



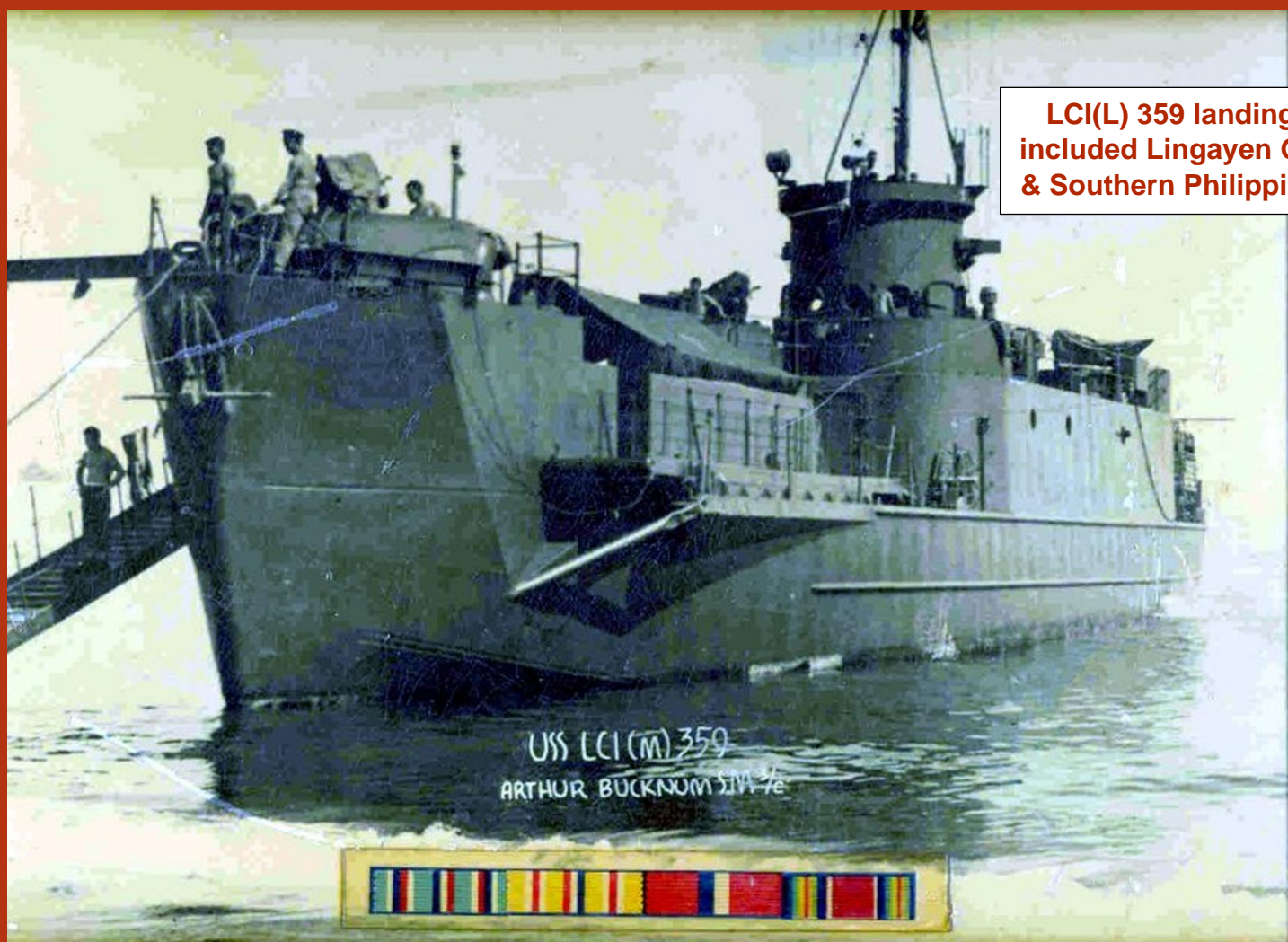
Elsie Item

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

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FALL 2022



Inside this issue...

- The Forgotten War Part 3
- 4th of July at Rendova Harbor
- Interviews with LCI 1059 shipmates



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.

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"Elsie Item": Official publication of the USS LCI National Association, a non-profit veteran's organization. Membership in the USS LCI National Association is open to any U.S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard Veteran who served aboard a Landing Craft Infantry, to anyone related to an LCI veteran, to any past or current member of the U.S. Armed Forces, and to anyone interested in the history of LCIs.

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

Observations from Officer's Country

from Robert E. Wright Jr.

All USS LCI National Association Reunions for 2022, are CANCELED.

Future Reunions Looking Unlikely.

Only four members responded that they would attend at New Orleans last spring. These same four members also responded to the proposed reunion at Portland in October which we hoped would draw some west Coast members.

It is almost impossible to have a National Reunion with just four families attending the event. I do realize also how difficult it is for our few remaining veterans to travel to attend these reunions. The hotels and other venues do not even consider this small number a group for reservations and special rates. We were forced to cancel our contract with the hotel and banquet facility so that we would not be on the hook for the block of unused rooms, and minimum food and bar revenues for our group.

Does this mean that National Reunions are now a thing from the past?

We'll continue to assess the feasibility of having another National Reunion. If you have any ideas as to when and how to have one, **Please**, send us your Ideas.

The USS Landing Craft Infantry National Association is financially stable.

Our fiscal year ended on May 31, 2022. We have an adequate reserve in our Net Assets to continue our current operation through the end of 2023. The current annual dues of \$30.00 will only pay about 50% of our costs. The balance of expenses is covered by the donations of our dedicated members. See the report on Page 31.

I wish to thank all of our donors for their continued generous support.

The Officers and Directors of the Association

As we get older, you expect some health issues. During the past year, some of the Officers and Directors of the Association experienced major medical events. Unfortunately, Peter Selan our Secretary, succumbed to his illness. Your Vice President, Rich Lovell, is presently limited in his capacity, and I wish him a speedy recovery. John France, our past President and principal historian, and Stan Galik, a director, were on the disabled list for a period of time. The current, status report on the President and Treasurer is that he is still able to serve in his roles, but at a restricted capacity for the last few months. Thankfully Lisa Tancredi who assumed the role of the Secretary is doing well. Director Stan Galik has also been on sick call most of this year.

We are (desperately) seeking Members who wish to volunteer their skills and talents to help continue the work of our Associations. Please write or email.



Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

One of the perks of being editor of *Elsie Item* is that authors send me books and articles about LCIs. I always learn new details about Landing Craft Infantry class of ship. And it introduces me to the sailors who served on them. Like their ships, the sailors were in class of their own.

Although *Elsie Item* and our www.usslci.org website tell the LCI story to our members, we are only reaching hundreds. Books and articles in national publications can reach thousands. I feel it is important to keep the LCI story alive through other publications as well.

I have received two books this year. Zach Morris published "When the Beaches Trembled." It's the story of his grandfather, Stephen Ganzberger who served on *LCI(L)* 329 and *LCI(G)* 65. It covers Ganzberger's life from before Pearl Harbor to the end of the war. Much of the book comes from detailed interviews with Ganzberger. It is loaded with Zach's granddad quotes. His memories of seven Pacific campaigns are remarkable. I've written about one of the stories in the book for this issue of *Elsie Item*. It covers *LCI(L)* 329's first landing.

Bill Mercer sent me his new book, "Oklahoma to Okinawa – 18K Miles on the *LCI(G)* 439." I called Bill to thank him, and we talked for about a half hour. On board the 439 Bill started a newsletter from war news coming over the radio. After the war

that hobby became a job as a newspaper reporter, then an author, then a sportscaster, and then a household name in Texas sports history. At *LCI(G)* 439 reunions, his shipmates would ask him to write a book and mention their names. He promised he would, and he finally made it happen with help of his son. He grabbed my attention in the first chapter about his boyhood in Muskogee, Oklahoma during the depression. His mom put him on the hood of their car with a .22 rifle while driving slow at night on the country roads. Any rabbit staring at the headlight was bunny stew. I'll tell more of Bill Mercer's story in the next issue of *Elsie Item*.

Both of these books are available on Amazon.

Are you ready for some football?

Steve Jampol has been a strong supporter of LCI Association and Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum since 2017. He learned his dad, Paul Jampol, served on the *LCI(L)* 530 and landed troops on Utah Beach during D-Day. Jampol has visited the *LCI(L)* 713 in Portland, the Normandy beaches in France, and shared his dad's story in *Elsie Item* March 2021.

Jampol is a season ticket holder to the Carolina Panthers. He is donating two free tickets to the Panthers vs Atlanta Falcons on November 10th. These tickets are on the visitor side 2nd row at the 30-yard line. Contact him at sjampol54@gmail.com for the free tickets. Thank you, Steve.

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

In Memoriam

LCI 328
Wade Swanger

LCI 365
Frank Wulf

LCI 371
Rear Adm. J. Robert Lunney

LCI 612
Edward Tenerowicz

LCI 871
Albert Bibbo



The Forgotten War Part 3

by Robert Wright



The above map indicates the areas controlled by the opposing forces at the end of October 1943., Australian New Zealand and United States forces controlled the dark shaded area (lower). Japan held all the light area (above)

Following World War II Samuel Elliot Morrison published a 24-volume set of books in 1950 titled History of United States Naval Operations in World War II. It was envisioned to be the definitive work that would provide all of the details, all of the naval actions and campaigns from 1941 to 1945. Volume VI of this work is titled Breaking the Bismarks Barrier 22 July 1942 -1 May 1944. Morrison devoted a total of 22 pages to the occupations of Salamaua, Lae, and Finschhafen from 16 June 1943 to 30 October 1943 and many of those pages were focused on the PT boat operations along that part of the New Guinea coast.

Unlike his fellow LCI Flotilla Commanders who reported very detailed War Diaries,

Flotilla Seven Commander Homer McGee provided minimal details of operations of his LCI's. And this was true of his Group Division and individual LCI COs. Maybe they too, wanted to forget that war?

In Part 2 of this series, we covered Operation Cartwheel's central Solomon's Campaign as one part of the pincer to encircle the major Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain. The Central Solomon's campaign fell under the command of the US Navy Pacific Fleet's, Adm. Chester Nimitz. The South Pacific's Third Fleet was commanded by Adm. William Halsey. Halsey and MacArthur had a good working relationship from all accounts, and their coordination of forces in Operation

Cartwheel was a good example of this rapport. The original plan, for Cartwheel, envisioned by General Douglas MacArthur was to invade New Britain and engage and defeat the 100,000-man force occupying Rabaul. Then he could move on to the Philippine Islands in 1944.

During the Solomon Island's New Georgia campaign, the joint force planners had adopted a strategy of landings where the Japanese had minimal defenses and then quickly build new advanced naval and air bases. From these new bases, they would be able to attack Japanese operations and restrict their ability to move troops and resupply food, and war materials within range of the new allied base. This was accomplished from the Allied bases on Vella Lavella, the Treasury Islands and New Georgia, against supply efforts from Japanese base at Rabaul to their bases on the islands of Bougainville and Kolombangara.

MacArthur chafed at the idea that he had to request the assistance of the US Navy commanders in Pearl Harbor to conduct any operation. The Creation of the Seventh Fleet and the Seventh Amphibious Force was the concession from the Joint Chiefs in Washington to MacArthur's demands that he be given command of all the forces in the Southwest Pacific. Senior naval officers found it "inconceivable" that there was a possibility of anyone in the Army could command any naval force. After the MacArthur's debacle of moving overland through the New Guinea Jungles to capture Buna, it was concluded that all future

South West Pacific operations would require the use of amphibious forces. So, the Seventh Fleet was created and placed under to General MacArthur's overall command. In early 1943, the Seventh Fleet appeared very impressive on paper considering that it was comprised mostly of ships and landing craft that had yet to be built.

Halsey and MacArthur decided that the use of simultaneous landings in two different locations would confuse the Japanese of their ultimate goals and make them split their forces to respond to the two different attacks. So, on June 30, 1943, while Halsey forces were landing on Rendova, Macarthur's forces would occupy the Trobriand Islands of Woodlark and Kiriwina. These islands were selected because they provided sites for two new air bases that could be used by fighter aircraft that would provide air cover for the long range heavy and medium bombers that were attacking Rabaul on a regular basis.

The Woodlark and Kiriwina Landings fooled no one, no shots were even fired, because the islands were not occupied by Japanese forces, and they did not bother to counterattack. Afterwards, it was considered as successful training exercise for the Seventh Amphibious Fleet. Adm. Daniel Barbey reported that he had used every LCT, LCI and LST in his Seventh Amphibious Fleet, plus some additional ones borrowed from Halsey's Third Fleet. The 12 LCI's initial landing on Kiriwina carried 2250 troops averaging 188 men each.



LCI(L) 34 and LCI(L) 26 of Flotilla 7 unload supplies at Woodlark Island after the unopposed landings on June 30, 1943

The following is the War Diary of USS *LCI(L)* 339 and is representative of all the ships that landed on Kiriwina Island. *LCI(L)* 339 transported 186 US Army enlisted personnel plus 5 officers together with an additional 10 tons of supplies. Unfortunately, this would be the last successful landing for *LCI(L)* 339.

U.S.S. L.C.I. (L) 339 WAR DIARY

CONFIDENTIAL

June 30, 1943

Sighted Trobriand Island at 0510 and passed Boli Boli Point, through passage at 0807. At 0825 hit a sand covered coral bar; remained stuck until 0830. Cause; loss of steerageway due to ships ahead slowing down, causing tide to carry us toward shore and shallow water, charted. At 0835

beached between LCI (L) 74 and LCI (L) 344, between Boli Boli Point and Kumkupji Point, Kiriwina Island Trobriand Group, LAT 08° 32' S LONG. 151° 01' E, used stern anchor and hit coral beach with engines stopped. Ramps dropped 0837 in 1and1/2 feet of water, and at 0845 troops disembarking, at 0910 troops began unloading the approximately 10 tons of supplies and ammunition. Finished unloading supplies at 0950 and hauled up ramps at 0953. Started backing at 2/3 astern at 1004 and taking in anchor. 1007 off beach. Delay of few minutes getting off beach caused by painful, but minor injury to SCHUCKMAN, Ernest Francis, F2/c, #62364 74, while operating starboard ramp hand winch. Handle struck him below left eye as a result of releasing stopping dog with winch tension on ramp cables.

Pharmacist's mate brought aboard few minutes after injury. The ramp hand operated winch set up is foul and constitutes unnecessary hazard to personnel. The mechanism was in good mechanical condition. Medium bomber circled beach during operations. Unidentified. Two LCI (L)s stuck on beach and remained behind. Troops stood trip well, good spirits, approximately 10% seasick. Complimentary accommodations.

Underway on return trip at 1210 with 9 other LCI (L)'s. No escort. Night dark, took inward route.

Lae and Salamaua must be defended to the death-Japanese Imperial Emperor

The Japanese strategists could read the maps before them. They knew where all their bases were and how defensible each one was. They could see the evolving Allied Strategy which was moving quickly in the southwest Pacific. Wewak now become the principal Japanese air base to defend their conquered territory in Northern New Guinea the Dutch East Indies. The Japanese began to transfer 100's of additional aircraft to that base in an attempt to stop the Allied advance.

Simultaneously with the landings on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands, MacArthur had landed the 1st Battalion 162nd Infantry of the 41st Division in Nassau Bay, which is above Buna and more importantly 20 miles south of Salamaua on the northern coast of New Guinea. 770 men were landed by LCVP manned by the US Army Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment (EBSR) which

was MacArthur's other naval operation. The American 1st Battalion quickly met up with the Australian 17th Brigade that had been engaged for weeks in the mountainous terrain behind from the beach. In the following days, additional troops including the 2nd and 3rd Battalions with supplies were landed. During the next six weeks the combined Allied force engaged determined Japanese troops until they pushed them to the perimeter of their Salamaua defenses. The Japanese then moved 5,000 infantry reinforcements to Salamaua from Lae to bolster that position anticipating the continued Allied advance, leaving approximately 2500 troops at Lae.

On August 17, 1943, in preparation for the landings at Lae, General Kenny's Fifth Army Air Force launched an all-out air assault on the existing Japanese air bases using the information from intercepted Japanese Military Communications. The first wave was comprised of forty-one B-25s and twelve B-17s. It was followed two hours later by thirty-three B-25s and eighty-three P-38s. The reported results were 175 Japanese planes left destroyed on the ground. The Americans lost 22 planes from their attacking force.

The reason that the battle to take Lae has generally been ignored in the United States, was the fact that it was undertaken largely by the Australian Army with some US Army support operations. Assigned to this task were the Australian 7th Division which had been engaged in the fight with the Japanese for over one year in the Papuan jungle.

Joining them was the 9th Division which had returned to Australia in February of 1943 after the defeat of the Germans in North Africa. There they had earned the title “Desert Rats of Tobruk” after their superhuman efforts stopping attacks by the superior German Afrika Corp commanded by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Since their return to defend their homeland against the anticipated Japanese assault, they had been training in Jungle warfare. These were completely different conditions than they had just endured for the previous two years.

MacArthur’s US Army Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment (EBSR) was wholly inadequate to move two full divisions with their equipment along the coast of New Guinea to Lae. So, the Seventh Amphibious Force was used with the EBSR craft falling under the command of Adm. Barbey for the first time. The Australian Army was under the command of General Blamey. His plan called for an amphibious landing of the 9th Division between Salamaua and east of Lae outside the range of artillery in Lae.



Soldiers of the Australian 9th Division “the Desert Rats”, come ashore from LSTs of the Seventh Amphibious Force. On the port side of LST 458, the wrecked LCI(L) 339 is visible.

The 7th division was to be transported by plane to an airstrip at Nadzab west of Lae. The two divisions would create a pincer movement as the 9th approached the Japanese defenders of Lae along the coast, and the 7th from the rear. For the Seventh Amphibious Force this would be their first test of a landing on Japanese held territory. The fleet that was assembled had 156 ships and landing craft. This was the largest force in the South Pacific to date. The Australians had major concerns. This was to be the first time that their men were to be part of an amphibious assault since the disaster at Gallipoli in 1915. They were resolute that there would be no repeat of that landing where the Australian troops, sustained over 5,000 casualties after being trapped on the beachhead for months by a determined defense, with no means to resupply or evacuate their stranded force.

Fortunately, the actual amphibious landings at Lae were unopposed. During and after the pre-landing bombardment, the Japanese who were occupying the landing beaches fled to the mountains. The force that had remained in Lae was not infantry but service personnel, because the Japanese commander of Lae had repositioned his combat forces to oppose the anticipated advance of the Australians toward Salamaua from the east. This is exactly what the Australian army commander had planned. The majority of the Australian force meanwhile had been withdrawn and was prepared to assault Lae by the air. The morning following the beach landing, 1700 paratroopers of the U.S. Army 503 Parachute Infantry Regiment jumped

from ninety-six C-47s into the valley behind Lae, onto the landing strip at Nadzab which they secured immediately. The parachute drop was observed from a B-17 flying high over the airfield. Onboard was General MacArthur, accompanied by newsreel photographers who were there to capture his moment of triumph. On the ground the American paratroopers were met there by additional Papuan and Australian units who had marched overland. Working through the night, they made the runway serviceable, so that by the next morning 2 brigades of the Australian 7th began to arrive by air transport. It was not lost on the Aussies who had taken months as they fought their way from Port Moresby to Buna over the Kokoda Trail, the same distance that they had covered in just hours.

After the initial landings had succeeded, General Wootten commanding the 9th Division, stated his forces would occupy Lae in two weeks. It took the “Desert Rats” twelve days of fighting the Japanese defenders through 16 miles of jungle, mangrove swamps, Kunai grass, rivers and streams to reach Lae where they were greeted by members of the 7th Division.

The Japanese commander of the Lae area realized that his forces had been outmaneuvered and that further resistance was futile. In order that he did not lose what men he had remaining, he decided to evacuate his combat forces from Salamaua. So, they executed one of their now famous operations by boat and submarines, and within days his entire remaining force had

been extracted right from under the Allies noses.

On September 15, 1943, General MacArthur released a communiqué. In it he claimed that Forces under his command had encircled and cut off the 20,000 defenders of Lae. What was omitted was that most of the actual 11,000 Japanese troops had managed to escape.

On D-day, there had been minimal casualties among the landing force. Almost all of these occurred in one air raid in which the landing wave of LCIs including *LCI(L) 339* was attacked by a formation of Japanese bombers while approaching the beach. One bomb struck just forward of the Conn as the LCI with the well deck was full of troops. Twenty Australians were killed by the bomb detonation. Many more were wounded. *The LCI(L) 341* had a hole blown in her hull by a near miss but managed to beach before settling on the bottom. One radioman aboard was killed. In one landing, Admiral Barbey had lost over 10% of his 18 available LCIs. Two LSTs in the succeeding supply echelons were damaged by Japanese air attacks but were saved by their young officers and crewmen in spite of heavy damage and numerous casualties. That attack reduced his LST force from 12 to 10.

September 22, 1943: On to Finschhafen.

General MacArthur called a conference of his senior Allied military officers immediately after the fall of Lae. At that meeting was Lt. General Kenney of the Allied Air Corp. Lt. General Wootten of the

Australian Army, and Rear Adm. Barbey of the U.S. Navy. MacArthur was intent, on moving up the planned landings at Finschhafen from the following month to as soon as reasonably possible. General MacArthur was aware that a large number of Japanese troops that had escaped from Lae and wanted to prevent them from reinforcing the defenses at Finschhafen. Both he and now the Japanese realized that it would be the next target of his movement up the New Guinea coast. After considerable discussion about the previous commitments, status, and availability of the various branches it was determined that the operation could commence in six days. Finschhafen was approximately one hundred miles, by sea, down the Northern coast from Lae. The Australians who would conduct the campaign had most of the 9th Division already assembled at Lae. The amphibious landing force would be comprised of 8 LSTs and the 16 remaining LCI's of Flotilla 20. The LCIs were assigned to Task Group 76.4. Included were *LCI's* 28, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 224, 226 and 344 in Section One of the Task Unit. The Second Section was comprised of *LCI's* 71, 31, 34, 73, 74, 338, 340, 342, 343. In the afternoon of September 21, 1943, the Australians boarded the LCIs at Lae and got underway. The Amphibious force reached the area of the landing area called Scarlet Beach, north of Finschhafen before dawn but had a difficult time locating it in the predawn darkness. The landings that followed were chaotic, but eventually troops and supplies made it on to the landing beach.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

080192

Australian troops from the 9th Divisions embarking from smaller landing craft one of the Flotilla 20 LCI's for the trip down the coast of New Guinea for the landing at Scarlet Beach the following morning.

Fortunately for the Allies, the Japanese were just as confused by the landings north of Finschhafen. The Japanese general had expected the allies to attack overland from Lae and not by sea. He had moved the majority of his combat troops to the south to establish defensive positions on the approach to Finschhafen. Just like the earlier landing at Lae, the bulk of the Japanese combat troops were miles away from the actual landing beaches north of town. The few coastal defenders that were located at the landing beaches put up some resistance before fleeing inland after the initial assault waves had landed.

L.C.I. (L) Flotilla 7 Group 19 Report of Execution of Operation NG 5-43, Second Section September 22, 1943 Part 5. Beaching at Scarlet Beach

Visibility was good when this section was approaching. Ships of the first section could be plainly seen on the beach and this command intended to beach LCI(L) 344 as close as possible to the spot vacated by LCI(L) 71 to disembark troops at an already established beachhead. Much gunfire was observed while approaching and we had anticipated resistance from the enemy. Just prior to entering the site a red light was observed approximately on the spot where the 71 had beached, and a green light was

sighted about 400 yards to the right of the red one. It was decided to beach in front of the green light with the ships following in succession to the left with 520 yard intervals between ships. LCI(L) 344 beached at 0531 on a bar about 30 to 40 feet from the water's edge. The ramps were dropped, and the starboard ramp fell into deep water, upend and becoming useless. several troops disembarked by the port ramp and stepped into water almost chest-high, took a few more steps and found the water over their heads. One swam ashore and the others came back aboard, the ship was driven ahead at standard speed to get over the bar to the beach. The port ramp which had not been hoisted enough to clear the beach and was carried away when the ship beached. Emergency ladders were rigged, and the troops began disembarking. By swinging the ship's stern to the left the starboard ramp was brought down and at right angles to the ship, and half the troops were able to use this ramp. The approaching LCI(L) 343 collided with the 338 which was standing out. LCI(L) 29 stopped on the same bar as the 344 but evidently saw the 344's difficulties and was able to power over the bar to the beach and then drop the ramps. All ships performed calmly and well in the face of strong fire from the enemy. Several of the ships opened fire at the treetops in an effort to silence the enemy snipers. The enemy used snipers, mortar and machine gun fire in an effort to resist. One mortar shell landed just aft of the deck house on 343, killed four troops, injured several others, and caused slight damage to the ship in the form of holes in the after bulkhead

and water tank. A bullet pierced the hull of the 344, close to the waterline causing the peak tank to be flooded. Other hits were made by small caliber bullets on most of the ships but caused no damage. No naval personnel were wounded. The total number of troops wounded can only be estimated at about 12 to 15, as some are known to have gone on to the beach. The plastic armor around the conning tower and gun mounts proved excellent in stopping all bullets. The steel plating and bulkheads were easily pierced by bullets of any caliber. At 0600, 344 retracted and stood out to rendezvous, closely followed by 343, the last ship to retract.

In August 1942, the United States Marines had begun the long land war to stop and then turn back the Japanese expansion in the Pacific. Until September 1943 the Pacific naval battles had been a war of attrition with the United States losing far more ships than the Japanese. The major advantage had been that the US Navy had been able to sink or damage more of Japan's critical aircraft carriers. Those losses had eliminated Japan's ability to project their military power into forward areas. The aircraft carriers that the U.S. Navy lost, before September 1943, were soon to be replaced by the new Essex Class of fleet carriers, which would be able to take the war to Japan itself. While Halsey's Navy campaign in the Solomon's was moving slowly from island to island, General Macarthur's Forces had pushed the Japanese defenders back 500 miles along the New Guinea Coast. Operation Cartwheel, the elimination of Rabaul, was well underway.

LCI(M) 565 Battles one of the Pacific Typhoons of 1945

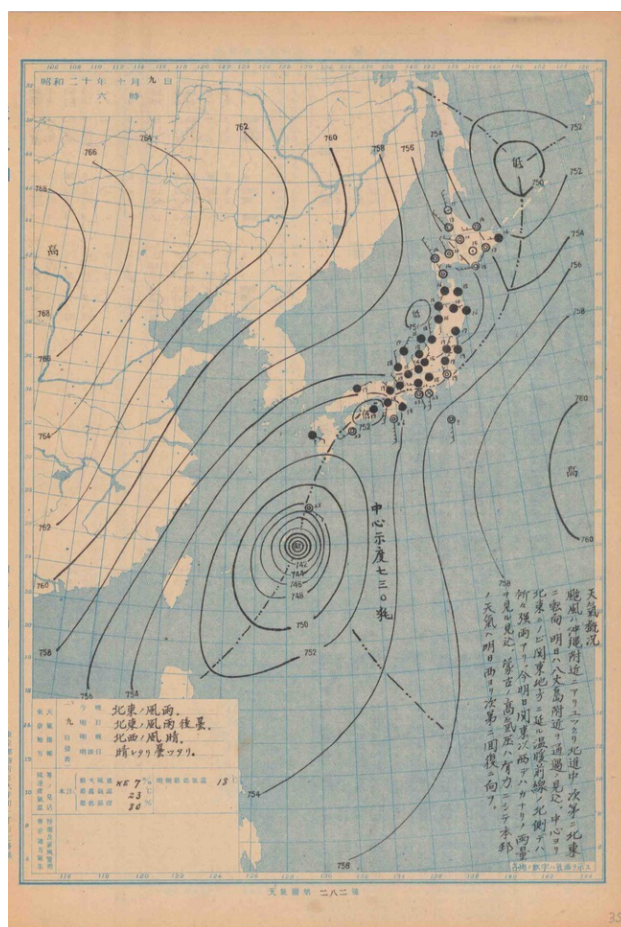
By Jeff Veesenmeyer
with story from Rod Scurlock

The Pacific War was nearing the end. Attacks from kamikaze planes called the *Divine Wind*, were the biggest threat at sea. But another type of Divine Wind was rearing up to attack the Navy in and around Okinawa beginning in the spring of 1945.

Rod Scurlock was on deck of *LCI(M)* 565 enroute to Okinawa. “We had just completed making our runs in the Philippines and joined a convoy heading for Okinawa.” He was sitting on the number two 40mm ready box talking to his friend Bud Lennon. “We were trying our best to drain the coffee urn in the galley.” The weather had been calm and the convoy had smooth sailing.

A typhoon had been spotted and was tracking toward the East China Sea. There would be 22 of these storms during the typhoon season of 1945. Japan hoped one of these “divine winds,” which translates to *kamikaze*, would stop the American advance toward Japan. A typhoon had saved Japan from a Mongol invasion in the 13th Century. Japan named their special attack force *Kamikaze* – a term that means Divine Wind, in honor of the typhoon that saved their island nation. This typhoon and those that followed would be devastating to the conquerors. But not enough to stop the constant supply of men and ships invading Japan’s home islands.

“Bud looked past me and pointed. He said it looked like a storm coming. I looked over and there was one monster black cloud coming over the horizon,” recalled Scurlock. By the time they finished their coffee the cloud was getting pretty close. A squall of rain could be seen beneath the cloud. The wind was stronger, and the sea was getting choppy and the waves higher. It was time for Scurlock to go on watch up in the Conn Tower.



Japan’s weather map of Typhoon Louise in the Fall of 1945 shows the eye of this storm right on top of Okinawa.

Scurlock describes the next moments like this, “The squall hit suddenly and hard. It was like being in a shower with the valve open wide. The rain hit you hard like someone tapping you on the head with a

small wooden mallet. The spray would get in your eyes, and it was difficult to see very far.” Everything loose was stowed away in boxes under seats or the drawer on the bulkhead. The wind was blowing hard, and the waves kept getting higher. The *LCI(M)* 565 pitched, rolled, and bucked. Waves were splashing over the well deck. It was difficult to walk without holding on to something.

“I would look to the side to see how high the sea was, and I had to look up, even from the conning tower, to see the top of the wave,” said Scurlock. “The next moment you were on top of a mountain and the ocean was way below you.”

It was reported later that there were 60-foot waves. Scurlock would have considered that a gross understatement at the time he was riding a wave down into the trough. “The wind was howling, and blowing fiercely like some weird banshee, dark clouds were swirling overhead, and spray from the waves continued to hit you.” One sailor made the mistake of opening his mouth while facing the wind...and not being able to close it until he turned away.

Every wave would hit the side of the ship, jarring it, and slamming the flat hull as it came to the bottom of the valley. Then it would lift the ship quickly again toward the top like a fast elevator. The only way another ship in the convoy could be seen was if both ships were at the top of a wave.

“Ships to the side of us were pitching and taking the force of waves hitting the ship just as we were. I looked over at the *LCI* 580 on our port side and I swear I saw daylight all the way under her as she topped

a wave,” Scurlock remembered. “I don’t know how others felt, but every time I looked up at those waves overhead, I wondered if that was the one that was going to come down right on top of us and take us to Davey Jones headquarters.”

When Scurlock looked forward, the bow would take a nose-dive into a rising wave ahead of it. The ocean would come rushing up, the wave would crash over the bow cascading water everywhere. He wondered if the ship was going to come back up out of the wave. “Next I would hear the motors suddenly increasing in speed and hear the screws fanning the air as the stern came out of the water.” Then the flat bottomed *LCI* would tip forward, slide down the wave and slap the bottom of the trough.

***“It would shake your innards
to the core”***

The hull sounded like huge oil drum being hit with a sledgehammer. Everyone and everything on the ship would shake. “It would shake your innards to the core,” said Scurlock. “To say the least I felt a little uneasy. I wondered if that little ship was going to be able to weather being tossed round like a cork on those waves and survive.”

Moving around the ship was a scary experience. Trying to climb up or down a ladder was especially dangerous. “One moment you were flying through the air,” explained Scurlock, “you couldn’t hold your feet on the ladder, and then the ladder was driving your feet right through the steps so

hard you could hardly hold your legs straight.” If not holding on to something when a wave hit, men would be thrown up against the bulkheads. “As much trouble as we had in the conn, I couldn’t help wonder how the guys were doing down in the engine room.” Engine spaces were close quarters with hot exhausts, big motors and equipment that could cause a lot of bodily harm. “At least we could see the next big wave coming and brace for the jolt,” Scurlock noted.

“While the storm was going on it seemed a lifetime”

The storm peaked out at about 80 knots or 92 miles per hour. It traveled fast and left almost as quickly as it hit. The sea settled down again. Scurlock remembered, “While the storm was going it seemed a lifetime that it was continuing at full tilt.” This was how many sailors remembered battling typhoons in 1945.

When *LCI(M)* 565 made it to Naha at Okinawa the full impact of the typhoon was realized. The harbor and Buckner Bay were a disaster area. The 565 anchored near a cruiser. It was beached and damaged badly.

In October the Typhoon Louise was responsible for twelve ships sunk, 222 grounded, 32 severely damaged, and hundreds of men killed, injured, or missing. On Okinawa all food and medical supplies had been destroyed and 80 percent of housing was damaged.

The amphibious fleet had 107 ships damaged and needing repair that fall. Some ships in the harbor fared better than others.

There were 28 LCIs that had dragged their anchors and became grounded on the beach. This is what they were designed to do. No problem for LCIs. Those that avoided collisions with larger ships were towed back off the beach and put back into service with only minor repairs. But many tugs and smaller craft were crushed by the out of control and drifting bigger ships. These losses could not have been replaced or repaired in time for the next landings.

The little flat bottomed LCIs showed their fortitude and capabilities again. *LCI(M)* 565 survived what bigger, stronger more powerful ships could not. “You felt lucky and relieved that you made it through,” recalled Scurlock. “This was an experience I will never forget.”

Had the war not ended in August, the planned invasion of Japan would have been just three weeks after Typhoon Louise. Operation Downfall could not have begun on November 1st with so many vessels, and so much of the supplies damaged. Japan’s home islands might have been saved (temporarily) by another divine wind.

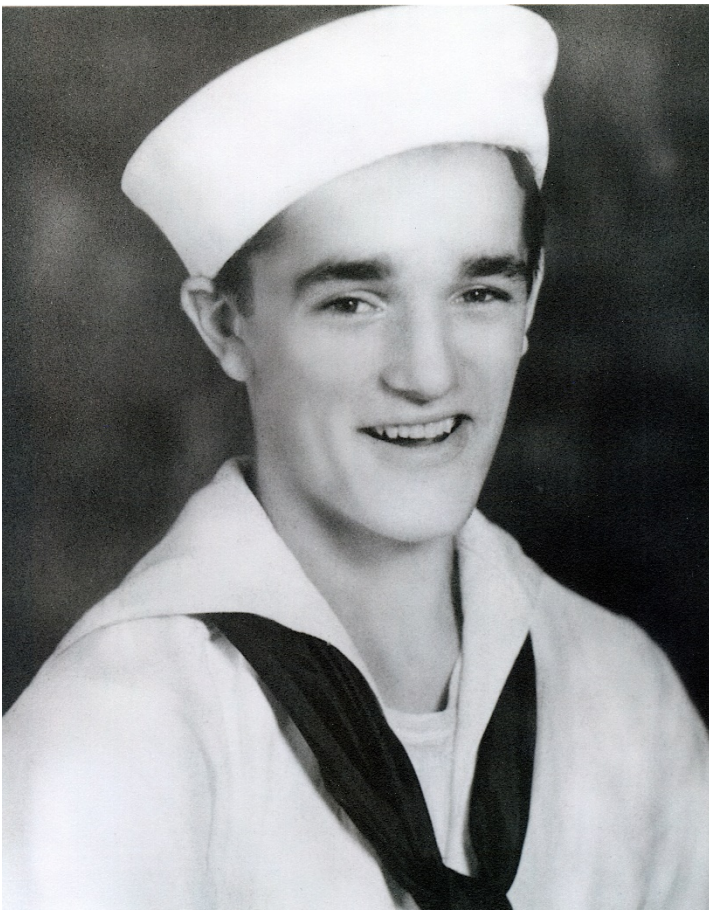


LCI 337 sits beached along with debris from dozens of other damaged ships at Okinawa.

July 4th Fireworks in Rendova Harbor

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Ten LCIs from Flotilla Five were beached, anchored, or exiting Rendova Harbor on July 4, 1943. At 0150 a V-formation of 16 Japanese bombers was spotted. *LCI(L)* 329 had unloaded elements of the 169th Field Artillery Battalion. Now the ship was anchored along the northern shore of the harbor along with *LCI(L)* 327. Six LCIs from their group were still beached. Two were exiting to the west.



Stephen Ganzberger QM3/c

Stephen Ganzberger was at his 20mm battle station on *LCI(L)* 329. "When I looked up in the air, here comes sixteen bombers at

three thousand feet." This was the first time Ganzberger and these LCI crews had encountered the enemy. The Betty bombers were headed in perfect formation for the six LCIs beached on Rendova. It had been a year and half since Pearl Harbor. Finally, Ganzberger would have a chance to fight back.

Stephen Ganzberger was from Wyadotte, Michigan. He was born in 1924 to parents of Hungarian descent. His dad had left Budapest Hungary in 1910. He sailed to the United States on the *HMS Carpathia*. This was the same ship that would become infamous two years later by rescuing survivors of the *Titanic*.

Ganzberger had four older and one younger siblings. He was 17 when the family heard the shocking news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. His older brothers enlisted in the Army and Merchant Marines right away. But his parents wouldn't let him join the war until he turned 18. The day after his birthday, August 25, 1942, Stephen Ganzberger enlisted in the Navy.

After boot camp at Great Lakes Ganzberger's company was sent to Portsmouth, Virginia for amphibious training. They learned how to operate amphibious ships, land troops and retract from a beach. They'd be assigned to new LCIs being built in Texas. Ganzberger first saw his new ship *LCI(L)* 329 at Brown City, Texas. There, the green LCI crews took their ships out into the Gulf for shakedown cruise. "A shakedown is like when you buy a new car, you get to drive it for a while."

The *LCI(L)* 329 was attached to Flotilla Five. After shakedowns they headed

for the Panama Canal. It took about a week to get the LCI group through the locks. For the *LCI(L)329* it took longer. The ship sustained damage to one of the screws and had to go into dry dock for repairs. Flotilla Five left them behind. “Next thing you know we are all by ourselves,” remembers Ganzberger. Once repaired they made the crossing to New Caledonia alone. Once there they continued their training in schools for radio, landings, and gunnery. They were now getting close to the front lines. “We’d still get air raids,” Ganzeberger recalled. It was good practice for general quarters but never saw or had to fire their guns at the enemy. On 23 June 1943 the *LCI(L)329* got orders to leave New Caledonia for Guadalcanal. They would be participating in “Operation Toenails” during the opening days of the New Georgia campaign.

This operation was a historic moment for the Landing Craft Infantry class of ships. It marked the first time that LCIs would land troops on enemy beaches. It was also the first time the LCI crews would be tested in combat with the Japanese. They were looking forward to seeing some action.

At the Russel Islands the *LCI(L)329* and Flotilla Five loaded up with the 169th Field Artillery Battalion, part of the 43rd Infantry Division. Their destination would be Rendova Harbor. The tiny island of Rendova was considered a must capture at all costs. At the northern tip of the island was a 3,400-foot mountain. It was the perfect location for an observation post. The Army could use it to provide artillery support for troops across the channel on New Georgia Island. Capturing Munda Airfield on New Georgia was the primary

target for those troops. This airfield would provide a landbased air defense and attack capability against the huge airbase at Rabaul. The 16 Betty bombers in the perfect V-formation were flying 400 miles from Rabaul.



Mitsubishi G4M bombers flying in formation.

The Betty’s were Mitsubishi G4M twin engine bombers. These were the primary land-based bombers stationed on island airfields throughout the Pacific. The seven-man crew had four defensive guns. They were positioned in the tail, dorsal and waist of the plane. They could carry external bomb and torpedo loads. They were designed for long range and high speed. To achieve this, they lacked protective armour and self-sealing fuel tanks. A few hits could kill crewmembers and ignite the plane on fire. The Japanese pilots called them “hanake” (cigar) due the shape of the fuselage and ability to burn. US pilots named them flying Zippo lighters.

The initial landings at Rendova on June 30 were hampered by weather. Monsoon rains turned the interior jungle into a sea of mud. Equipment and supplies were

still stacked in a disorderly mess on the beach. Seabees were still unloading rain drenched supplies on the morning of July 4. But the rain had stopped, and the skies were clear. Flying weather had resumed.

The steamy jungle provided ideal defensive positions for Japanese snipers. To the allied troops every tree was a potential threat. Dense jungle made pill boxes and mortar emplacements nearly invisible. Progress inland was painfully slow. Tractors, equipment, and men were bogged down and covered in muck. After four days the beachhead was just barely secured. The threat of counterattack existed each night.

The bad weather continued through the night of July 3. The LCIs maneuvered through the Blanche Channel to Rendova Harbor under the cover of darkness. Wind, rain, and poor visibility caused ships to become scattered. But as the sun rose on a clear July 4, all ships in the column had regrouped. Flotilla Five reached the northern tip of Rendova and entered the narrow opening to the harbor at 0800.

The *LCI(L)329* beached two hours later, on Rendova's East Beach. Side ramps were lowered, and the artillery battalion began embarking. Unknown to the Flotilla Five, their column had been spotted by scout planes at sunup. The Japanese commander of the 11th air fleet at Rabaul was determined to stop the American advance toward New Britain. He ordered over 100 planes to attack on an aerial assault to intercept and destroy any resupply of troops that had already landed. By 1230 the first group of LCIs had completed their landing assignments. They withdrew to the northern shore of the harbor and anchored. Ganzberger and the crew of

329 were at their GQ stations. *LCI 332*, 23,24, 65, and 63 were now beached and unloading. *LCI 336* was still there too. They had become stuck on the beach and could not retract with their stern anchor or reverse power. A tow or higher tide would be needed.

A huge mid-air melee was now in progress over Munda airfield. The approaching bombers and escorts sent from Rabaul had been spotted on radar. US fighter squadrons were waiting for them. Dog fights erupted. One raid escaped detection by keeping in the clouds. They dipped out just above Rendova's mountain and headed directly toward the beached LCIs. "When I looked up in the air, here comes sixteen bombers at three thousand feet," recalled Ganzberger. He was at his GQ station as gunner on the number-two 20mm gun. His good buddy and ship's cook, Elmo Pucci was his loader. Two other shipmates were assigned to help aim and another was an ammo runner. Behind them was the Executive Officer Lt(jg) Frank Garfield Love Jr. He was their spotter and recorded the action that was about to erupt.

"I could hear the Jap airplanes right away because they had a different sound," remembered Ganzberger. Then every gun from LSTs, LCIs and shore batteries opened-up...and nothing but the roar of gunfire could be heard. A wall of metal rose-up from a dozen ships and army anti-aircraft emplacements. Tracers lit the sky and AA shells bursts blackened the formation of planes. "I was on a 20 mm, and oh boy, here they come, sixteen big bombers. And when they come over, they were only about 1,500 to 2,000 feet up,

because it was very low overcast, so they start coming through and right where we dropped all these Seabees off...the bombs went down,” said Ganzberger. He aimed his gun ahead of the planes and pulled, and pulled, and just kept pulling. “Out of 16 planes we shot 14 of them down. I must have gotten one or two of them.”

The XO Lieutenant Love was spotting for Ganzberger’s gun. He watched tracers hitting the fuselage of one of the planes. It burst into flames and fell. The 329’s number three gun hit the starboard engine of another plane. It caught fire and began falling, then was hit by a larger caliber gun that took off the tail. “Man, you couldn’t miss if you tried. Boy, and that’s all I kept going. I’d pull 60 rounds, I told that guy Pucci, I says, ‘Keep pumping baby’ until that barrel gets hot!” Gunners were trained to switch barrels when they got too hot. Most didn’t. Barrels could warp or a round might cook off in the barrel from the heat.

LCI 335 had retracted just before the bombers attacked. The bombers came in low. They dropped their bombs just before the anti-aircraft fire began. Bombs hit where the 335 had been beached. Then burning planes began dropping everywhere. The whole beach and harbor were engulfed in flames and flying shrapnel. Lieutenant John R. Powers on the *LCI (L) 335* recalled, “It was like a good old 4th of July...planes fell around us.”

There would be no celebration though. A bomb landed between *LCI(L) 24* and *LCI(L) 65*. It ripped holes in both ships and caused the first casualties to LCI sailors at Rendova. Three sailors were killed. A dozen others were wounded. “The 65 got

straddle-bombed,” Ganzberger recalled, “and that’s the ship that I ended up on.” He was transferred to the *LCI(L) 65* in January of 1944.

The remaining bombers circled for another pass but were taken down by anti-aircraft fire or were finished off by American fighter planes. Twelve Betty’s were destroyed at Rendova Harbor. None of the 16 planes made it back to Rabaul. Over a hundred Japanese escort planes were downed in the may lay. In all, 137 Americans were killed on the beach that day. “They killed a lot of our Seabees,” Ganzberger lamented. “They died in the mud.”

Ganzberger and the crew of *LCI(L) 329* escaped the bombing. They pulled up anchor and left Rendova Harbor with a convoy LCIs at 1800. The crew of *LCI(L) 24* wasn’t so lucky. They were ordered ashore until the Seabees could repair their ship. They were issued rifles and told to dig fox holes on the beach. A Japanese counterattack was expected that night. They watched the naval gunfire during the distant Battle of Kula Gulf. Nobody on the beach slept that night.

“When we hit Rendova, they pulled us in there and we had to stay there for 30 days, and every day, we went through dive-bombing attacks and strafing. And I watched dogfights every day, plain as day,” that’s how Ganzberger recalled Rendova. After July 4 at Rendova, nobody was asking when they were going to see some action.

Resources: New book by Zach S. Morris grandson of Stephen Ganzberger titled “When The Beaches Trembled,” Wikipedia, history.navy.mil, Aircraft of WWII.

My Quest to Meet Art Wilson's LCI-1059 Shipmates

By Greg Maury

INTRODUCTION:

As introduced in the June 2022 issue of the *ELSIE ITEM*, I began my quest to meet the three remaining shipmates of my maternal grandfather, Art Wilson, from *LCI-1059*. In early 2020, Association President Robert Wright, put me in touch with shipmate, Bob Wright; Bob put me in touch with Jim Nance; and Jim put me in touch with Herb Wilson. Additionally, Robert put me in touch with Mike McGreevy, grandson, and his father, Jim McGreevy, son of Ensign Robert McGreevy (deceased) of *1059*; and my real journey began.

My first contacts were phone calls I had with Bob Wright in April 2020; Jim Nance in June 2020; then Herb Wilson in February 2021. Along the way, I have had several calls and built a friendship with the McGreevy's who have shared a wealth of information on *1059*.

Speaking with these three veterans was more exciting to me than speaking with the President of the United States! Subsequently, I planned a trip to meet Bob and Herb, and Jim. Unfortunately, I have not been able to visit Jim Nance, yet. The following stories are from my conversations with these gracious heroes and my visits in October 2021 and April 2022.

BOB WRIGHT:

After enjoying phone and email correspondence over the prior 18 months, meeting Bob and Nat Wright in person at



Nat Wright, Yta Maury, and Bob Wright in the Wright's home in Florida. The visit and interview by Greg Maury took place in October of 2021.

their home in Dunedin, Florida, in October 2021, was like meeting long lost family members.

Bob is originally from Concord, New Hampshire, and Nat, Rockland, Maryland. They met after World War II. Nat invited Bob to a family clam bake, where she served him lobster. **“I decided then and there that I was going to marry this woman!”**

After boot camp Bob was sent to Gunners Mate School, at the Farragut Naval Training Station, Idaho. Bob shared, **“One time, the SP's caught me throwing dice, kicked me in the teeth and knocked out a front tooth. I was in sick bay for 5-6 weeks. But, they never arrested me!”**

After completing his training, and before shipping out to Pearl Harbor, **“My Parents drove from New Hampshire to San Diego, to visit me. And when they arrived around noon, they found out they had just missed me, as my transport left San Diego at 7:00am.”**

Bob was originally assigned to *LCI 971*. By a twist of fate, he was assigned instead to *1059*. In February 1945, after the Lingayen Battle, at age 19, Gunner’s Mate, Robert Wright was welcomed aboard *1059* in the Philippines.

OKINAWA:

“In Okinawa, we made smoke, and were harassed by Kamikazes every day.”

The Kamikaze Story – May 28, 1945:

Bob, Jim Nance, and Herb Wilson, all described to me the same story of the close call with a kamikaze in Okinawa. Bob was at his gun tub post as gunner’s mate when the Japanese Betty Bomber came streaking right towards them. **“I looked up as the plane was so close, I could see the pilot’s face, the goggles over his eyes, and the white bandana across his forehead....the pilot was looking right at us, leaning forward into the controls, the sound of the engines were so loud – I can still hear it today. I was frozen just watching the plane come in – as there was nothing we could do, but shoot and watch.”** They all said the plane passed so close overhead that it nearly took off their radar mast, then slammed into the aft beam of the *USS Brown Victory (AP3)*, about 100 yards away.

After most operations were winding down on Okinawa, Sailors from *1059* got to

go ashore. One day, Bob recalls several of them encountered an old man with white hair, sitting by himself. He had one leg. Bob said, **“I remember the look in his eyes – he thought we were going to kill him! We gave him cigarettes, and he sat there and smoked one right after the other!”**

Another shore visit, in Okinawa, Bob, Herb Wilson, and others captured a Japanese suicide boat. **“We would waterski behind it using a board as a water ski ...we ended up towing the craft all the way back to Pearl Harbor.”**



Crewmembers of the 1059 taking a spin on their captured suicide (speed) boat. Hundreds of these Kaitens were found hidden in caves and coves at Okinawa. They would be packed with dynamite and rammed into anchored ships at night.

After Okinawa, *1059* stopped in Saipan on the way home to Pearl. When docking in Saipan, Bob said, **“I recognized**

an old acquaintance –down on the dock, Dean Blanchett... I hollered at him, and we waived, hollering back and forth at each other...but didn't get to get any closer."

"When we first arrived in Pearl, along with several other LCI's – the Navy sent us to Kauai, as there was no room in dry dock at Pearl." Once back in Pearl, Bob asked for shore duty, as he was ready for some dry land. **"I told the Navy I worked in the laundry room in high school – truth is I never worked a day in laundry in my life!"** So, the Navy assigned Bob shore duty in laundry.

However, Bob, *did* work 'A Day in Laundry' on 1059, before Okinawa. He and a buddy decided a good way to make some money was to offer to wash the other guys' clothes. **"So, we spent the better part of a blistering hot day on the transom of the boat, mostly stark naked, laundering others' clothes."** Bob said, **"The only thing we really got out of it was a horrible sunburn...I couldn't sit for days!"**

Running into old friends and acquaintances continued. **"Later, in Waikiki, I literally bumped into another Sailor on the sidewalk – I turned to look at Elmer Anderson from Concord! He was on a minesweeper. I continued walking and ran into a Sailor and a Marine – both from Concord – they lived right down the street from me!"**

At this point in our conversation, I asked Nat about her experience during the War. As Nat is three years younger than Bob, she was in high school for most of the War, living on the coast in Rockland, Maine. **"Rockland served as a Port Trial Course**

[Preliminary Trial, Standardization Course] for Navy ships in support of Bath Iron Works. I remember the nightly black-outs due to the threat of German U-Boats." Nat continued, **"After the War, I went on to Nursing School where the tuition was \$300 for three years – after footing a \$25 deposit! I graduated in 1950. I recall during school, breaking a thermometer – it cost me \$1 to replace! After graduation, I worked for the New Hampshire State Hospital, where I became a Building Supervisor. Later, I moved to the Coos County Hospital as the nursing director."**

KOREAN WAR:

May 1951 the Navy called Bob back to service. He was assigned to the transport ship the USS *President Jackson* (APA-18), which made trips to Alaska, Washington, Japan, and Korea. On board, Bob worked in...you guessed it...that's right, laundry!

In Pusan, Korea, another money-making adventure presented itself to Bob and one of his Buddies... this time they heard Marines in the field wanted some 'Oleo Margarine.' **"So, my buddy and I took two pounds of butter from the ship's stores, strapped the boxes to our legs, thinking, 'butter is better than Oleo Margarine, we're going to make more money than we thought!' We hiked our way out in the field and presented the boxes of butter to the Marines – only to find out what they wanted wasn't Oleo Margarine but, medicine...Aureo – mycin."** Bob said, **"It sounded the same to us!"**

Eventually, Bob was assigned to the Destroyer Tender, the USS *Frontier* (AD-

25). Bob was later honorably discharged, achieving the rank of Petty Officer 3rd Class.

After the Navy, Bob built a career working bridge & road construction for the State of New Hampshire. **“I worked as a grade foreman, carpenter, and welder. I also worked for the BOSTON & MAINE RAILROAD, as 1st Class Welder & Carpenter in the repair shops.”** Bob was responsible for maintaining and repairing the beautiful, covered bridges throughout New Hampshire. **“I remember working with an old foreman who was about 80 years old. I was fascinated with the old tools he still had that they used to use to repair the roads and those covered bridges. There was one in North Conway that had to be repaired several times due to trucks and tractor trailers with not enough clearance that would hit the I-beams regularly.”**

The Wrights retired around 1985, and moved to Dunedin, Florida. Years later, Shipmate of LCI 1059, Jim Nance of Carlsbad, California tried locating Bob using phone books. Bob said, **“Jim spent 10 years trying to locate me, calling over 300 ‘Robert Wrights’ across the country before finally locating me in Florida.” “I recall answering the phone, and this man asking if I am Bob Wright from LCI 1059.” “I said, ‘Yeah, I am.’”**

Ten years effort by Jim Nance finally paid off! Until recently, Bob and Jim continued to stay in touch over the years.

It has been an extreme honor and joy to meet and get to know this very special couple. Nat is mostly confined to a wheelchair yet has been an avid quilter. Bob has lost most of his sight, yet still likes to tinker on projects. They both enjoy sports,

rooting for both, Boston, and Tampa Bay Teams. For 96, Bob is very spry, and they are both sharp as tacks, and both have a great sense of humor!! And they take great care of each other! They have kept a large collection of 1059 memorabilia & photos that they have shared and gifted to me and my Wife, Yta. We had the honor to visit them again in April 2022, and we still talk on the phone about every other week. They treat me like their own grandson, and to me, they are my very special adopted grandparents!!

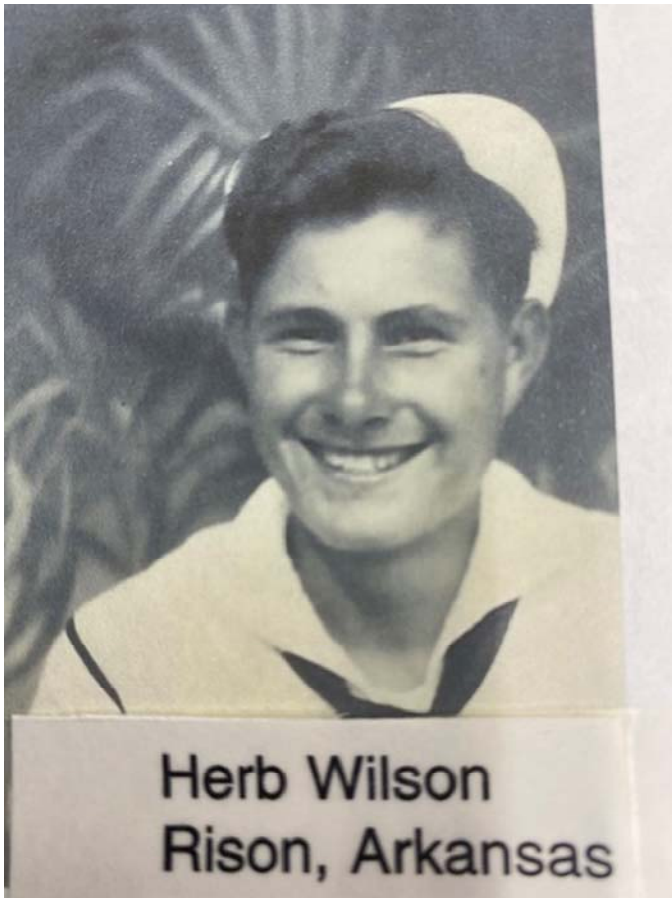


Jim Nance and Bob Wright hamming it up at a photo booth while on liberty. They've remained friends for over 70 years.

Herb Wilson (12/21/1926 – 4/17/2022):

I thought the best way to tell Herb's story is to share a modified eulogy I wrote for his

funeral, held in Marks, Mississippi. It was written for an audience that probably knew of Herb's Navy service, but not much about life on an LCI. I felt this context was important to tell Herb's story.



Eulogy for Herb Wilson:

My name is Greg Maury. I am 60 years old and live in Rancho Cucamonga, California.

My maternal grandfather was **Art Wilson**. (No relation) My 'Grand-Daddy' served in the US Navy in WWII, aboard *LCI (M)-1059* with Herb Wilson, in the Pacific in 1945. Over the last couple of years, I have been on a mission to meet the three remaining shipmates of my grandpa's crew, **Bob Wright, Jim Nance, and Herb Wilson**. I have had the honor of speaking with all three of them, and meeting Bob and Herb in person. My first contact with Herb and Maggie was by telephone in February

2021. I then sent a letter and photos of my grandpa and others from WWII.

It is important to know a little background on LCI's: A LCI – Landing Craft Infantry – At the time of WWII, was the smallest, ocean-crossing vessel in the US Navy. These Ships were 158 feet long; and had flat bottoms – hence giving them the ability to pull right up on shore to deliver, and support troops. This also caused these tiny ships to be tossed about the ocean in rough seas...as they had to cross from the US mainland - to Pearl Harbor, to the Philippines, to Okinawa, and back. These ships had small crews of 25 to 45 Sailors. It was extremely special to find remaining shipmates of my grandpa.

The *1059* ship was designated "M" for mortars. It had three mortar mounts on the deck...and their mission had three primary objectives:

1. Prep Beaches for Invasions by inserting Under-Water Demolition Teams days before landings to clear mines.
2. Stand close offshore to lob mortars to support ground units. These LCI's also had deck guns used to fire on to shore, and as anti-aircraft weapons.
3. The other thing they did was "make smoke." The LCI's created smoke screens for other Navy vessels on a regular basis – this required the crew to later clean up the built-up black soot and grime, with whatever rags or old clothes they had.

Because their Mission put them in close proximity to land battles – the crews of the LCI's had some of the most brutal, close-in combat from Japanese shore batteries, aircraft strafings, and bombings. And they

were harassed by Kamikazes on a regular basis.

Herb Wilson called this, **“A Vacation!”**

I had the honor to visit Herb, his Wife, Maggie, Daughter Jeanne, Stepson Kirk, Nephew Mike, and other family, along with their Great Neighbor, James Hall, on October 6, 2021, at their home in Marks, Mississippi. I was treated with the most gracious, “Southern Hospitality” I could hope for.



Herb Wilson and shipmates from the not so spit shined LCI(M) 1059. L-R back row: Aronson, Bailey, Bernhardt, front row: Jurovich and Herb Wilson.

I want to share a few of the things I learned from Herb that day as he ‘kept me in stitches’ sharing his stories from his time in

the Navy! At the time of my visit in October 2021, Herb was mostly sitting in his easy chair, and moved around only a bit with his walker – Why is this important? Because Jeanne warned me, **“that if he could, he would play practical jokes on you!”** I was not surprised by this.

I also learned that day, that when Herb could not recall something – he would tell me honestly, **“I don’t know”... or, “I don’t remember.”** And when he was certain about something, he looked me straight in the eye, and pointed to me when he made his statement. Looking at the photos of my grandpa, he looked me in the eye, pointed his finger at me and in a very thoughtful way said to me, **“I remember your Grand-Daddy. I remember that face... He was a quiet man.”** That was my grandpa. I learned right then that I could take Herb’s word to the Bank. I said, **“You are right – he was quiet, didn’t speak much unless he had something important to say.”** I then added, **“That’s probably what happens when you’re the only boy at home raised with 4 Sisters – He ‘couldn’t get a word in edgewise!’”**

Herb talked about Boot Camp in San Diego, California... the days they had small arms weapon training – requiring an 18-mile march to Camp Pendleton. Now of course, Herb being raised in rural Arkansas knew a lot about guns & hunting...so with a short shake of his head and a big smile, he said to me, **“I skipped all the way to the gun range!”**

One of the things that became clear meeting with his Shipmate, Bob Wright - was that their fellow shipmate, **Jim Nance** was a popular guy. It seemed Jim was the guy many of the others wanted to hang around and be friends with...he was a guy

the others looked up to. The many photos from Pearl Harbor that Bob & Nat shared with me seemed to prove this. I saw many photos of Bob with Nance, and Herb with Nance, and other Shipmates with Nance.

Herb shared a few stories about Jim Nance. Then, looking down and shaking his head sheepishly, Herb said, **“Jim Nance followed me around everywhere I went!”** Then Herb talked about life on board, **“We played a lot of Monopoly – then go to GQ – then back to Monopoly!”**

OKINAWA:

“Four days before 4/1/45 (invasion day), UDT Teams were assigned to *LCI 1059*. They cut mine cables. The mines would float to the surface, we’d retrieve the divers, stand-off then shoot the mines.”

“There’d be battleship projectiles overhead – we could hear them and see them. We passed a large Rock seven miles outside of Okinawa – Japs on that rock opened up on us – so the Destroyer escorting us turned broadsides and opened up with their 5-inch guns and ‘cooked off’ the top of that rock!”

“Our Navy guns used radar to pin-point Jap big guns that would come out of hills and open up. Battleships could zero in on their location and send 2,000 lb. shells and take out those guns. The Japs stopped doing it!”

“We went to Ie Shima, carried troops ashore – No shooting. We made smoke to protect the ships. Japanese bombers would fly overhead for three hours or so before needing fuel. The wind would change, (exposing the ships) and we’d

have to go around the other side (of the Island) to start over!”

During the Battle of Okinawa, *LCI 1059* had an extremely close call with a Kamikaze. Herb described seeing the pilots face the same way Bob recalled the moment in my previous interview. Herb told me a few of them fished the dead pilot from the water, he looked me in the eye, pointing his finger - **so I knew this was going to be good!...** Herb said, **“The Pilot was a Girl!”** Then with a dismissive wave, he said, **“We then threw her back.”** Of course, all of us in his house were all in shock when he shared this.

Later in Okinawa, several of the *1059* Sailors went ashore and captured one of the Japanese suicide boats that was tucked away in a cave. It was about the size of a ski boat, loaded with explosives. Apparently, they towed it around for a while. Herb said, **“Yeah, we’d take it out at night when the Officers were asleep!”**



LCI 356 was part of the caravan of ships sent back to Saipan. Wilson recalled putting on a drag show for the 356 crew as the ship passed by 1059.

After Okinawa, *1059* was part of a ‘caravan’ back to Saipan. It was decided

this caravan would pass Iwo Jima on the way. I shared a photo with Herb, I got from my grandpa, via my Aunt Anita, of *LCI 356* passing in front of *LCI 1059* on this journey. Herb got all excited, and almost jumped out of his chair! He said: **“I remember this!”** **“I went down below and came up wearing an old skirt we had for cleaning smoke residue and a mop on my head and danced around on deck. Those guys thought we had a woman on board!”**

After WWII had ended, Herb and Nance continued to serve on *1059* into 1946. **“After the War when we returned to the Philippines. *LCI 1059* served as a ‘ferry’ mostly between Subic Bay and Manila. While in port at Tacloban City, we’d toss pennies into the water, for kids to dive for. Those kids could stay underwater a long time! We thought they’d drown, but they’d pop back up!”**

At some point, Herb and some of the guys made and operated a still on board. He shared, **“The Brass was gonna’ come aboard for court martials, for operating a still & making whiskey. The brass then pulled back at the last minute. I’m glad my parents didn’t hear about their son being court martialed for running a still!”** I told Herb, **“This information is important.”** Herb retorted, **“It don’t sound important to me!”** I laughed and his family laughed as if they had heard this for the first time.

After his stint on *LCI 1059*, Herb shared, **“I put in for sub duty - it paid more money! And my parents needed the money. So, after a 30 day leave home in Arkansas, I was sent back to the Mare Island Sub-Base and was to go to Sub School. Then they told me I had to give**

up my rate and start over!” Herb said, **“There was no way I was going to give up my rate! So, I wound up in San Diego on sub tender USS *Sperry AS-12*. They needed a boatswain’s mate, which I was, but I couldn’t blow a boatswain’s pipe. The commanding officer handed me the pipe and said, ‘Take this son of a bitch to learn how!’ Three Days later I piped aboard Admiral Towers,...and I became so good!”**

Herb was honorably discharged from the Navy as boatswain’s mate 1st class. He returned home to help the family run the store at home in Rison, Arizona. **“We butchered one cow and two hogs each day. The GI Bill allowed me to go to college where I was to get a Degree in Agriculture. That was the easiest because I knew something about it!”**

The Bookend of Bookends:

In the 1990’s, Herb met his new Doctor, Salvador Petilos. Of all the places in the world a doctor from the Philippines could set up his practice, it was in Herb’s very own small hometown of Mark, Mississippi. Dr. Petilos, a man about five years younger than Herb was from...Tacloban City. In 1946, young Salvador knew *LCI 1059* with the large white hull numbers painted on the side... *He was one of those boys who dove for Herb’s pennies.* Herb said to me, **“One of those kids came to Marks, Mississippi, and became a Doctor!”**

Several times during my visit at the Wilson’s, a few of us would be talking at the same time, and moments later I would come back to Herb and ask, **“Sorry, Herb - What were you saying?”** Herb’s eyes would get real big and he would say, **“I don’t**

remember!” Again, the room would erupt in laughter...

I also learned from Herb, that his brother served on the USS *Saratoga*, and became a Navy commander. His cousin was J.D. Ward, who during and after the Vietnam War served as commander of an attack carrier airwing aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Constellation*, executive officer of the USS *Coral Sea*, and commanding officer of the amphibious force ship USS

Mobile and finally as Commander of the USS *Constellation*.

As I wrapped up my four-hour visit with Herb and said to him, **“I have no other questions. It was just an honor to meet you and spend time together!”** Herb again retorted, **“Well, that’s where you are wrong!”** More laughter around the room – my sides were about to split.

Sadly, on December 20, 2021, Herb’s sweet Wife, Maggie passed away. As I shared in the June 2022 *Elsie Item*; Since my

visit in October, I had the pleasure to speak with Herb two or three times on the phone. Each time he would tell me, **“When I get better, I want to visit you in California!”** And, every time, I would again thank him for his service, he would say to me, **“It was a four-year Vacation!”**

My Wife, Yta, and I booked a trip to visit him again on Thursday, 4/21/22. Easter Sunday, 4/17/22, James Hall, his neighbor called to let me know of Herb’s passing. Later that day, I was touched by Jeanne’s text messages. She told me, **“He was planning new stories to tell you when you arrive!”**

I am honored and blessed to know these amazing men who served with my grandpa on 1059, and their amazing Wives. I am forever grateful to Jim and Mike McGreevy. Bob Wright, Jim Nance, Herb Wilson are my heroes. Soon, I look forward to telling my grandpa’s story.



LCI 1059 crew on 19 April 1946.

Financial Report of the USS LCI National Association Inc

We are presenting the results of the USS LCI National Association, Inc. Financial Operations for the years ending May 30, 2022 and 2021. For these 2 years, the expenses of the LCI Association to publish the Elsie Item newsletter, maintain the USSLCI.Org website and the the expenses for administration have remained relatively constant averaging \$1,159 per month during the current year and \$1,097 per month in the prior year. Our main expense is the cost for the ELSIE ITEM which, last year, included additional pages and more coverage of the history the LCI's in WWII.

The natural decline in the number of WWII veteran members and their related family members which has not been offset by new memberships. This has led to the decrease in receipts of dues. Fortunately, the continued generous Cash Donations by our members has sustained the USS LCI National Association and maintained our financial viability for these last 6 years. Thank you to all for your Generous Support!

Robert E Wright Jr., Treasurer

USS LCI National Association Inc Statement of Financial Position

| | Current Year End May 31, 2022 | Prior Year End May 31, 2021 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ASSETS | | |
| Cash and Checking | 29,115 | 29,264 |
| TOTAL ASSETS | <u>29,115</u> | <u>29,264</u> |
| LIABILITIES & EQUITY | | |
| Total Liabilities | 0 | 0 |
| Equity | | |
| Opening Equity Balance 06/01/2006 | 90,564 | 90,564 |
| Reduction of Net Assets 2007 to 2016 | -81,686 | -81,686 |
| Post 2016 Addition to Net Assets | 20,263 | 20,386 |
| Total Equity | <u>29,115</u> | <u>29,264</u> |
| TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY | <u>29,115</u> | <u>29,264</u> |

USS LCI National Association Inc Statement of Activities

| | June 1 2021 - May 31 2022 | June 1 2020 - May 31 2021 |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Support, Gains and Revenue | | |
| Direct Public Support (Donations) | 8,265 | 8,429 |
| Membership Dues | 5,145 | 5,490 |
| Net Product Revenue | 350 | 180 |
| Interest Income | 5 | |
| Total Support, Gains and Revenue | <u>13,765</u> | <u>14,099</u> |
| Expenditures | | |
| Organization Operating Expenditures | 365 | 236 |
| Elsie Publication | 12,790 | 12,927 |
| Website Operations | 760 | 0 |
| Annual Reunion Expenditures | 0 | 0 |
| Total Organization Operating Expenditures | <u>13,915</u> | <u>13,163</u> |
| Contributions to Other Organizations | 0 | 0 |
| Total Expenditures | <u>13,915</u> | <u>13,163</u> |
| Total Addition to Net Assets | <u>-150</u> | <u>936</u> |

Last of the Square Conns

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

The original square conning tower for the LCI class of ships was used for the ships numbered 1-350. The *LCI(L) 350* was the last of this class.

The *LCI(L) 350* was built by Brown Shipbuilding Corporation in Texas and commissioned on 15 May 1943. The ship was assigned a complement of three officers and 21 enlisted for the US Coast Guard.

The *LCI(L) 350* was assigned to LCI(L) Flotilla 4. After undergoing shakedown and training exercises in the Gulf she crossed the Atlantic to North Africa. There the crew participated in the occupation of Tunisia in June of 1943.

The crew then landed troops on the beaches of Sicily on 9 July 1943 and the landings at Salerno on 9 September 1943. Both operations prepared the crew of the *LCI(L) 350* for what was to be their biggest challenge...D-Day.



The LCI(L) 350 in column to Normandy.

The 350 arrived in Plymouth England on 3 November 1943. The next seven months



the crew engaged in the training exercises on the beaches of Southern England.

Their preparation was for the invasion of Normandy. These beaches were very similar. The *LCI(L) 350* landed troops on Utah Beach 6 June 1944.

For the next month they made numerous trips to and from England bringing troops and supplies for the invasion forces.

In October of 1944 the *LCI(L) 350* was sent back Charleston, South Carolina for overhaul and repair. In December a new crew came aboard. They trained at the amphibious base in Little Creek, Virginia. Then they headed for the Pacific.

On 3 April 1945 she departed San Diego for Pearl Harbor, Eniwetok, Guam, and Ulithi. On 29 May 1945 they landed at Okinawa. The air/sea battles with kamikazes had been furious for two full months. The *LCI(L) 350* was immediately assigned daily smoke screening detail until the war was over.

During the initial occupation of Japan, the *LCI(L) 350* was assigned to destroying mines. A typhoon grounded the ship. After being laid up for several months she returned to San Francisco where the ship was decommissioned 3 May 1946.

Amphibs in the News



The *LST 325* is the only operational Landing Ship Tank in a WWII configuration. It is based at Evansville, Indiana on the Ohio River. A volunteer crew takes 325 on river cruises each year. The ship was docked at Cincinnati, Ohio recently for tours. The ship participated in operations at Tunisia, Salerno, and Normandy during WWII.

This Higgins Boat LCVP, pictured below, is now visible in the receding waters of Lake Mead. It was still 44 feet under water in 2020. These were the landing craft used during the D-Day invasion at Normandy. Many of them were sold for fishing or tour boats after the war. It's not known how this one sank to bottom of Lake Mead.



Hoover Dam was built in 1937. The water level of Lake Mead has not been this low since the dam was built.

Andrew Jackson Higgins of New Orleans was a builder of shallow watercraft used on oil rigs. He provided the Navy the concept of a Landing Craft Vehicle & Personnel LCVP. He built 20,000 of them for WWII.

USS LANDING CRAFT INFANTRY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



I have obtained a small number of these models from a retailer



Products Description: This is a Round Conn Model even though the Ships Numbers and box have the appearance of a Square Conn. This Model has been out of Production for 30 years. The company has rereleased these for the 70th Anniversary of D-Day. This is a 1:160 model, so it is 12 inches long.

LCI Model \$32.00 each Quantity _____ Amount Paid: \$ _____

Shipping: First Model \$12.00 additional models \$3 each Amount Paid: \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT PAID: \$ _____

Name _____ **USS LCI (____)** _____

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Additional Information contact: rewrightcpa@gmail.com or 517. 548-1026

Thank You for Your Support of the USS LCI National Association!

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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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The First Naval Amphibious Landing

In 1776 the Continental Navy and Marines made an amphibious assault on Port Nassau in the Bahamas. British and Loyalist forces controlled two forts protecting Nassau Harbor. A large supply of gunpowder was warehoused in the town. A young Lt. John Paul Jones led 200 Marines and 50 Sailors in the landing and assault on Fort Montagu. The lightly defended fort was surrendered without a struggle. The next day Fort Nassau was taken. They siezed gunpowder, military supplies and drank all the rum they could find. The USS *Nassau* (LHA-4) an amphibious assault ship was later named in honor of this first amphibious landing.