews made sure all trucks and tanks were topped off with fuel. The realism of the exercise had many troops believing they were headed for the invasion beaches in France.

T-4 went to sea with one small escort leading the way.

The convoy had just two British escort ships. The *Azalea* a 200foot corvette would lead. An older but larger destroyer *Scimitar* would screen the convoy's flank. While jostling for positions inside Plymouth Harbour the *Scimitar* and an American landing craft collided. *Scimitar* was ordered back to the yards for repairs. The T-4 commander saw *Scimitar* heading back. Not being part of the British chain of command, he had not been notified of the order. He assumed the destroyer was just maneuvering for position. T-4 went to sea with one small escort leading the way.

Larry C. Bowan, Jr. RM3/c, LCI(L) 83: *I was a radarman, I was the only one, so I was kept ready. We went out on maneuvers quite a bit. We would go on the Slapton Sands, which is on the English coast, and practice landing troops. On the night of April 27-28 we were part of Operation Tiger.*

The convoy headed out into the English Channel to assimilate the time at sea for the D-Day crossing then tuned south for Slapton Sands. The danger from enemy attacks was minimal during daylight hours. The Luftwaffe and submarine wolf packs were no longer as big a threat as earlier in the war. Nights were different. That is when the German E-boats came out to hunt.

The German Schnellboote 124 at Cherbourg Harbor. The Allies called them E-Boats.

There was a flotilla of Schnellbootes (fast boats) based at Cherbourg, France. They were about 20 feet longer than American PT boats. With their 7,500-horsepower engines they could cruise at nearly 40 knots. They carried four torpedoes and 20mm guns. The Germans were aware of the war games going on in Lyme Bay. They patrolled the area nightly in hopes of disrupting preparations for the invasion. LSTs had been spotted there by patrol aircraft. These "large slow targets" - as sailors called their ships – were easy prey for fast torpedo boats.

The Royal Navy protected the 90 mile stretch into Lyme Bay with four destroyers, three motor torpedo boats, and two motor gun boats. Not enough ships or speed to stop

the fast E-Boats from slipping into the harbour.

Leroy Brown LCI(L) 83: *We had the LSTs and escort ships with us. The English ships were called Corvettes, They would have to protect our rear-end because the LSTs were so slow. We called LSTs floating coffins because they went like 3 knots. But our rear flank escort ship had returned to base during Operation Tiger.*

The T-4 convoy included *USS LSTs 515, 496, 511, 531, and LST 58* towing two pontoon causeways. The *499, 289, 507,* followed the single column at 6 knots. They entered Lyme Bay after midnight on April 28th. They were to proceed slowly and take up positions for the follow up landings. Commanders, on all the ships had been briefed on the danger from German E-Boats. Both U.S. and Royal navies insisted on radio silence except in the case of imminent danger. Unfortunately, the danger was already there. Nine E-Boats had slipped by the picket ships and were in the vicinity of T-4. British radar had picked them up. So did the crew on one of the LSTs. They assumed these mystery vessels were part of another Allied convoy. British shore batteries sighted the E-Boats but were under orders not to fire. They alerted *Azalea,* but the escort ship took no action. Due to a typographical error in the LSTs communication rooms, all the LSTs were on the wrong radio frequency. They never heard these warnings of enemy E-Boat activity in the area.

LST 507 was bringing up the rear of the two-mile long column.
Sometime after 0130 scraping noises could be heard on *507s* flat bottomed hull. Any confusion about the cause was erased when a torpedo exploded on the ship's hull at 0203. The previous torpedoes had been aimed too low for an amphibious ship. A correction was made and this one hit its mark with devastating results. Fully loaded trucks and tanks burst into flames. Another torpedo hit five minutes later. The ship began to settle. The E-Boats came in and strafed men on deck and in the water with 20mm gun fire.

Lt. Eugene E. Eckstam, a medical officer, had heard the sound of grinding coming from deep within the *507*. "I was trying to go topside to see what was going on," Eckstam remembers. "Suddenly BOOM there was a horrendous noise accompanied by the sound of crunching metal and dust everywhere. The lights went out and I was thrust violently in the air." Hatches were dogged down per Navy regulations. Screams could be heard from below. "We sat and burned," Eckstam explained, "gas cans and ammunition exploding and the enormous fire blazing only a few yards away."

Within a half hour it was time to abandon ship. The soldiers had not been trained on how to abandon a sinking inferno. Many jumped in the water wearing full packs and helmets. They had not been told how to wear the inflatable lifebelts. Most soldiers had them around their waist. When inflated the weight of their packs tipped them over to be drowned. Those who remained upright, died quickly from of hypothermia in the 40-degree water.

While *LST 507* burned far behind the column, other LST radio operators sent queries, but received no reply. The convoy

continued on until another blast was heard from the middle of the column. At 0217 the *LST 531* was hit by two torpedoes. Guns from throughout the convoy exchanged fire with the fast-moving E-Boats now lit up by fire and tracer bullets. Ensign Douglas Harlander had just been alerted to a "little peep" on the corner of the *531s* radar screen.

Ensign Harlander, LST 531: *I went to take a look at the radar screen and was standing on the starboard wing when the first torpedo hit. It felt like a sledgehammer on my feet. It threw me back eight or nine feet. The torpedoes hit mid- section and in the engine room. We were dead in the water. We were completely loaded with trucks, vehicles, tanks and all of them were loaded with fuel to the hilt.*

The decks were an immediate ball of fire. The second torpedo ripped the seams apart. The ship went down six minutes later. None of the four landing-craft used to transport the troops to shore could be launched. They were secured tightly, damaged or surrounded by fire. The ship was loaded with Army personnel and Navy crew members. Only a few small rafts had been launched. Harlander made it to one and held on with about 15 others. A couple of wounded lay inside. "The big problem," said Harlander, "was the water was 44 degrees…mighty cold. The first half hour the water felt cold, but after that your arms and legs just got numb. You couldn't feel anything. You couldn't hang on either." As the night went on, men became unconscious, slipped away and drowned. Survivors were rescued about 0700 by the HMS Onslow. Of 1,026 sailors and soldiers on *531* less than half survived.

After the *531* got hit the remaining six LSTs began to zig-zag. A third ship *LST 289* was hit by a torpedo in the stern. The ship remained afloat but sustained extensive damage and loss of steering. Thirteen crewmembers were killed.

Leroy Brown LCI 83: *The E-Boats came out and sank a couple of our LSTs and quite a few guys got killed. One of the LSTs, number 289, we actually towed back to Dartmouth the next day. I talked to their radioman. The LST was all beat up and had a couple of bodies still hanging over the side. Because this was a training exercise for D-Day we were told that we weren't to say a word about it. They told everybody that you'd get a dishonorable discharge if you got caught speaking about Tiger.*

The convoy commander ordered the remaining ships of T-4 to head toward shore. This was the correct protocol for a convoy that had come under attack. It didn't sit well with Lt. John Doyle the captain of flagship *LST 515.* Doyle was a "mustang," a former enlisted man who had risen through the ranks. He wanted to go back to pick up survivors of the two sunken ships. This was in violation of standing orders. It could cause another ship to be sunk. He didn't care. In an act of near mutiny, he got on the loudspeaker and told soldiers and crew that men were dying in the water out there. Who wanted to go back for them? A rousing cheer went up.

The *515* returned to a scene of mostly floating lifeless bodies. They'd been in the frigid water for over two hours. Limbs lose their functionality in cold water. They rescued those men who had barely survived. Their clothes were soaked in oil. They were

hoisted on board, given dry clothes and had their wounds treated.

Ensign Harlander LST 531: *I was rescued about 0700. I was given a cup of hot tea, but I was shaking so badly I spilled half of it. It was the best drink I've ever had in my life.*

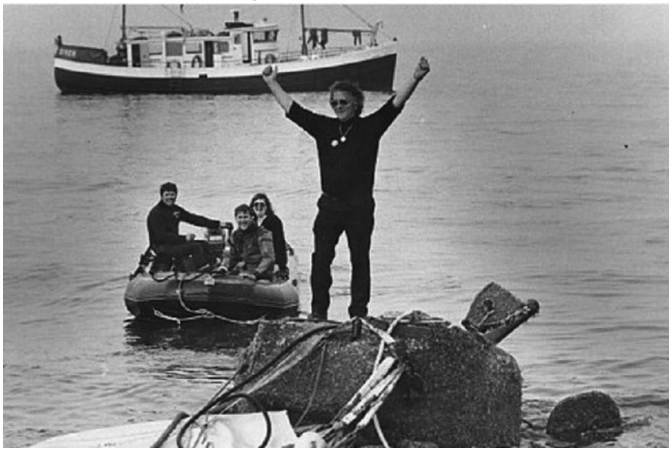
When there were no more men to be saved, they began retrieving the lifeless forms with the intent of giving them a proper burial. Orders arrived to leave them which caused complaints too. But the *515* left the scene knowing they had saved 134 souls.

The final death toll from the E-Boat attacks was 639. Another 110 were killed from friendly fire and accidents. More men died during Exercise Tiger than would die during the actual D-Day landings on Utah Beach. But lessons learned were applied to D-Day. Abandon ship and lifebelt training were developed for landing troops. A fleet of Coast Guard cutters were added to the invasion force for water rescue. The most important change was to fix the broken system of communications. Radio frequencies were standardized between U.S. and British forces at sea, on land, and in the air. The chance of miscommunication on D-Day itself was reduced dramatically. Maybe many more lives were saved by lessons learned those awful days on Lyme Bay.

Thirty years later, Ken Small started beach combing along the area at Slapton Sands. He began finding military buttons, shell casings, pieces of military vehicles. He learned about the rehearsal landings there. A fisherman told him about a large object not far off-shore. He had a diver check it out. It was an American Sherman Tank. Now he was certain something had gone terribly wrong here during WWII. The story had been kept quiet for decades. Through research he found some details of Exercise Tiger. Then he found some survivors who now felt the need to talk and provide the horrible truth.

Leroy Brown LCI(L) 83: *Operation Tiger was never discovered for 50 years. We didn't know much about it until later. But I'll tell the story now.*

Small began a quest to erect a memorial honoring those men who lost their lives at Slapton Sands in 1944. He wanted the tank for the monument. It took several years of negotiating but he finally bought the tank from the U.S. Government for $50. He brought it up from 60 feet down and it finally reached the beach on Slapton Sands in 1984. It was 40 years late for Exercise Tiger, but perfect timing for veterans who felt the need to talk and families who wanted closure for a long lost relative of WWII.



Ken Small reacts in triumph on top of the Sherman Tank he recovered in1984.

Once the tank was out of the water, the story went international. Small received letters from veterans and their families. He received an official thank you from President Ronald Reagan. Memorial donations came in, and now the beautiful

site holds Memorial services each year on the Sunday closest to April 28. It has provided closure for hundreds of veterans and families to finally know the story.

This tank had been on the seabed for 40 years. It was recovered, cleaned, refurbished, painted, and mounted on a pebble platform that resembles the beach at Slapton Sands.

Small wrote and published a book titled "The Forgotten Dead." He tells the true story of 27-28 April 1944 through the eyes of veterans he interviewed. The book points out, Exercise Tiger was not covered up…but was conveniently forgotten.

First waves of troops began landing during Exercise Tiger at 0630 on 27 April 1944. Orders to delay the landing one hour were never received in some of the Higgins Boats. They came under friendly fire from a British cruiser at 0730. There were over hundred casualties.

LCI 84 was part of Flotilla 24. They participated in secondary wave landings on April 27th during Exercise Tiger in 1944.

This plaque is erected at the Tank Memorial on Slapton Beach. It reads:

This American Sherman Tank took part in the D-Day practice landings at Slapton Beach in 1944 where it was lost at sea and there remained until its recovery in 1984. It stands as a memorial to those American lives lost during the course of the D-Day practice landings at Slapton Beach in 1944. Their sacrifice was not in vain, be they ever at peace.

SOURCES: Badger Legionnaire April 2021, www.historynavy.mil, www.NPR.org, www.exercisetigermemorial.co.uk, Bowen oral history Library of Congress

Ralph Davis – 1933 – 2022
Captain of the LSIL 1091

California and the USS LCI National Assn. lost a very good friend and a driving force for WW II Veterans of the Amphibious service when Doc Davis sailed west Jan. 3, 2022.

Ralph "Doc" Davis was the McKinleyville, CA Dentist who purchased the LSIL 1091 and with the ship came the title of "Captain."

Born in Lansing, MI Aug. 7, 1933, Ralph passed on Jan. 3, 2022. He grew up in Alaska fishing on his father's boat and after service in the US Army, he returned to college and dental school. He established his dental practice in McKinleyville, CA and later bought the LSIL 1091, which had been used in the salmon fishery in Alaska. Initially, he had two hopes for the ship: 1. Fish Albacore to pay for dock space and maintenance, and 2. He wanted to sail the ship to remote Pacific Islands as a medical missionary. In the preparation for that trip he had added a helicopter pad on the aft portion of the ship.

But then, Jim McCarthy, LCI Veteran and member of the LCI Assn. Board, was driving through northern California and spotted the ship. Jim was a good talker, and he convinced Capt. Davis to sail the ship with a crew of seasoned LCI Veterans to the 1995 LCI Reunion in San Diego.

The voyage received extensive news coverage (even some on the east coast) as the 1091 made the 950-mile trip. Capt. Davis, according to the crew, "Spent more time on the bridge than the compass." She made a grand entrance in San Diego and was met by a welcoming crowd. The LCI reunion there had over 900 registrants; the largest LCI reunion attendance before or since. And some 6,000 people toured the ship during its stay.

San Diego is a Navy town and the welcome mat was out. An Honor Guard was at the banquet, followed by the Navy Band. As a result of the publicity, the 1091 was named "The Flagship of the USS LCI Nat., Assn."

The 1091 then hosted California LCI reunions each year to 2008. At the 2004 reunion, Capt. Davis took LCI Vets and their families for a cruise on Humboldt Bay. The group could then say, "I have sailed on an LCI." At the time, the 1091 was the last seagoing LCI. In 2005, Capt. Ralph donated the 1091 to the Humboldt Bay Naval Air/Sea Museum.

Restoration continued with numerous open houses, and overnights for the Boy Scouts. But with the small population of Eureka, CA (27,000) and Humboldt Co., (135,450) fund raising has been difficult. Progress was made through salvage from mothballed Navy ships. Troop berthing was installed. Plans made to restore the medical lab used in secret forays into North Korea during the Korea War. But time and new bottom costs outran the ship which in 2017 was hauled ashore. It remains open for tours and restoration continues. Capt. Ralph never gave up hope. *By Joe Flynn*

This

The San Diego Union-Tribune.
A Copley Newspaper

Saturday, April 29, 1995

'Lousy civilian idea' ties up in San Diego

Veteran: *LCI 1091 — landing craft infantry — is at the Broadway Pier for a reunion of former LCI crewmen.*

Union-Tribune / JOHN NELSON

This photo of the LCI 1091 published during the 1995 Reunion that had over 900 attendees!

Excerpts from Newsletter #13

"We just had the best reunion yet! The banquet served over 900 ladies and gentlemen, and everything went well. How about that Navy Band! I believe some of us were ready to reenlist by the time they stopped playing."

"The *1091* arrived on Tuesday. During her stay in San Diego, she was visited by almost every attendee of the reunion and about 6,000 visitors from almost every state and from 15 countries including, Scotland, Switzerland, England, Okinawa, South Korea, Wales, Thailand, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Nepal, Philippines, Mexico, Holland, and Canada."

"The drawing card for this reunion was the LCI *1091*, the last operational vessel of its kind, a survivor of the 912 that were built. Everyone wanted to see this Lousy Civilian Idea that was unworthy of a name."

Royal Wetzel, LCI 70 Cook and King of the Kazoos

Anyone who attended an LCI reunion since 2008 will remember Royal Wetzel, cook on the *LCI(G) 70*. You likely saw him, and surely you heard him, talking, laughing, singing, or playing tunes on his Kazoo.

Wetz was a born entertainer, never without a smile who enjoyed the Reunions to the fullest. After his first reunion in 2008 in Mobile, AL, he never missed another one. In Mobile he met shipmate John Reulet, Gunner's Mate on the *70* and they renewed their friendship.

Planning for the next reunion started for Wetz, on his way home from the last one. All agreed that he had the most fun of any of the attendees. Always the cook, he brought with him Pennsylvania bologna and cheese; enough for the crowd. And he always had his Kazoo, and extras for those willing to learn and play. It was his Kazoo marching band.

In between Reunions, Wetz traveled to San Diego for the Veterans Day Parade.

Wetz passed on Nov.2, 2021 due to Covid 19, just short of his 96th birthday. He will be missed. Fair winds and following seas, Wetz.

At the 2012 Veterans Day Parade in San Diego, Del Hollinger and Royal Wetzel posed by a Greatest Generation Walk sign.

Deck Log of LCI(L) 1074 At Hollandia

October 28, 1944 – December 13, 1944

By John Harvey

Editor's Note: The following article was written from entries in the deck log of LCI(L) 1074. John Harvey's father, Lt.(jg) Richard G. Harvey, Jr. had been the commanding officer. His son, John, obtained the ship's deck log, transcribed it, and added historic information, making the mundane day to day entries into a readable history. This portion provides interesting details of how they prepared and trained for the invasion of the Philippines.

The journey to Hollandia, New Guinea, the next port for the *LCI(L) 1074,* was short in miles and brief in duration, but a big step in terms of drawing closer to the combat in the Philippine Islands, a theater of conflict for which LCIs with their amphibious landing capabilities were designed.

The deck log from October 28th reflects that once at sea the crew quickly resumed their routine of following a base course and periodically checking navigational position via a star fix. In addition, the crew conducted drills for general quarters, beaching stations, retracting stations, damage control, and fire response. At noon on October 29, 1944 in the company of five other LCI(L)s the *1074* entered Jautefa Bay, New Guinea. At 1240 the crew "secured special sea detail and main engines", and moored alongside a sister ship, the *LCI(L) 1072*.

Hollandia, located on Humboldt Bay, was an excellent deep-water anchorage situated on the North coast of New Guinea. It was currently a part of the Dutch East Indies. The Japanese had seized Hollandia during their 1942 invasion of New Guinea with plans to use it as a base for seizing the rest of New Guinea and moving on to Australia. These Japanese plans had been halted by Allied victories in the naval of Battle of the Coral Sea and in land fighting during which the Allies repulsed attacks on Port Moresby on the southern coast of New Guinea.

After that the allies slugged it out with Japanese forces making slow progress from Port Moresby along the coast of New Guinea. By 1944 General Douglas MacArthur decided to leap-frog 500 miles down the coast and capture Hollandia. In late April of 1944 MacArthur launched a daring amphibious operation code-named "Operation Reckless." A combined naval task force and an army division of 30,000 soldiers seized the strategic harbor in Humboldt Bay and the airfields around Hollandia. This operation, guided by intelligence gleaned from code breaking and supported by air raids and naval bombardments, achieved complete surprise, and was deemed "an unqualified success."

The Humboldt Bay area includes Jautefa Bay where the 1074 often anchored.

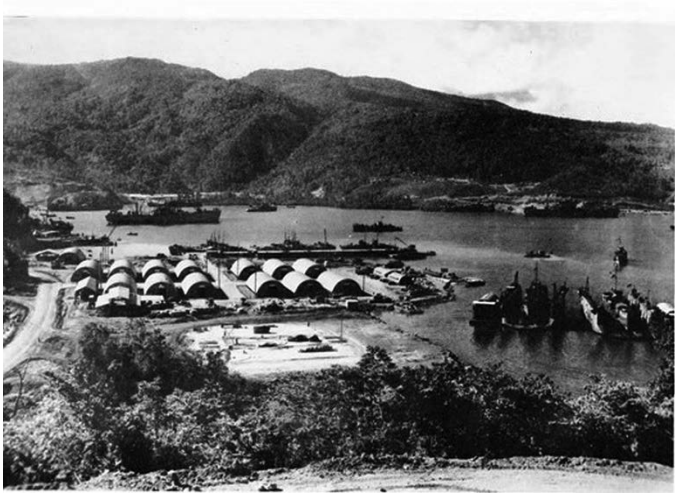
Within days after the conquest of Hollandia in late April of 1944 the Seabees arrived and started construction of a base that would not only provide logistical support for the Seventh Fleet but would be the main supply base for the invasion of the Philippines.

The invasion of the Philippines was a crucial part of the overall Allied war strategy. Retaking the Philippines would not only return these islands to US control and avenge a humiliating defeat but would effectively sever the Japanese Empire's connection with its sources of raw materials and oil in the East Indies which the Japanese desperately needed to maintain the war effort.

The Seabees had created and impressive support facility

By the time the *1074* arrived in Hollandia in late October the Seabees had created an impressive support facility that included a base for convoy escorts, a repair base for destroyers and lighter craft, an ammunition depot, a fueling depot, a fleet post office, advance headquarters for the Seventh Fleet, a network of roads and a crucially important fresh water supply system. The Seabees built roads, piers for docking and unloading cargo, warehouses, refrigeration units, a telephone system, a degaussing range, along with housing and messing facilities.

All of this work was done in difficult terrain and weather. New Guinea has a tropical climate with heavy rainfall. The rocky shoreline, described as a jumble of hills and bluffs, was edged inland by heavily forested mountains that reached up to 1000 feet in height.



The waterfront facilities at Hollandia shows a concrete surfaced sorting platform, landing craft watering, loading, and unloading ramp, fleet post office and the harbor administration office. The sheltered harbor and steep forested mountains can be seen in the background.

On the morning of 30 October, one day after arriving at Hollandia, the *1074* weighed anchor and got underway for the Destroyer Repair Base. Unfortunately, on the way the *1074's* bow bumped the stern of an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) a much bigger ship. Fortunately, as noted in the log "No damage was done." The ship continued to the Destroyer Repair Base and moored alongside the *LCI(L) 1072.*

Starting on October 31st the *1074* began engaging in a series of training exercises most likely as part of a plan to prepare the crew for upcoming combat operations in the Philippines. By 1615 on that day the *1074* was engaged in group maneuvers with five other LCI's. The first activity was a 'smoke screen drill." Generating smoke was a key capability of LCIs designed to provide cover for troops disembarking and to provide a smoke screen for larger ships under air or sea attack.

The maneuvers continued through the night involving changes in course and speed

without notice and without signals presumably to provide training in nighttime operations which would have been important as the Japanese had come to prefer night- time combat because they could avoid allied air attacks.

By 0800 the next morning, the first of November, the crew began towing practice which included towing *LCI 622*, and then being towed by the *1022.* In the afternoon the *1074* engaged in firing practice with their 20 mm deck guns. In the log the ammunition expended was listed and included 774 rounds of H. E. T (High Explosive Tracer), 1734 rounds of H. E. I. (High Explosive Incendiary) and 90 rounds of B. L. P. (Bulk Load Liquid Propellant).

In the afternoon the *1074* returned to Humboldt Bay. The crew had been on training maneuvers for a full 24 hours through the night, stressful and demanding for sure as all the men needed to be on duty and fully alert at all times. This was real preparation for what might lie ahead.

The deck log entries from 1 November 1944 also reveal other important information relating that the *1074* was on maneuvers with LCI(L) Flotilla 24. This was the first statement that indicated where the *1074* fit organizationally in the Navy. Flotilla 24 was made up of four groups of LCIs, 70, 71, 72 and 79 and contained a total of 45 ships. The Flotilla which was part of the Seventh Fleet Amphibious Force was led by Commander Vernon Jannotta. The ships assembled and trained in Manus Island and at Hollandia. The *1074* was part of group 72.

The Seventh Fleet in turn was under the command of Admiral Thomas Kinkaid and the fleet in turn was under the overall command of General Douglas MacArthur, a somewhat complicated command structure. MacArthur was a strong willed and independent leader who was laser focused on retaking the Philippines. He was also known as skilled tactician, a methodical planner and careful organizer, traits that usually led to his attacks going well. Under his ultimate command the crew of the *1074* would be well prepared before heading into action.

Another interesting detail from November 1, 1944, was a change in the format of the deck log. After several weeks of handwritten logs on blank paper the format switched to using a standardized form, Navpers-135 (Rev. 1-44) and the entries were typed for the first time. It is hard to know the full backstory here. Maybe this was an individual initiative or maybe it was a fleet order. In the transcription of the deck log below I have tried to recreate the look of the actual deck log by using the same font and type size (NY Times 10 pt.) It seems that the deck log was a living changing document and most likely was constantly evolving on board the *1074* in response to circumstances as were other shipboard routines and procedures.

On November 2 the crew of the *1074* spent the morning practicing beaching at Pie Beach, then anchored in Humboldt Bay later in the day proceeding to and anchoring in the more sheltered Jautefa Bay alongside the *LCI(L) 1075*, a sister ship from the Defoe Shipyard in Michigan.

Training resumed on November 3rd, with beaching practice in the morning followed in the afternoon by heading out to sea for maneuvers including general

quarters, and drills for collision quarters, man overboard and abandon ship. These drills must have been sobering events for the crew in terms of what might happen in combat or at sea.

By evening the 1074 returned to Jautefa Bay and beached at "Officers Club Point." No mention is made of whether or not the officers went to the club for some relaxation and beverages or if there was an enlisted men's club nearby affording the similar recreational opportunities for the crew.

The 1074 remained beached overnight and the next morning, November 4, a working party went ashore to "help construct a flotilla pavilion." While no more details are provided this entry at least suggests that the military identity of the 1074 was now invested in Flotilla 24 as they now had their own pavilion for recreational activities. I recall that after the war my dad identified with Flotilla 24 and faithfully attended reunions.

On November 5, 1944 Commander Baker of Group 72 came on board to hold a "military inspection." After a good hour inspecting the ship Commander Baker watched the officers and crew of the 1074 weigh anchor and proceed to engage in "various drills" which included towing, beaching, and drills for man overboard and abandon ship. By 1615 the *1074* returned to Jautefa Bay to moor alongside the *LCI(L) 635.*

No report was given as to how the inspection went but it is easy to imagine the tension present on board as Commander Baker watched the crew perform. Most likely, as most inspectors do, he found something that could be improved upon. Reading this entry about the inspection brought back memories of my time in the Navy when my company or my division underwent an inspection, events usually proceeded by days of cleaning quarters, polishing the brass and double-checking uniforms and appearance

On the morning of November 6 at 0915 the 1074 got underway to take on water and fuel, then came alongside the *LCI(L) 561* to take on an officer and a working party—no further details were provided. By 1120 the *1074* was moored alongside an Australian oiler, the *Karumba*, presumably to take on fuel. The mention of this Australian ship was a good reminder that the main operational ally of the US at this time and in this region was Australia.

"Underway as before"

On November 7th, presidential Election Day back home when FDR won a resounding reelection, the *1074* headed back out to sea for training maneuvers with Group 72. Throughout the day the group conducted "various drills and maneuvers." The training continued through the night as noted in the log entry from 1800 hours, "Underway as before on night maneuvers by SCR voice radio."

SCR voice radio was another WW II technical innovation, essentially the first walkie-talkie. These battery-powered, 18 vacuum tube FM radio transceivers had a range of about three miles and could transmit through interference. Weighing around 30 pounds and designed to be portable these units were employed with great success by ground troops to

communicate in the heat of battle. Such a unit could also have easily been stored on board on an LCI(L) and used to maintain communication and coordination during landings or smoke screen maneuvers. This deck log entry is another reminder that technological innovation to gain even a slight advantage was a constant and crucial part of the war effort.

A 2240 log entry reads, "Sighted green flare off port bow at 400 yards." Flares were an important way to communicate at night. Typically, a green flare indicated an enemy submarine or served as a torpedo warning. It is unknown if the flare was part of the nighttime training or a real warning.

The training maneuvers, conducted outside Humboldt Bay continued into the next day. By 0930 on the 8th the *1074* conducted another session of firing practice with their 20mm cannons this time expending over 2000 rounds. Two stoppages during firing were noted, a breakdown that would have certainly received the officer's attention. Firing practice was important as LCI's were often required to provide covering fire when landing troops and would need to defend themselves against air attack including kamikaze strikes.

The training ended by the afternoon of the 8th and the *1074* proceeded back into Humboldt Bay heading to the "water hole" to refill its crucial supply of fresh water. The *1074* did not have desalinization equipment and for freshwater needed to refill its storage tanks.

Training continued on the morning of November 9th. At 0815 hours the *1074* cast off all lines and proceeded to Pie Beach for beaching practice. During the afternoon this included towing another LCI(L) in this case the *LCI(L)702* and being towed off the beach by the *702*. Beaching was a challenging undertaking as the contour of the beach, the state of the tide and wind and currents had to be taken into account. Getting stuck on the beach was a constant danger and if it happened assistance from a sister ship would be required. Even this could be complicated as noted in log when "The first line broke."

Training for such operations was crucial and the Navy clearly tried to prepare personnel for the kinds of situations they would encounter in battle. Actual conflict would always be unpredictable, but the better prepared crews were the higher the probability that they would perform well under fire.

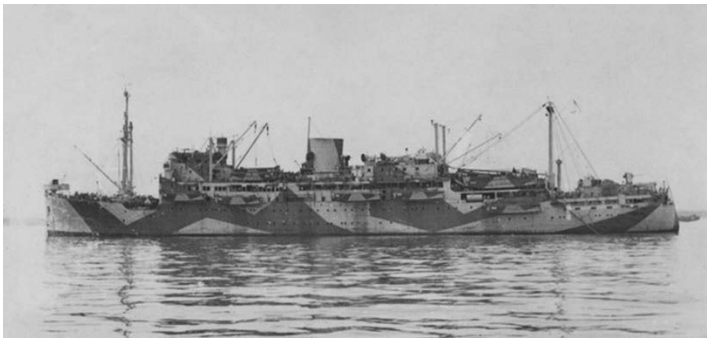
In addition, as the war continued US forces increasingly gained an advantage in terms of training. Training requires the expenditure of resources, fuel, ammunition, time, and a safe haven to practice. As the war proceeded Japan increasingly lacked these resources. For example, at the beginning of the war the Japanese had some of the best trained pilots in the world, but by 1944 pilots were being sent into the air after a mere two weeks of training. All the practice the crew of the *1074* did was part of an important and bigger picture.

By 1700 hours on the 9th the *1074* was back in Jautefa Bay moored alongside its sister ship the *LCI(L) 1071*. The next day, November 10, 1944 they returned to training. At 0800 the *1074* was underway to Pie Beach once again practicing beaching in this case "all morning." The training was conducted with Group 72 presumably so that

the crews and officers could learn to work together which they would have to do when landing troops on a hostile beach under fire.

After a morning of training at 1138 the *1074* anchored for a "chow" break. The ships position was given relative to local prominent landmarks such as Sukerbrodt Hill, Cape Pie, and Mathilide Island. The orientation to each landmark was noted in degrees followed by the abbreviation P.S.C. which stands for Per Standard Compass.

At 1000 hours on November 11th the *1074* set a special sea detail, heaved around on the stern anchor and proceeded to Humboldt Bay to the "watering hole" where they had to drop anchor and wait their turn. At noon they lifted anchor and moored alongside the Australian ship "Noora" for an hour before heading to the beach at the waterhole.



Minoora wearing "dazzle" disruptive camouflage paint scheme circa 1944

The Noora referred to in the deck log was the HMAS *Manoora* a passenger ship built in 1935 but once WWII started converted to an armed merchant cruiser. In 1943 the ship was reconverted into an LSI (Landing Ship Infantry) and in one of its first engagements transported American troops to the Operation Reckless landings at Hollandia in April of 1944.

This history of the *Manoora* illustrates changing priorities as the war progressed. During the early years of the war the ship was needed for patrol, but then later as the Allies moved to the offensive there was a greater need for amphibious transport. The ship was involved in numerous amphibious operations up through July of 1945. Its presence also spoke to the integration of American and Australian forces.

No reason was given for the *1074's* visit alongside the bigger *Noora*. The purpose could have been military, could have been social, or could have involved some practical barter—American cigarettes for Australian beer is a possibility.

The main event of the next day, November 13th, was the arrival on board of a Lieutenant White whose job it was to "compensate the compass." This process needed to be done periodically to cancel out any stray or boat related magnetic field affecting the compass. This correction, usually done with aid of an accurate compass brought on board would ensure that the ships compass would once again only see the earth's magnetic field.

After completing this task which required around two hours the *1074* returned to its anchorage in Jautefa Bay and remained anchored there through the next four days, a long time to be cooped up on a short, narrow, flat-bottomed ship swaying up and down on the waves under a hot tropical sun. The four-hour watches came and went while ensigns Tonelli, Miller and Gershon watched over the routine of the ship. The only break in the routine came on 16th when divers from Flotilla 24 "went down to clear the props."

On the 17th at 0935 the 1074 weighed anchor, cruised over to the *LCI(L) 1076* and moored alongside through late afternoon. Was this military business, a break for socialization or a bit of both? On the 18th the *1074* headed back to Hollandia to take on fresh water again and then moored alongside the *1075*.

After a period on intensive training this middle week of November seemed to be a return to "waiting." It is probably important to keep in mind that the *1074* was a tiny piece in the huge puzzle that was the war effort. The crew had to wait until their turn came to be deployed.

Garbage detail rotated between the ships in Group 72

On Sunday, November 19th, the *1074* was assigned to "garbage detail." At 0745 they got underway to come alongside all the ships in Group 72 and collect the garbage. Then they sailed about four miles out of Humboldt Bay into the ocean where they disposed of the garbage. Most likely garbage duty rotated between the ships of Group 72. This was probably not very pleasant duty and by today's standards not very environmentally friendly, but that is the way it was done in 1944. By mid-afternoon the *1074* was back in harbor moored alongside the *LCI(L) 703*.

On the 20th the *1074* remained moored alongside the *703* in Jautefa Bay until 0815 when they got underway and five minutes later anchored. An interesting event was reported at 2200 when the *1074* weighed anchor to search for "two men missing in a small boat." Given that 20 minutes later they were moored back alongside the *LCI(L) 1076* it seems likely that the missing men were found. However, this event is a good reminder that there is always danger near the ocean and mistakes in judgement can cost lives. In every war a number of casualties are the result of accidents.

At 1015 on the 21st departed from its mooring alongside the *1076* and moved over to moor alongside the *1075* where they remained for the rest of the day. On Wednesday, November 22, at 1210 the *1074* weighed anchor and proceeded to beach at "Coconut Grove." No details are provided but this sounds like a recreation facility where the officers and crew could enjoy rest and relaxation and most likely imbibe in some alcoholic beverages. They remained beached at the Coconut Grove through to the next morning, November 23rd which was Thanksgiving Day. Perhaps the timing on their visit was fortuitous and involved some celebration of turkey day although nothing is mentioned in the log. The military made every effort to provide a Thanksgiving meal to all sailors, soldiers and marines whenever possible.

Every man aboard the *1074* surely knew that it was Thanksgiving and must have had thoughts of home and family on that day, a day when they found themselves on a tropical island thousands of miles from home. Any celebration seemed to have ended by 1100 when they headed to the water hole at Hollandia. By 1700 the *1074* returned to Jautefa Bay and dropped the stern anchor.

On November 24 the *1074* began its first real mission to do what it was designed to do—carry troops. The log entry for 0540 reads, "Set special detail and got underway

for a troop-carrying mission to New Britain." By 0555 the *1074* was in column with seven other troop transporting ships and headed out to sea proceeding on "duty assigned."

They continued on their journey through the day with adjustments in their base course. An entry from 1835 noted that they "stopped all engines in order to watch for floating logs." At 2305 they had to execute a sharp turn to avoid a merchant ship. Clearly the officer on duty and the sailors on lookout needed to stay alert.

The *1074* continued underway on November 25th. A star fix at 0422 put their position at 02-38 south, 144-48 east. At 0900 the *1074* cut speed to 1/3 while its sister ship, the *LCI(L) 1009* made repairs. By 0930 both ships were back at full speed and in formation. At 1520 the *1074* once again left formation to deliver a "spare fresh water part" to the *1009*. The *1074* came alongside and passed over the spare part. It seemed that the ships in the group needed to improvise and help each other as situations arose.

The first log entry from November 26 notes that the *1074* was underway from Humboldt Bay to Finch Hafen further east on the coast of New Guinea with LCI group 71. At 0027 the ship had to take several more sharp turns. By the afternoon at 1300 they executed a maneuver called "Form 18" and by 1400 they shut down the engines and "layed to" six miles outside of Finch Harbor. A half hour later they proceeded into the harbor and by 1542 had dropped anchor. At 1730 they weighed anchor and were once again underway on a base course of 135°T. At 1913 a green flare was spotted about a mile off the port bow and right afterward they changed course. By 0700 on the 27th the 1074 had arrived at Cape Sudest, New Guinea, and two hours later had beached. At noon 189 troops came aboard. This first-time carrying troops must have been a big event for the crew as Joseph Gage recorded the moment with his Kodak camera.

Immediately after this pick up the *1074* joined the formation and headed toward Cape Gloucester in New Britain with it cargo of troops. By the next morning, the *1074* along with three other LCI(L)s arrived at Cape Gloucester. At 0818 the *1074* proceeded to the beach to disembark troops, a task which was completed an hour later after the crew successfully cleared the beach. The men of the *1074* must have felt some satisfaction that they had successfully handled the task for which they had trained so long. By the afternoon of the 29th the *1074* was underway, in formation proceeding back to Humboldt Harbor, mission accomplished. Finally, on Wednesday, December 13, 1944 the *LCI(L)1074* headed into action.

As the sun set over the Pacific and they steamed north on a vast dark ocean toward the Philippines, toward troop landing operations, into a zone where Japanese combat aircraft and kamikazes flew sorties, the men must have had many thoughts and feelings; excitement, apprehension, fear, and curiosity.

Deck Logs can be obtained at the National Archives. For ships logs 1941 or later go to www.archives.gov/de-metro/college-park/ or write to…

Archives II Reference Section
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740

LCI Reunion 2022 Notice

Members, please respond, SOON, to this notice if you are interested and willing to attend a reunion of the USS LCI National Association in 2022

The Association cannot consider planning or obtain any firm pricing for an event without some idea of the number of Association members and their guests who are willing to travel and participate. Also the current pandemic adds to this challenge. An additional issue is the cost of lodging has increased substantially, and fewer discounts are available. If you would like plan to attend, there are two POSSIBLE alternatives presented below.

New Orleans, LA Date would be mid to late June 2022

Most activities centered at the National World War 2 Museum The reunion would be based at the Higgins Hotel directly across the street from the museum.

Estimated Cost: Hotel for 4 night stay: $300 per night, total cost $1,200
Activities and Banquet $250 per person

Portland OR Date would be mid to late September 2022

Most activities centered on the LCI 713. The reunion would be based at the same Sheraton Hotel as it was in the past

Estimated Cost: Hotel for 5 night stay: $200 per night, total cost $1,000
Activities and Banquet $150 per person

Please indicate <u>below</u> the number of people in your group

I would like to attend New Orleans in June LCI Veteran_____ Guests_____

I would like to attend Portland OR in September LCI Veteran_____ Guests_____

I would like to attend at either location LCI Veteran_____ Guests_____

Number of hotel rooms required for my group: _____

Name_____ LCI Number: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Return to: Robert E Wright Jr. by Email to: rewrightcpa@gmail.com
Or US Mail: USS LCI National Association, PO Box 407 Howell MI 48844

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

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

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Exercise Tiger – Slapton Sands by Ted Archer: This painting depicts three LSTs *507, 531,* and *289* being torpedoed by German E-Boats the night of 28 April 1944. It is not historically correct. The three ships hit were not close in line or hit at the same time. But it does show the tragic result of this D-Day rehearsal that killed over 700 soldiers and sailors. See the full story in this issue and eyewitness accounts that include Leroy Brown on *LCI(L) 83*.