Elsie Item

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

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ISSUE 124 SPRING 2024

Sinking of SS *Rowan*
Gela, Sicily

Inside this issue…

The Elsie Item Number 124 – Spring 2024

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
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THE STORIES
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THE LCI EXPERIENCE
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- 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.

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

Membership Renewals 2024: As of 2/7/2024, there are still 45 members who have not returned their renewal forms. Please take some time and do that today!

As of the date of this letter, we have had **18** of the WWII veterans renew their membership in the Association for 2024. There is an extremely small number of WWII veterans remaining as we are all aware. I am proud to say that our USS Landing Craft Infantry National Association continues, as one of the few WWII Veteran Associations remaining and still active, 79 years after the end of the war.

Note to widows: I will mail your renewal forms in April.

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

We continue to Celebrate the lives and legacies of our WWII veterans.
During 2024 they will celebrate these Significant Milestones.

Member		BORN	AGE	Rank\Rate	Resides	LCI in WWII
GORDON	**SMITH**	**1921**	**103**	**QM 1/c**	**WA**	**LCI(L) 43**
WILLIAM	YAKEY	1923	101	MoMM2/c	IL	LCI(L) 661
WILLIAM	BERTSCH	1924	100	RM1/c	WA	LCI(G) 64
HARRY	RITZEL	1924	100	CMoMM	NY	LCI(L)(R) 341, and LCI(L) 362
HAROLD	MC CREARY	1924	100	MoMM3/c	IN	LCI(L) 412
THE	**YOUNGSTERS**					
DIXON	HEMPHILL	1925	99	LCDR	VA	LCI(G) 514
RAYMOND	JACOBSEN	1925	99	MoMM3/c	NY	LCI(L) 412
RODERICK	SCURLOCK	1925	99	QM3/c	ID	LCI(G) 565
LEO	NOWICKI	1925	99	SM3/c	SC	LCI(L) 661
ABRAHAM	LAURENZO	1925	99	RM1/c	WA	LCI(L) 409, and LCI(L) 47
PETER	DE BLAISE	1925	99	CP3/c, GM3/c	NJ	LCI(M) 355
JOHN	NIMESKERN	1925	99	S1/c	OH	LCI(G) 439
J. R.	REID	1925	99	S3/c	VA	LCI(G) 65
ELMER	RADZIK	1925	99	GM3/c	AZ	LCI(G) 64
WILLIAM	ARMSTRONG Jr	1925	99	SM3/c	TN	LCI (G)(R) 455

Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Writers of WWII books and publications are a close-knit group. I have about a dozen authors and editors who I collaborate with. We share resources, contacts, and story ideas.

Last year I was contacted by Minnesota author, Jon Strupp. He wrote "King of the Oilers," a story about his dad's ship, the USS *Chiwawa*. Strupp, an Air Force veteran was touring a Commemorative Air Wing Museum in South Saint Paul. One of the glassed-in displays stopped him. It was honoring a sailor and his ship *LCI(L) 414.* He wondered if I knew about it, so he took a picture and emailed it to me. Nope, I had never heard of the museum or George Alex Jr., but I sensed there was story to be told.

The display for LCI(L) 414 at the Commemorative Air Force Wing Museum in South St. Paul, Minnesota.

I contacted the museum. They introduced me to the son of George Alex Jr. He is a member and volunteer at the museum. He donated his dad's memorabilia and helped create the display. He told me how and why a Navy display wound up in an Air Force Museum. You'll find his photo with the story about the sailor, the ship, and the museum display inside this issue.

Our front cover photo of an ammunition ship blowing up is dramatic. It has nothing to do with LCIs. But LCIs were there. So were association members Gordon Smith on *LCI(L) 43* and Robert Wright Sr. the father of our LCI National Association President/Treasurer. This memorable event marked the invasion of Sicily. Check out more photos of the landings at Sicily in this issue.

LETTER TO EDITOR: Hello, I just read the book "When the Beaches Trembled," and I saw your publication referenced several times. My father served on an LCI in the Pacific, and I am interested in subscribing/joining.
Thanks, Mike Fergus

Mike Fergus is a now a member of the LCI National Association. He shared stories and photos about his dad and *LCI(G) 79.* You'll find that story for Lt.(jg) Charles Fergus in this issue too.

LETTER TO EDITOR: Terrific issue (#123). I love reading when the men got home. Those stories really get to me. I'm in awe of William Armstrong. What a wonderful life. I hope he makes it to 100!
Sharon Anderson – Millbury, MA

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

In Memoriam

LCI 80
PAUL HUPPMANN

LCI 224
ROY GALEWSKI

LCI 874 & LCI 481
JOSEPH RICHOTTE

LCI 981
ANDREW POMEROY

LCI 1059
ROBERT S WRIGHT

LCI 1077
VAUGHN BROWN

Liberty Ship Rowan Under Attack by German Ju-88 Bombers

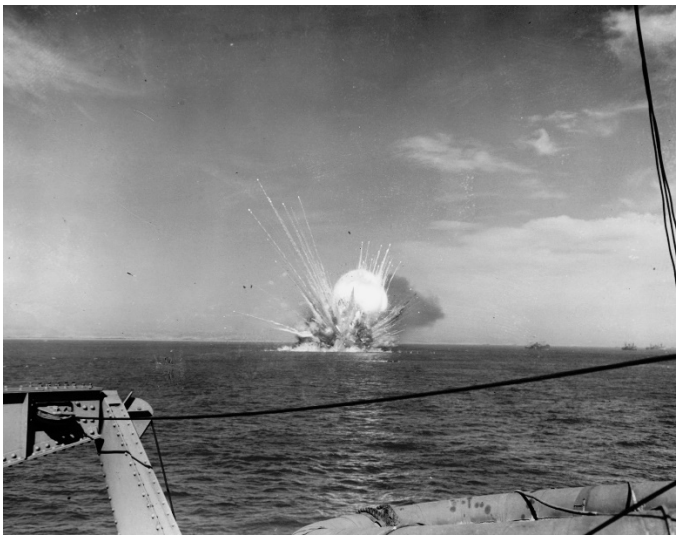
SS Robert Rowan (K-40) was launched at Wilmington, North Carolina on March 3, 1943. Ninety-six days later it was sunk during the invasion of Sicily. LEFT Air Raid BELOW The Rowan afire

SS *Robert Rowan*, like all other Liberty ships, was 441 feet long, 56 feet wide, carried 9,000 tons of cargo, and had a top speed of 11 knots. Her mission was to transport troops and supplies to the war across the Atlantic.

Rowan's maiden voyage was to Oran, Algeria as part of the USGS-8A convoy to prepare for the invasion of Sicily. There the ship was loaded with ammunition and 334 soldiers of the 18th Infantry. Operation Husky was scheduled to begin on 9 July 1943 with airborne troops and followed by amphibious landings.

On 11 July *Rowan* was anchored off the shore of Gela, Sicily. There were dozens of the mass-produced Liberty Ships waiting their turn to unload troops and supplies. In addition to troops and ammunition *Rowan* had 87 U.S. Navy and merchant marine crewmembers. Despite having over 400 sailors, crew, and soldiers on board, planners had crammed thousands of tons of ammunition on the ship.

From day one of the invasion German aircraft made a constant effort to stop the landings and cut off resupply. In early afternoon of 11 July over a dozen Ju-88 "Junkers" targeted the fleet off Gela.



Twenty minutes after SS Robert Rowan (K-40) was hit by three bombs, ammunition exploded.

SS Rowan was hit by three bombs. One bomb passed through the ship, but the other two exploded in the hold. Fires broke out. With the quantity of explosives stored on the ship, the number one priority was to get the troops off. Damage control was secondary. Brave crews of PT Boats and small landing craft organized a daring rescue operation. They came along side and helped all personnel abandon ship. Miraculously, everyone escaped. Ships not involved in the rescue moved away from the floating time bomb.

The blast was horrifying and spectacular.

Soon after all ships had cleared away, the flames ignited ammunition in the cargo holds. The massive explosion tore the ship in two and sent flames and smoke thousands of feet into the sky. Pieces of metal came down over the entire anchorage area.

The ship burned furiously into the night. The fire lit up the entire anchorage area. Now ships were illuminated, making them more vulnerable for night attacks. Attempts were made to sink *Rowan* with torpedoes. The water was too shallow. The superstructure of the Rowan remained exposed, and the fires continued for two days and nights.

One of the 125 Liberty Ships launched at North Carolina Shipbuilding Company in Wilmington.

Anyone in the vicinity of Gela that day, recalls the bombing of SS *Robert Rowan*. LCI veterans Robert Wright Sr. *LCI(L)-20* and Gordon Smith *LCI(L) 43 along with other ships of LCI Flotilla One* were there. The memory of the ship's explosion and fire was vivid to both long after the war ended.

The LCI as seen through the Lens of the Combat Photographer by Robert E. Wright

Invasion of Sicily

During the early part of World War II there were few trained photographers available in the American Army and Navy to record the events as they would unfold. The General Staff back in Washington D.C. soon realized that the press had an insatiable appetite for news of the war and photographs from the war fronts that could be printed in the daily newspapers and moving images that could be shown in every movie theater in every town in America.

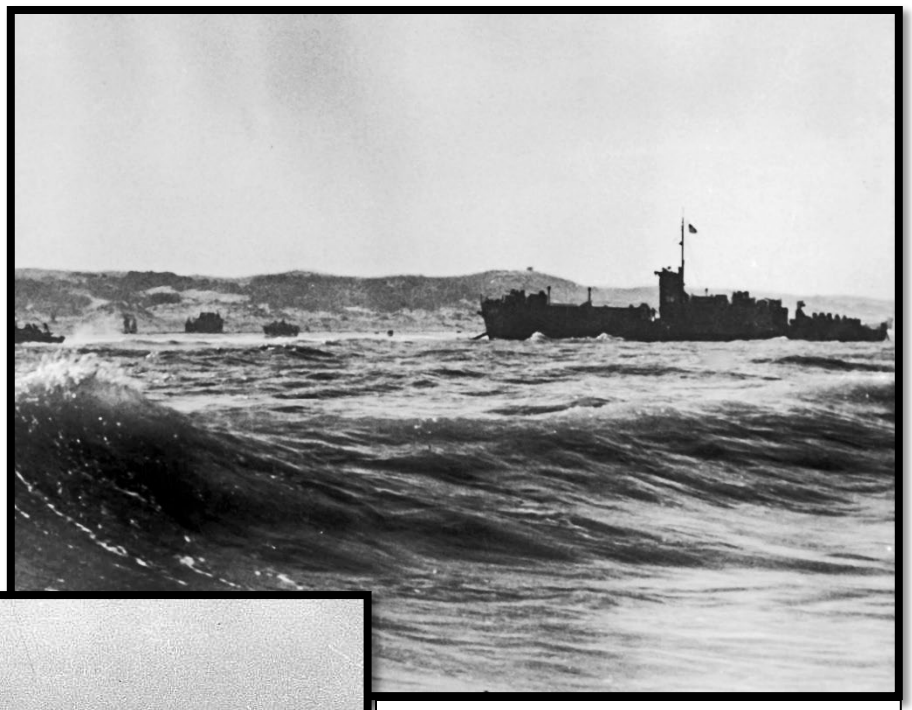
The driving force behind the creation of the Combat Correspondent and Combat Photographer was that the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard Public Relations offices wanted to have their branches portrayed in the best light to enhance their status with the American public, and with Congress who controlled their budgets. It was a part of the playbook of Army - Navy Game of finance.

Every candidate was required to go through standard military training as either an officer or enlisted man. This enabled them to perform their duties while at the same time being an integral part of their units and to have a complete understanding what was occurring during an engagement. The combat photographer needed to understand what they were seeing and the need to create a record.

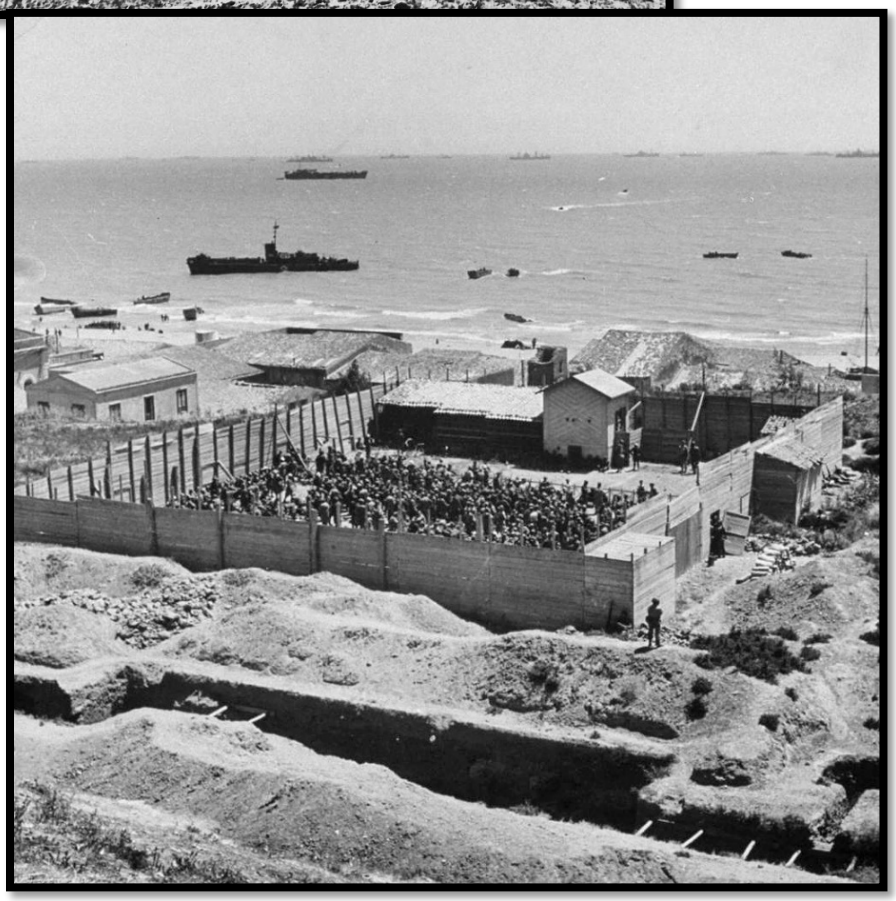
I chose to start with the Invasion of Sicily in July 1943 because it was the first time that the U.S. and the British Navies had operational flotillas of the new Landing Craft Infantry with trained crews. This was the first large invasion recorded by the new Combat Photographers. And as the saying goes, “everyone wanted to get in on the story.”

I have tried to arrange the photos in a timeline. This was determined from having historical knowledge of the invasion, code-named Operation Husky. Other evidence comes from the visual cues within the photos which I presented. I will provide a general narrative of my analysis and reasoning.

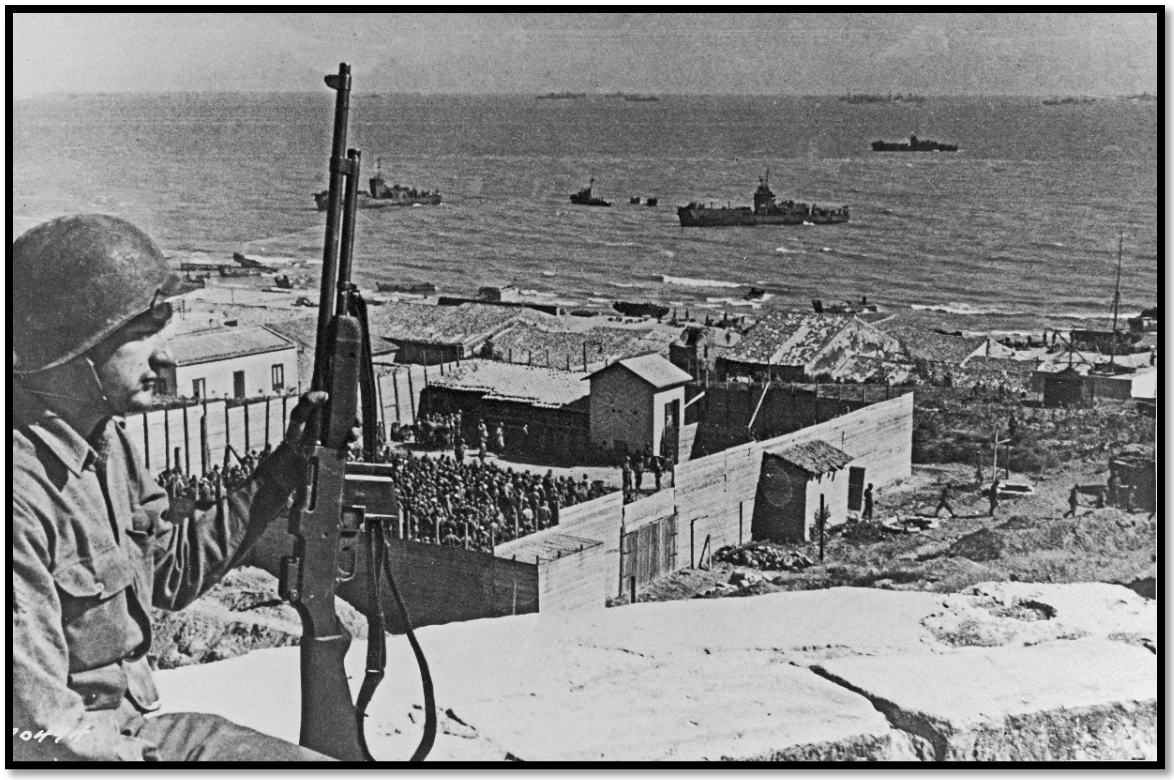
ABOVE: A famous photo of the LCIs of Flotilla 2 and 4 assembled at Bizerte Tunisia loading the 45th Infantry Division. RIGHT: This photo was credited to an unknown location. The ships berthing order and the street off the bows match the lower picture. BELOW: The LCIs in the top picture depart Bizerte for Sicily.



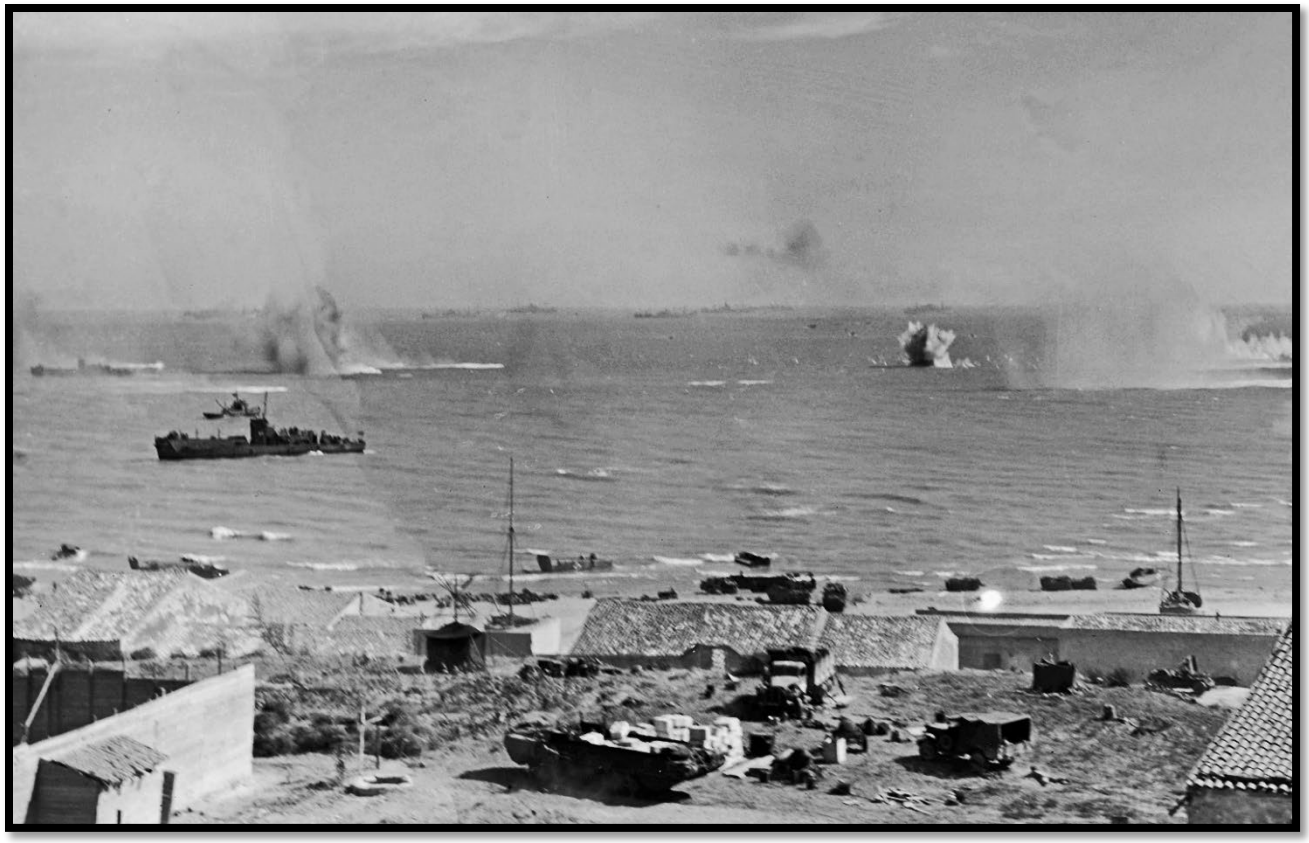
ABOVE: LCI(L) 38 of the CENT Attack Force unloading men of the 45th Division on the Beach near Scoglitti. LEFT: LCI(L) 1 broached (parallel to waves) on the beach near Gela. BELOW: LCI(L) 37 (left) and LCI(L) 237 (right) unload CENT forces near Scoglitti.

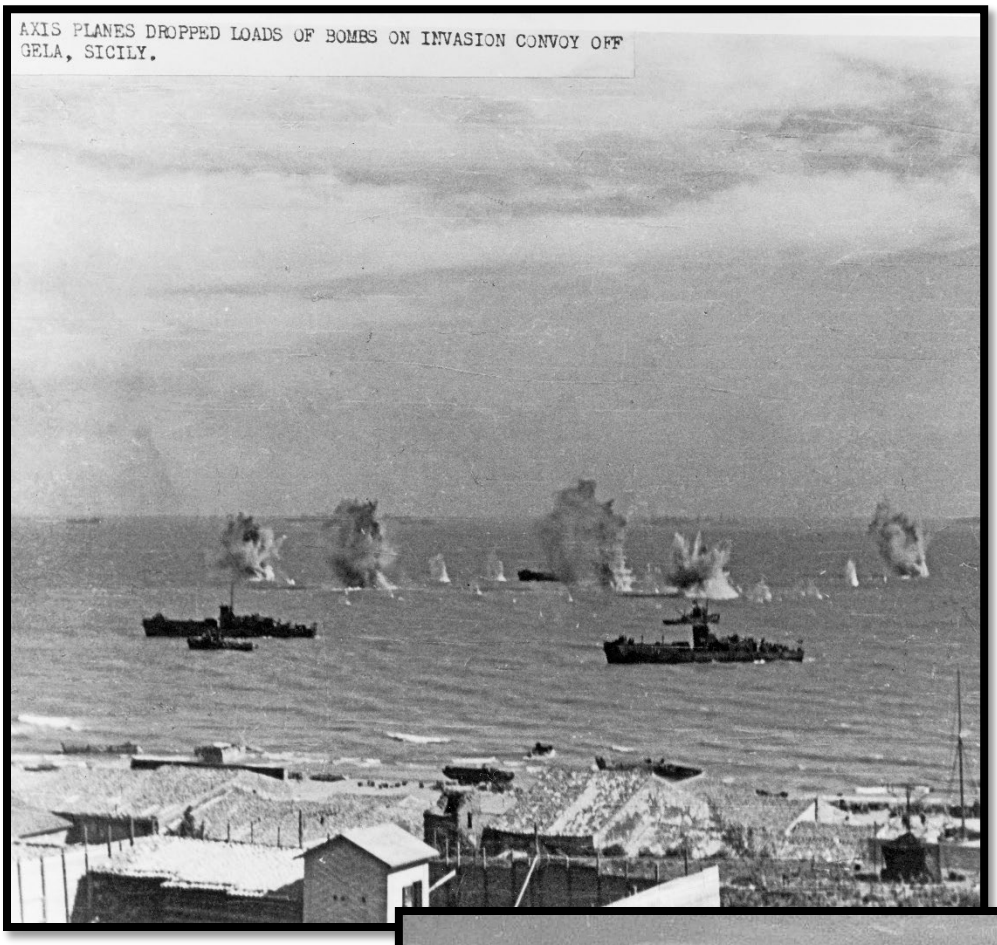


ABOVE: LCI(L) 220 of the CENT Attack Force sits on the beach while the 45th Division continues to unload supplies.
RIGHT: A stockade with Italian Prisoners of War at Gela. An unidentified LCI is just offshore probably arriving to pick up the POWs to transport them to camps in North Africa. Barely visible in this photo are a group of the POWs assembled on the beach near the LCVPs. LCIs from Flotilla One were used to transport the Italian prisoners.

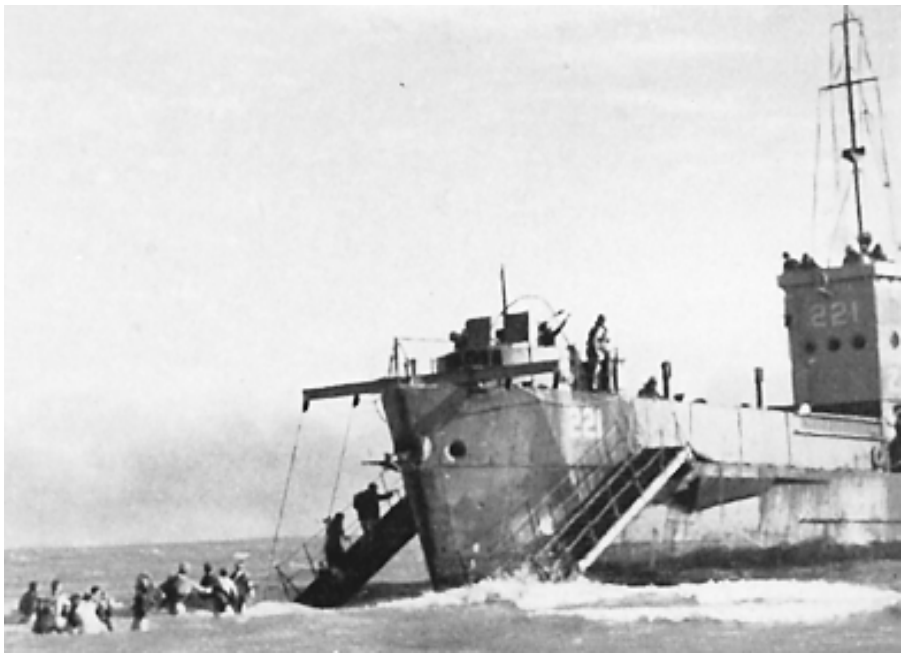


ABOVE: The Picture above appears to have been posed. The soldier is guarding the stockade. Three LCIs appear offshore for POW transport. The calm in this scene would soon be shattered by a German air raid on the assembled invasion shipping. (BELOW)





ABOVE: Three LCIs maneuver to avoid the bombs dropped from German planes. Two LCIs are clearly visible. One LCI (center)is partially obscured by a bomb blast. Notice that there is no smoke on the horizon.
RIGHT: The SS Robert Rowan explodes and burns. This photo is taken slightly after the cover photo. The LCI, probably the 221, is closer to shore and the smoke column is more developed.



OTHER MISADVENTURES OF LCI(L)-221

by Ray Rapier

I remember our first air raid at Arzo (Arzew), Algeria, and nearly every ship in the flotilla exhausted every round of 20 mm ammo sending up a barrage into an empty night sky. As it turned out the air raid was carried out by a single sortie. Whose bombs were directed at an Army target, and the only casualties were suffered through mishandling their guns. It was alleged that some gun crews didn't bother to switch barrels on their air cooled 20 MM's, and the barrels got so hot, they melted. We fired more rounds that night than were fired during the next two years of action.

Then there was the time we were sent to the beautiful fishing village of Churchill (Cherchell, Algeria), and Lt. Dalligan took two crew members. (I think it was radioman Kantowitz and cook Brown) on an egg hunt. Going from farm to farm until they were able to treat the crew with two breakfast eggs apiece.

While there, Supply Officer Dalligan arranged to have shrimp boats to come alongside and deliver enough of their catch to treat each of us with all the shrimp we could eat, and Brown, a lad from Delaware made the best shrimp cocktail sauce I've ever tasted, or so I remember.

Then there was the Sicilian invasion to which we were sent empty, and with the intentions that we were to ferry troops off a troop ship arriving directly from the States. Well, after much of two days were spent trying to locate the ship which apparently didn't exist - the Command Ship ordered us

to beach at Gayla (Gela) and relieve the Army of the burden the horde of Italian soldiers who laid down their arms at the first sight of Americans and requested to be taken to America. It appeared that all of them saw being taken prisoner meant a free trip to visit relatives in America and not an act of cowardice.

Anyway, we beached, took on about twice the compliment of what the ship was designed to carry.

The POWs helped to load the "C" rations given them by the Army, and because we had no guns by which to - jokingly - guard them, the Italians gladly gave us theirs, and even went so far as to instruct us on how to use them.

I remember when Mayfield tired of waiting for his relief, and on the spot, deputized a POW officer as his relief. He handed over his gun and went below.

So, it was of no great concern when some prisoners had discovered a full crate of hand grenades that some GI had stashed during one of our African maneuvers (most likely because he tired of carrying them) and here were these POWs, who were doing all they could to please us, afraid they might be punished when it was discovered the hand grenades were in their possession. It took Polareno, the Signalmen (the only crewman who understood a little Italian), to relieve them of their problem. (We later used the hand grenades to get fish in Lake Brenta). Polareno also had his hands full. After one of the POWs was hit by a piece of shrapnel (our only casualty of the war) and no ship with a doctor aboard would relieve us of our casualty. Not even a hospital ship would help. Polareno became our corpsman as well.

Perhaps the most humoristic event of the war occurred when we reached Bezerta (Bizerte, Tunisia) and went to discharge the POWs. There to meet us was an Army Major who would put all red neck sheriffs to shame. He insisted on treating the POWs as hostels. When he refused to send medics aboard to tend to the POW casualty, Polareno carried the man by himself onto the pier. He refused to leave his patient until he was given treatment and handled accordingly. In other words, Polareno made a complete ass of the Major. To support Polareno's actions and to protect these wimpy POWs from this gung-ho

Major, all the available crew rushed to the sides of their prisoners. They lead them to the safety of trucks waiting to carry them to the nearby stockades.

RIGHT LCI(L) 221 loading Italian POWs as the bow of LCI(L) 39 appears. BELOW POWs loading LCI(L) 221 Notes: In the picture to the RIGHT the prisoners are just beginning to approach the starboard ramp. Below both ramps are being used

Polareno made us all proud that night in June of '43.

Combat Photograph Credits:

Page:	Source with NARA Locator if known	LCI if Identifiable
Page 6 Photo TOP	US Coast Guard. **26-G-1790**	
Page 6 Photo BELOW	US Coast Guard. **26-G-1918**	
Page 7 Photo TOP	US Coast Guard. **26-G-2006**	
Page 7 Photo MIDDLE	Unknown	
Page 7 Photo BELOW	US Coast Guard. **26-G-1916**	
Page 9 Photo TOP	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-176486**	
Page 9 Photo BELOW	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-175758**	

LCI(L)s of Flotilla 2 and 4 (USCG) (Front Left to Rear Right)

SC-176486 Front Row	**SC-175758** Front Row	**SC-176486** Rear Row	**SC-175758** Rear Row
		32	
		90	
		320	320
218		16	
35		3	
14	14	213	213
326	326	321	321
88	88	4	
91	91	86	86
229	229	212	
	85	217	
	325	8	
	322	83	
	84	94	
	323	92	92
	209		
	93		

Page:	Source with NARA Locator if known	LCI if Identifiable
Page 9 Photo LEFT	Valerie Vierk for Herbert Nolda LCI(L)-229, USCG LCI(L)85 322	
Page 10 Photo ABOVE	US Navy. **80-G-87503** (Cropped) LCI(L) 38	
Page 10 Photo LEFT	US Army Signal Corp. *Unknown*	
Page 10 Photo BELOW	US Navy. **80-G-87509** LCI(L) 37 & 237	
Page 11 Photo ABOVE	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-175921** (Cropped) LCI(L) 220	
Page 11 Photo RIGHT	US Army Signal Corp. *Unknown*	
Page 12 Photo ABOVE	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-180474**	
Page 12 Photo RIGHT	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-175668**	
Page 13 Photo ABOVE	US Army Signal Corp. **SC 180475**	
Page 13 Photo BELOW	US Army Signal Corp. *Unknown Nearly Identical to SC 180476*	
Page 14 Photo ABOVE	US Army Signal Corp. *Unknown* LCI(L) 221	
Page 16 Photo ABOVE	US Army Signal Corp. *Unknown Nearly identical to SC 108477 below* LCI(L) 221 LCI(L) 39	
Page 16 Photo BELOW	US Army Signal Corp. **SC-180477** LCI(L) 221	

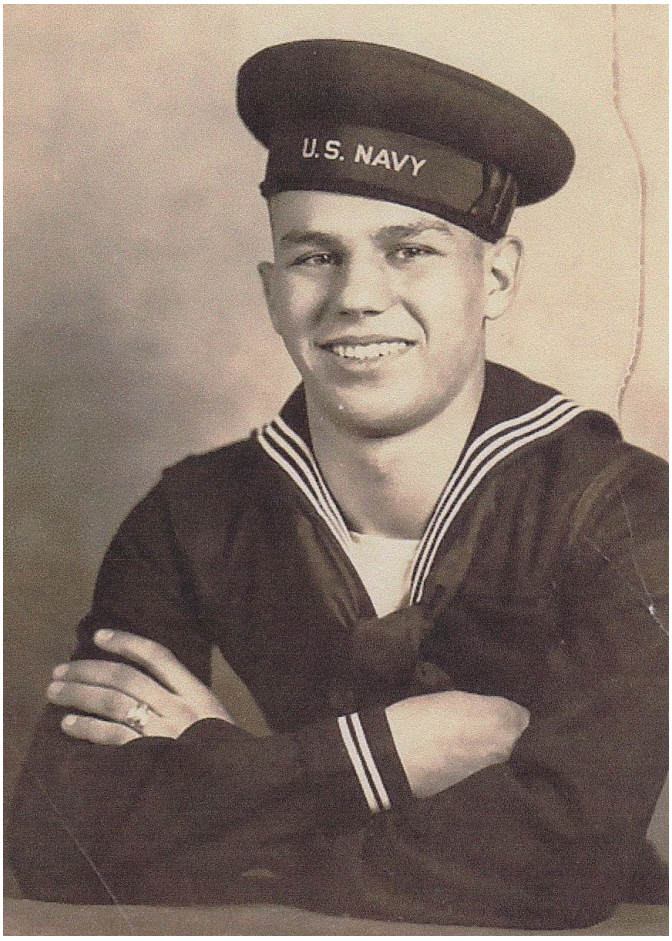
LCI 414 Vet honored at Commemorative Air Force Museum

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

George Alex III, son of LCI 414 veteran George Alex Jr. helped create this display. It is in the 1st Wing Commemorative Air Force Museum, at Flemming Field, South Saint Paul, Minnesota.

How did a swabbie end up in a museum for zoomies? Fireman 2/c George Alex Jr. lived a stone's throw from a hangar on Flemming Field…and his son is a member and volunteer at 1st Wing Commemorative Air Force Minnesota Museum.

The story begins in the early 1900s when the Alex family came to America from Yugoslavia. Alex Jr. was born in South St. Paul September 2, 1925. He grew up near a civilian airfield called Hook-Em-Cow-Field (it was surrounded by farm fields). The Navy acquired it in 1940 and built a naval auxiliary airfield to train pilots during WWII. They constructed a 1500-foot circle apron instead of multiple runways. This allowed students to take off or land from any direction. There were six hangers, two barracks, a boiler room, powerhouse, storage rooms and 100 U.S. Navy primary training planes. The field was later named Flemming Field in honor of Captain Richard Flemming (USMCR), a local aviator who died at the Battle of Midway. Flemming was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.



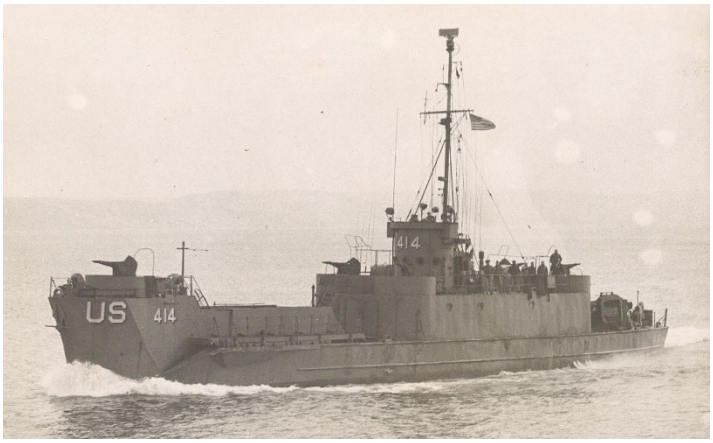
George Alex Jr. grew up near a civilian airfield in South St. Paul, Minnesota. It became a naval airfield during WWII. He enlisted in the Navy when he turned 18.

After Alex turned 18, he joined the Navy on November 12, 1943. Following boot camp and fireman's school he was sent to Norfolk. He mustered aboard the *LCI(L) 414* on 16 March 1944. He was a plank owner. His new ship had launched in February at George Lawley and Sons Shipbuilding.

Eight days after coming aboard, the *414* would be bound for Falmouth England. The crew had only one week to acquaint themselves with their new home. No time for the normal fitting out. Watch duties were set. Needed fixes were identified during shakedown cruises. Then, it was off to the biggest amphibious invasion ever attempted. In England they trained and prepared for the landings in Normandy, France.

LCI(L) 414 was the Flagship for Flotilla 12. The ship was commanded by Lt.(jg) Robert Erickson. Passengers for D-Day included some "brass." The Flotilla 12 Commander T.S. Cameron, Brigadier General Sands, the Commander of the 29th Infantry Division Artillery, and their respective staffs were on board for the English Channel crossing.

On the morning of June 6th, Ensigns Blue and Smith began recording the operational and administrative remarks in the ship's deck log. These entries provide a 24-hour timeline for the *LCI(L) 414*.



The newly launched LCI(L) 414 took an extra long shakedown cruise… across the Atlantic.

Deck Log LCI(L) 414 Tuesday 6 June 1944

0023 - *LCI 414* underway for Omaha Beach in convoy consisting of USS Acheamar, LCIs *415, 416, 417, 418, 420, 537, 538, 539, 542, 556, 401, and 403.* Steaming on course of 180T, base speed 13 knots.

0523 - Friendly fighter planes sighted at regular intervals.

0934 - Passed British Motor Torpedo Boats at 1500 yards.

1315 - Sighted coast of France.

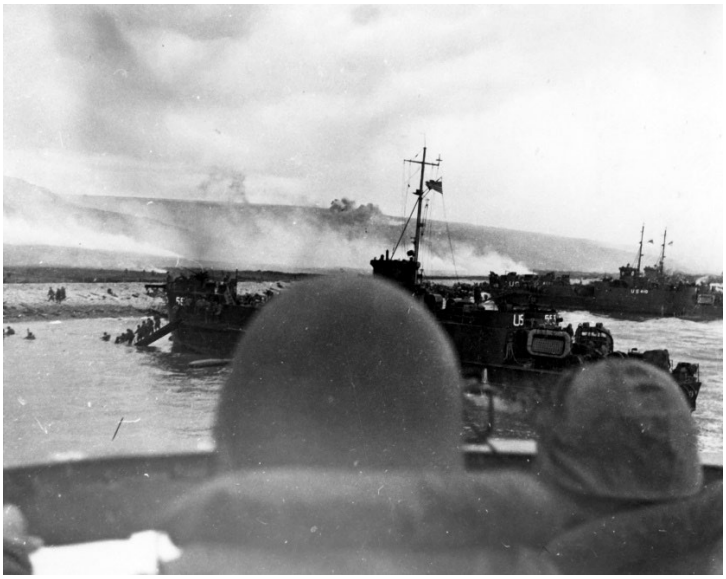


Photo taken from LCI(L) 414 on the afternoon of D-Day on Normandy Beach. Troops from the 1st Infantry are disembarking LCI(L) 553.

1445 - Entered transport lowering area, American ships bombarding shore strong points.

1615 - Made preparation for beaching.

2240 - Anchored by stern anchor in 9 fathoms of water.

2320 - General Quarters, number two gun opened fire on low flying enemy planes. Shot down one. Planes dropped sticks of bombs, landed 400 yards starboard, no damage.

It was Roland T. Harris S1/c who spotted the low flying JU88 bombers passing *LCI(L) 414* from starboard to port. He jumped on a 20mm gun and emptied the cannister on one of the planes. The crew watched it flame and crash several hundred yards away. Harris received the Bronze Star for his quick-thinking action.

Alex Jr. never shared much of his Navy experiences. During D-Day he was down below keeping the engines running. He didn't see much that day. But he did keep a diary and kept much of his war memorabilia. After the war he went home, got married and raised four children, three daughters and one son. He worked as a mechanic in the meat packing industry. He didn't stay in touch with shipmates or go to reunions.

After his death in 2012, his son George Alex III found his box of Navy memorabilia. He asked the folks at the 1st Wing CAFMN Museum if they would be interested in any of it. They were interested in all of it.

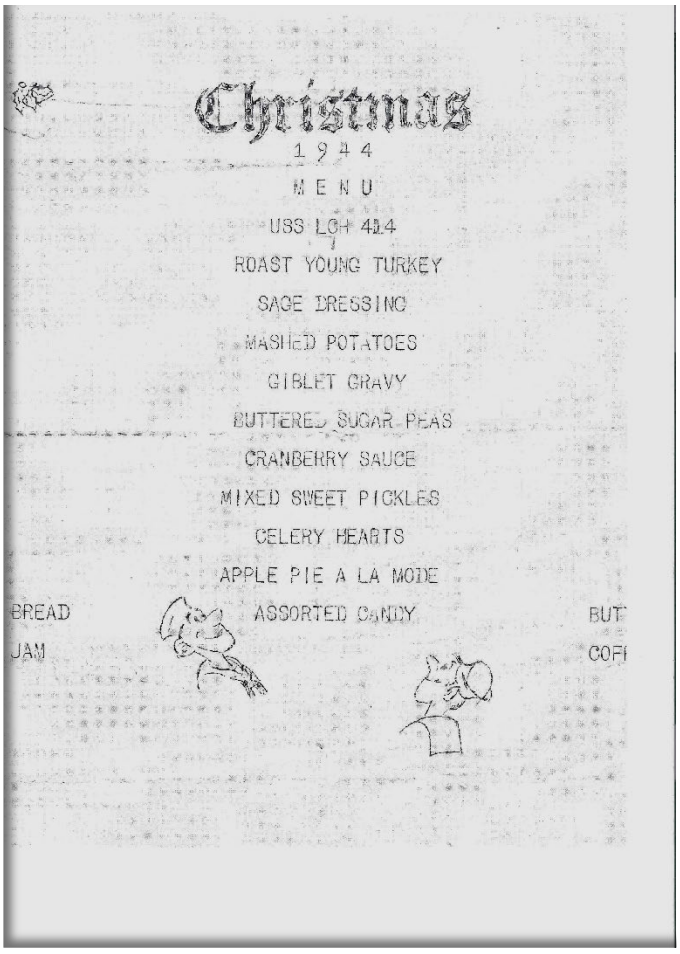
George Alex Jr. had grown up watching rookie Navy pilots trying to get airborne over his house. He came back home and lived by Flemming Field the rest of his life. He was a part of the airfield's history. It's former use as a naval training base during the war and location in South St. Paul made it perfect to display a local Navy veteran's uniform and memorabilia.

With son George's help, they created a beautiful glassed-in display. It tells the story of a gator sailor, a landing craft and the crew who participated in one of the biggest events of the 20th century.

"My family and I are honored with the opportunity to display his uniforms and share the story of dad's service. This display is how I got involved with the Commemorative Air Force and I am proud to be a member," stated George Alex III.

The CAFMN Museum is located at 310 Airport Road Hangar 3 South St. Paul, Minnesota. It is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and admission is free. In addition to military displays the museum has a rare collection of military aircraft. Many are still flown. Flight experiences can be purchased in the gift shop. A virtual tour can be taken by visiting www.cafmn.org .

Crewmembers on newly built LCI(L) 414.


Christmas

1944

MENU

USS LCI 414

ROAST YOUNG TURKEY

SAGE DRESSING

MASHED POTATOES

GIBLET GRAVY

BUTTERED SUGAR PEAS

CRANBERRY SAUCE

MIXED SWEET PICKLES

CELERY HEARTS

APPLE PIE A LA MODE

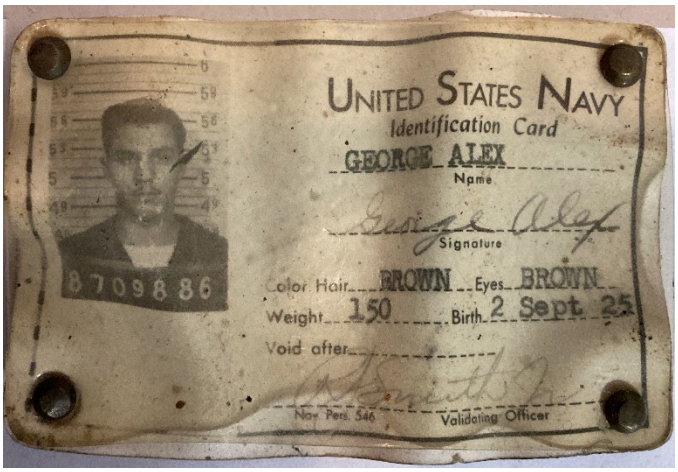
BREAD ASSORTED CANDY BUT

JAM COFI

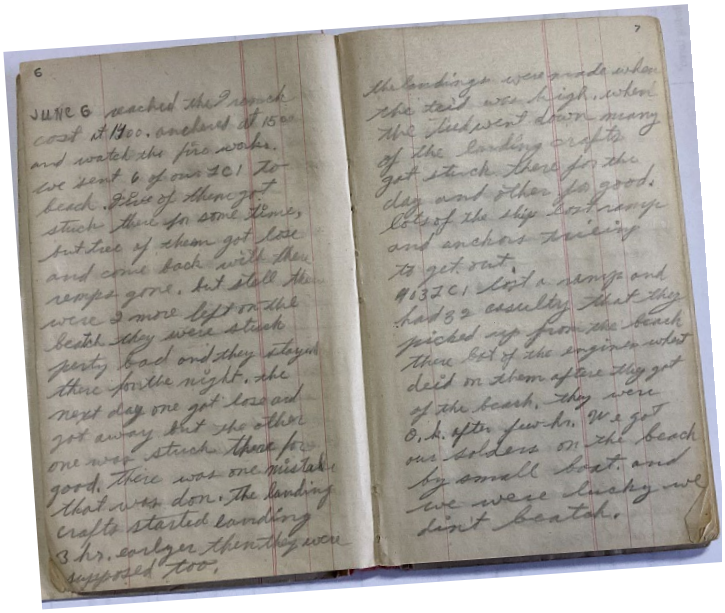
The crew of LCI(L) 414 included 29 enlisted and 4 officers. George Alex Jr. is seated front row, third from left.

Alex seated at top left by ladder.

Christmas celebration 1944 aboard the LCI(L) 414 was complete with a decorated tree and special holiday dinner. Their feast included turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy and apple pie al la mode. George Alex is seated to right of the decorated tree.



A well-used Navy ID Card for George Alex survived in his box of memorabilia.



Fortunately, many sailors ignored the wartime rules against keeping a diary. George Alex Jr. was one of them. His entry on 6 June 1944 is as follows.

"June 6 – Reached the French coast at 1400. Anchored at 1500 and watched the fireworks. We sent 6 of our LCI to beach. Five of them got stuck there for some time, but several of them got loose and came back with their ramps gone, but still there were 2 more left on the beach, they were stuck pretty bad, and they stayed there for the night. The next day one got loose and got away but the other one was stuck for good. There was a mistake that was done – the landing crafts started landing 3 hours early when the tide was high. When the tide went down many of the landing craft got stuck for a day and some for good. Lots of ships lost ramps and anchors trying to get out. We got our soldiers on the beach by small boats, and we were lucky we didn't beach."

This side of the museum display case shows diagrams and details about LCIs, crew photo and medals he received. The diary is opened to his entry for 6 June 1944.

Son considers parents part of Greatest Generation

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

While researching his dad's *LCI(L) 79*, Mike Fergus discovered the LCI National Association newsletter *Elsie Item.* "How do I subscribe or join," he asked. This began his membership in the association and my questions about his dad, his ship, any photos, or stories.

Lt.(jg) Charles L. Fergus graduated from the V7 Navy College in 1942.

Fergus' dad was Lt.(jg) Charles L. Fergus the executive officer of *LCI(L) 79*. "Like so many of his generation, he talked very little about the war," explained Mike Fergus. He did save some photos, commendations, and medals. Mike's research and the internet has helped to put his dad's story together.

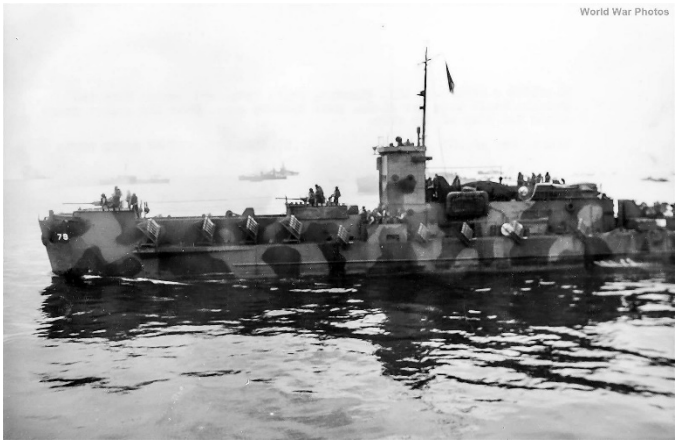
Charles L Fergus was born 11 November 1917 in Kansas City. He graduated with a BA from Ottawa University in 1940 and registered for the draft later that year. He met his wife Ruth while they both were attending college at Ottawa University. He continued his education at the University of Kansas. In 1942 he got his MA, married Ruth, and enlisted in the V7 Navy College training program. He attended schools at Annapolis, Urbana, and San Diego. He was a "90-Day Wonder."

Ensign Fergus was assigned to *LCI(L) 79*. His new ship was headed for the Aleutian Islands. The invasion of Kiska began on 15 August 1943. Japan had occupied islands of Kiska and Attu in 1942. They wanted the desolate group of islands to protect their northern flank. It may have also been a diversionary strategy to draw our Navy away from the invasion of Midway.

U.S. forces landed on Attu in May 1943 to take back the territory. The Japanese garrison of over 2,000 fought to the death. The same fierce defense was expected at Kiska. Japan had built up a garrison there of 5,000 men. The U.S. brought an invasion force of 35,000.

The Kiska landing provided valuable training.

This would be the first combat landing for *LCI(L) 79* and most of the amphibious ships. The invasion force landed men and supplies unopposed. They were met by six hungry dogs that the Japanese had abandoned. The entire Japanese garrison had evacuated under the cover of darkness and fog before the invasion began. This first invasion for Fergus became a huge training exercise. But lessons learned would be critical as *LCI 79* leapfrogged across the Pacific.



LCI(G) 79 at the invasion of Palau.

After returning to Pearl Harbor *LCI(L) 79* was converted to a gunship with rocket launchers. It was reclassified *LCI(G) 79*. This new classification would put Fergus and his crew in the thick of landings for the next two years. LCI rocket ships provided close-in beach bombardment in front of the first wave troops. These operations included Marshall Islands, Saipan, Tinian, Palau, and Okinawa. During this time his Flotilla 3 Group 7 received the Naval Unit Commendation Ribbon and *LCI(G) 79* received six Battle Stars. Lt.(jg) Fergus would hold titles of Engineering Officer, Executive Officer, and Commanding Officer.

Before the war ended, Fergus was retuned stateside to Fort Schuyler in the Bronx. He was made an instructor in engineering and damage control. His wife, Ruth had graduated from Ottawa College with a degree in English. She worked during the war as editor of a publication for the Lockheed Martin plant in San Diego. They were still living a continent apart. But after the war they settled in State College, Pennsylvania. Fergus never tired of education. He got his doctorate from Penn State University in 1948. He was professor of plant pathology, mycology, and biology. He taught classes, did research and published several papers and booklets.

LT(jg) Fergus' eyesight was made for lookout.

Charles and Ruth Fergus raised three sons. Although Fergus didn't share many war stories, his life on *LCI(G) 79* carried over to the raising of Charles, Mike and Brian. They all remember him singing Anchors Away to them. And sometimes he'd sing the Air Force song, "Off we go into the wild blue yonder," and he'd have his boys chime in for the last line. The lyric goes, "For nothing can stop the Army Air Force." Except they'd change the last three words to "Navy Air Force."

When the Fergus sons think of their parents, they all agree, "They *were* the greatest generation."

A man can leave the Navy, but the Navy never leaves a man. The Fergus household was no exception. Mike Fergus recalls his dad telling him to “Take a Navy shower, Mike, I need to use the bathroom.”

When one of his boys asked dad to do something, He’d respond with “Aye, aye, sir,” and sometimes follow with a salute.

When his boys were misbehaving, he’d tell them to ‘Straighten up and fly right,” or getting them to do something done pronto, “That’s a direct order.”

Fergus spent much of his time in the conning tower due to his excellent vision. His son, Mike recalls him spotting a cop car behind a highway billboard, before anyone saw the billboard!

Lt. (jg) Charles J. Fergus

PHOTO RIGHT: A proud crew LCI(G) 79 showing off their scoreboard on the conning tower. They had provided rocket bombardment during six invasions.

Heading back to California with their Going Home pennant flying high from the halyard.

"Ninety-Day Wonder" Introduced to the Gator Navy

By John F. Harrington – an oral monologue transcribed by Pacific War Museum 2002

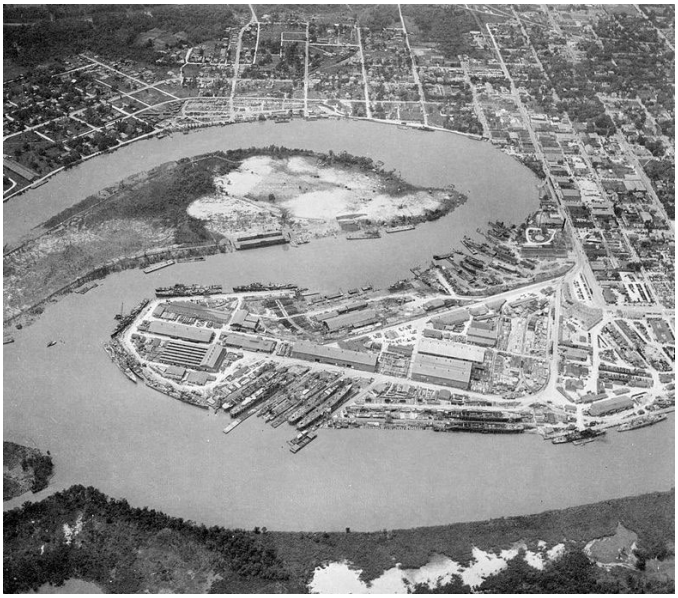
Editing by Jeff Veesenmeyer

In November 1942, I was a third-year college student when my draft board ordered me to take a physical. I immediately went to the Navy recruiter six blocks from where I lived and signed up for the officer candidate program, then known as V-12. I went on active-duty July 1, 1943, and reported to the University of South Carolina, where I spent one semester. I was then sent to Norfolk for a few months to be harassed by a sadistic chief petty officer.

U.S. Naval Reserves established a midshipman's school at Northwestern University in Chicago. Over 26,000 ensigns graduated from the 90-day program during the war. John F. Kennedy was one of them.

On January 15, 1944, I reported to Northwestern University Midshipmen's School in the heart of Chicago. On May 10, 1944, I was commissioned an ensign. While we were celebrating that, the sadistic chief from Norfolk approached us, but he was no longer a chief. He was now a lieutenant junior grade and outranked all of us. We shook hands and he told us how proud he was that we had all made it. I'm sure that he believed that by being such a son of a buck, he had made men of us.

I was sent to Orange, Texas, to report aboard USS *LCI(L)-981*. The ship was built by Consolidated Steel Shipbuilding Division and launched 14 April 1944.



The Orange, Texas division of Consolidated Steel built 106 LCIs from 1942 through 1944.

On May 21st a disinterested enlisted man on gangway watch signed me aboard, while examining me as if wondering whether or not to keep me. I looked about at my new home, which appeared to be a lot of wrinkled sheet metal badly welded together. This thing was surely no battleship *Iowa*. I had joined the Navy because my father, mother, and uncle, all had served in the Navy during World War I, and my favorite uncle had been called back to serve again in World War II. There was a large Navy yard in Charleston and the fleet was often anchored in the harbor, which meant good times for our economy during those Depression times. From early childhood, I had been brainwashed Navy. But now,

looking at this *LCI*, I thought I had done a very foolish thing.

The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Junior Grade Max Mayo, came out and shook my hand warmly and I began to feel a little better. We sat in his cabin, and he explained to me that I was already well qualified to assume the duties of morale officer, commissary officer, communications officer, damage control officer, ship store's officer, et cetera, et cetera. And now, I understood why he had greeted me so effusively; his working life had all but ended. He took me to the Captain, Lieutenant Junior Grade Thurman J. Bailey, who grunted and told me to be on the conn at 0600 in the morning. I was.

The captain took the ship out and tried to tear her apart. He got her up to flank speed, about 17 knots, and I looked around for a life jacket. I knew that thing was going to self-destruct, but the captain got her moored safely again and that evening, the other officers went ashore to lap up the nightlife of Orange, Texas, leaving me in command. They sensed that I would not likely be boarded by Japanese that night.

On 8 June 1944, we sailed for the Panama Canal and went through with one other LCI and a destroyer. The swift destroyer quickly left us. Two LCIs, for the next 16 days, plowed on towards the Society Islands. For a few days, gulls followed us, to salvage the leavings of our mess trays as we dumped them over the fantail. Then the gulls left us, probably, somebody suggested, because the gulls knew there was a war going on someplace out here and the chow just wasn't worth the risk.

During that period, I learned that our crew, some of whom were over 40 years old and excellent at their jobs, had been on a training ship at Little Creek, Virginia, teaching new crews to man other LCIs. However, that wonderful assignment ended one day when that ship was beached, and some girls asked if they could come aboard. Now, no sailor who ever lived would have said no. The ensuing party was such a blast, that nobody realized that the tide had gone out and the ship was stuck high and dry on the beach until the next tide.

Two days later, the entire crew was sent to Texas, to pick up a new ship and head out where the shooting was. Alas, the beautiful island of Bora Bora rose above the horizon, and we moored dockside in a lagoon so clear, we could see the coral bottom.

"Some of our crew had stolen a washing machine."

We refueled and took on water and provisions. That evening, I was again, the officer of the deck, while my superiors sampled the tropical Officers Club. Early next morning, an angry three-striped commander, stationed his men alongside the dock to make certain no one escaped our ship. He strode aboard and asked for our captain. He told Mr. Bailey that the previous evening, some of our crew had stolen a washing machine from his base and he demanded to interview them, man by man.

Not a single wide-eyed sailor "knew nothing about no washing machine," so the commander searched our ship and easily found it. Again, he summoned each sailor, but all remained blissfully innocent, and some were even affronted by the implication, except one young sailor. The commander intimidated this 17-year-old kid enough that he talked. The commander

smiled triumphantly and suggested to our captain that he transfer this boy ashore so that he would not find himself, one dark night, swimming all alone in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Then the commander kicked our ship out of his island paradise. We pushed on to Pago Pago, Manus, Hollandia, and things began to get serious.

On the 15th of October 1944, we took aboard 150 troops and then joined a gigantic collection of ships of all types, headed for Leyte Island, to invade the Philippines. General MacArthur was along riding in the cruiser *Nashville*. On the third day out, our troops, having slept two nights below deck in almost airless, darkened ship conditions, began to get grumpy. They were hot and tired, and they stunk. They wanted desperately to take a shower. One of their officers asked our skipper if anything could be done. Captain Bailey had our firehoses hooked up and pretty soon, the well deck of *LCI-981* was full of laughing, naked soldiers, playing fire hoses upon each other. Within minutes, every LCI in the formation was doing the same thing.

"The letters were full of bravado and forced humor."

What was happening back home? For families back home, the war was very difficult, because they had no idea where we were or what was happening to us. It was a dreadful time for them, as more and more gold stars appeared in the windows of neighbors. I was our ship's censor, a very distasteful job, and I read the anxiety of our crew for the folks back home. The letters were full of bravado and forced humor; "Mom, I got my first Jap today." "Mom, we were whipping their yellow asses." Some of our people were as young at 17 and had never been away from home before. The stress on them and their families was always present.

What role did minorities play on my ship? There was one black man aboard, Steward's Mate George Crum, the most cheerful fellow I have ever met, even to this day. George always had a laugh and a joke for you, and it seemed to me, he integrated wonderfully with 28 white guys, all of whom liked him. George loved to draw comic cartoons and was always working on various correspondence courses. I am certain that with his personality and work ethic, he has done well for himself and his wife and child after the war.

LCIs often nested together when at anchor. One ship would drop her stern anchor and one or two others would ask permission to come alongside. So, we got a little cross fertilization of ideas and complaints.

A fellow in our black gang came back to the ship, carrying on his shoulders, the largest monkey I had ever seen outside a zoo. The skipper reluctantly and against Navy regs, allowed him to keep it. Things went well for a time. The sailor kept the monkey tied to a long leash on the fantail and spent a great deal of time talking to his new pal. One afternoon, as we were about to cast off from the LCI we were moored to, the monkey jumped off the shoulders of its master, scurried up our mast, and walked out onto the yardarm and stared defiantly down at everybody. Our captain was more than annoyed.

He singled up our lines and the monkey jumped to the yardarm of the other ship. The sailor implored for the monkey to come back but the monkey was enjoying all

the attention and raucous comment he was getting from the crews of both ships. One man on the other LCI brought out a .22 caliber target rifle and announced that he knew how to bring the animal down. Our skipper had seen enough, and he ordered to bosun to cast off. As our ship drifted away from the other one, the cook appeared on the gun deck and waved a banana up to the monkey. Our mascot easily leaped the seven or eight feet between yardarms to claim his reward and both crews cheered.

My most emotional experience during World War II was the day we transported some of our POWs. We took aboard four men who had been prisoners of war at notorious Santo Tomas, and we transported them to a larger ship. They were aboard for perhaps two hours. They stood at the rail on the gun deck that entire time, speaking in low voices and only to each other. They were shirtless and wore only shorts and boots. You could count the bones in their chests, arms, and legs. Skin hung loose from their protruding cheekbones. They looked like the photos from Buchenwald that we would not see until much later. It was their tragic demeanor: beaten and hopeless. I can still see those haggard, frightened faces even today, 57 years later.

On January 1, 1945, New Years Day, at 09:06, we came alongside heavy cruiser USS *Portland*, sister ship of the tragically lost USS *Indianapolis*, and we took a liberty party aboard. An Annapolis ensign was in charge of his group. I got a glimpse of the difference between life aboard a tarp cruiser and a little ragtag LCI. The ensign, smartly dressed, kept calling me sir, and he was startlingly deferential. On the *LCI-981*, nobody ever called anybody sir. The black gang called the engineering officer Lieutenant JG Caprice, by his first name, Mike. I was glad I wasn't serving on *Portland*, as beautiful as the ship was.

The war taught me more in less time, than any other experience. I lived two years in a ship, 150 feet long and 20 feet wide, with 28 other men, and we all learned to get along well together. I, and many others, did a lot of growing up during the war.

At war's end LCI(L) 981 was sent to China. They prepare to get underway at Shanghai with Chinese Nationalist troops being transported to Formosa.

On October 10, 1945, a river pilot, came aboard. With four other LCIs, we headed down the Yangtze, then south along the coast with 200 troops of the Chinese Nationalist Army. We took them across the rough China Sea, to occupy Formosa.

Ensign Harrington became skipper before bringing *LCI(L) 981* to San Diego in April 1946. Most of the crew had been sent home. He was the only officer left and had just eight crewmembers aboard when they brought down the tattered ensign and said goodbye. "It was not as joyous a day as we had all thought it would be."

Kamikaze and Shinu (Sea Quake) suicide attacks created terror during landings in Lingayen Gulf.

Sea Quake Attack Attempted Destruction of Luzon Landing

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

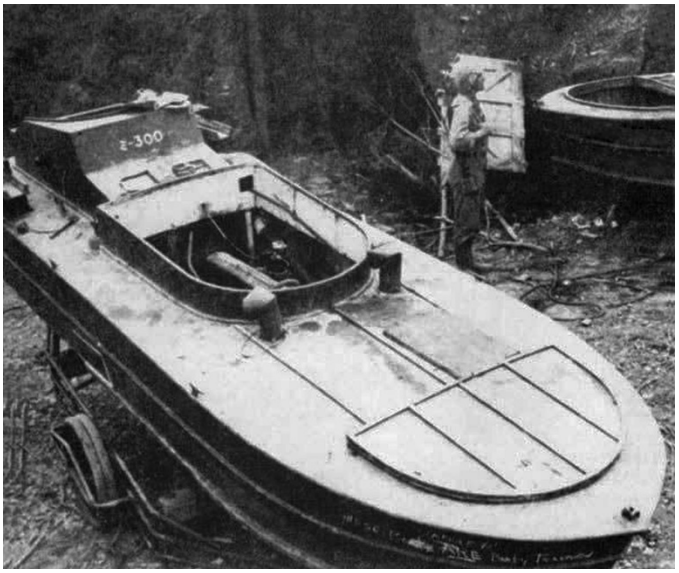
The Luzon operation began with initial landings on 9 January 1945. *LCI(M) 974* was part of the flotilla of mortar gunboats providing close in support during the landing. Lt.(jg) J.F. Brown was in command. He had a complement of 51 enlisted and officers on board that included army personnel for firing the mortars.

The army manned three 4.2 chemical mortars. They were mounted in 4'x4' walled sandboxes on the well deck. Their primary mission was close support of landing craft. With a range of up to 4000 yards they could cover a beach area 200 to 300 yards inland while troops hit the beach. The projectiles are fired at a high angle to clear obstacles and hit behind fortifications. This was found to be more accurate and effective than the air support provided by aircraft.

The initial landing went well for the Army. They were able to move inland quickly, allowing the mortar boats to pull back to seaward and await call fire support on specific targets. Invasion day was not as easy going for the Navy.

Lieutenant Brown recalled, "Just about L-hour as we were going in and shelling the beach, quite a few Jap planes came over. The closest one to us was out of range, we didn't open fire. It came in and hit the *Columbia (CL 56)* which was about 3,000 yards from us over on our starboard side. There was quite a bit of air activity from kamikazes."

Lieutenant Brown anchored about 6,000 yards from the beach in 20 fathoms of water. They laid smoke to conceal themselves and other ships moving around in the anchorage. Kamikaze attacks had begun when invasion ships first entered Lingayen Gulf. They came in low under radar and used surrounding hills to cover their approach. Dozens of ships had already been hit. Kamikazes would crash into 47 ships during the Luzon invasion. Everyone was watching the sky. This created an opportunity for a new type of kamikaze called the Shinyo. The name translates to Sea Quake.



Captured Shinyo on a trailer is ready for launching.

The Shinyo was an explosive motorboat. They were designed to attack landing craft and transports anchored near an invasion beach. Hundreds of them could be hidden along shoreline jungles, in streams, and estuaries. They were cheap and easy to make. Young men could be trained to pilot a Shinyo in days. The crowded Lingayen Gulf anchorage offered a target rich way for Shinyo pilots to ride their craft to a glorious death.

This painting depicts a Shinu armed with depth charges racing towards a ship.

The 20-foot boats had plywood hulls. They were powered by an 85 hp Chevy automobile engine that could do 25 knots. The bow was packed with a 600-pound explosive that would detonate on impact or with a trigger. Another Shinyo version was designed to carry two depth charges set for shallow detonation. These would be dropped alongside a ship giving the pilot a possible escape. But the blast from the depth charge or gunfire from the ship made these attacks suicidal too.

Shinyos attacked at night. Defense against them was difficult. Larger ships couldn't depress their 20mm and 40mm guns enough to hit the small surface craft. Small arms and Thompson submachine guns were the best defense to this new threat.

LCI(M) 974 remained at anchor that night. At approximately 0400 one of these small torpedo boats sneaked in and hit them on the port side slightly after amidships. Lieutenant Brown was knocked out. The blast injured most of the men on board. All power was out causing complete darkness. Battle lamps were jarred loose and couldn't be found in the confusion. The ship was taking on water. Luckily, there were no fires. The ship had 20

tons of mortar rounds and a magazine of 20mm ammunition. “We were very fortunate in not having any internal explosions or fires on the ship,” Brown recalled, “Because the explosion occurred underneath the fuel tanks and diesel fuel. The ship sank in about six minutes.”

There was no time for damage control measures. By the time injured men were on deck, it was time to abandon ship. There were about six uninjured men who were able to help others abandoning ship. At least one man was missing in action. There were quite a few other ships around. An army boat sent over a dinghy and an APA sent over an LCVP that took wounded over to the *Boise* for first aid.

The unconscious and injured Lieutenant Brown was unaware of the other attacks in Lingayen Gulf that night.

The Japanese had a Shinyo unit with 70 boats hidden around the gulf. They were ordered to make an all-out attack against transports and landing craft on the night of January 9th and 10th. Ten minutes after *LCI(M) 974* was sunk, USS *Warhawk* AP-168 was rammed by a Shino on the port side. Lookouts reported hearing an approaching boat but did not identify the source until it blew 25-foot hole in their hull. All power was knocked out and the engine spaces were flooding. Throughout the morning damage control crews put out fires, shored up the hole, and restored power. There were 61 men killed and many more wounded.

Four other ships were hit by Shinyos that night. Another mortar gunboat, *LCI(G) 365* was crashed into and badly damaged. No one was killed and only several men were injured. But *365* was out for the rest of the war.

USS *Robinson* (DD 562) had screened for the invasion fleet during the landings on January 9th. Then *Robinson* anchored in the transport area. A predawn attack by a Shinyo with depth charges shook the ship. The explosion knocked out their sonar but caused no serious casualties. That day they fought off kamikaze planes. *Robinson* was sent back to Leyte for repairs while escorting empty transports.

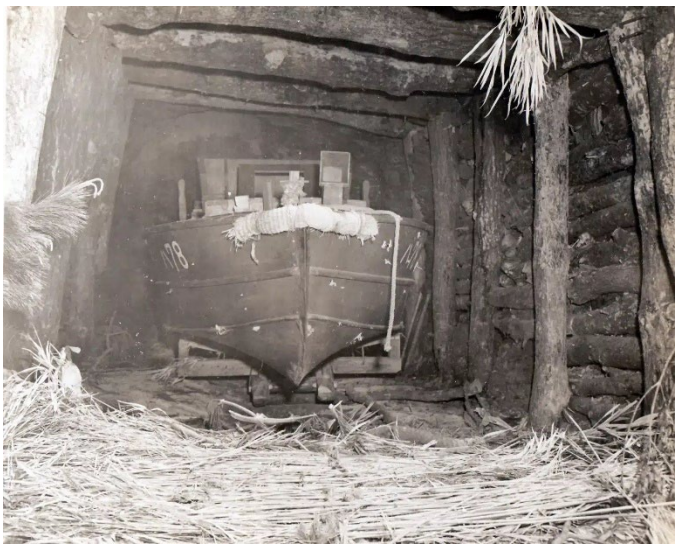
USS *LST 925* was attacked by a Shinyo that dropped depth charges alongside. The *925* crew destroyed the boat but received severe damage. LST *1028* came to the ships aid to help fight fire and take off wounded. Another Shinyo with depth charges attacked *1028*. It blew a hole in the ship. The Shinyo was destroyed with gunfire. Now both LSTs were threatened with sinking and losing their valuable cargo. They elected to be towed to an empty section of Orange beach. They were able to unload their troops, tanks, and equipment.

LSTs 1028 and 925 were able to beach and unload cargo despite being critically damaged.

The Japanese produced over 9,000 Shino explosive motorboats during the war. Half were destroyed without ever being deployed.

Hundreds of Shinyos were destroyed by U.S. submarines. They were sunk along with their pilots while being transported on cargo ships to the Philippines. Many others were destroyed or captured by landing forces.

Beyond creating terror, they never had a major effect on amphibious operations. However, after Japan's surrender, thousands of these "Sea Quake" suicide boats were found in caves and harbors near Japan's likely landing beaches. Their potential would have been greater than mere terror if the invasion of Japan had been necessary.



Japan used caves and tunnels like this one to hide Shinyo suicide boats.

This Shinyo fleet was found in Japan.

A Shinyo captured by Australians in Borneo.

Shinyos had been shipped to the far reaches of the Japanese Empire. Sailors from HMAS *Deloraine* found some of the "Sea Quakes" at Sandakan Harbour, British North Borneo, in October 1945. They took possession of six that were discovered in an immediate state of operational readiness complete with fuel. An opportunity of using this type of special attack craft in the area was never presented. Another eighteen similar craft were found in different states of repair.

These Shinyos were built in 1944. Their lightweight plywood hulls, and powerful 6-cylinder Chevrolet engine produced excellent speed boats. To the Aussie Sailors these made perfect water ski boats.

The launch shown above was used by sailors from HMAS *Deloraine* as a ski boat on Sandakan Harbour. It returned to Australia with the *Deloraine* in late 1945 and was presented to the Australian War Memorial. It is among only three surviving Shinyo suicide boats. One is in Mobile Battleship Park next to USS Alabama and the other is in a war museum in Japan.

RESOURCES: TheArmeryLife.com, combined fleet.com, awm.gov.au

THE DETROIT NEWS—PHOTOGRAPHIC DEPARTMENT

FILM NUMBER 10.XX DATE April. 30.1942.

PHOTOGRAPHER M.Stroecker REPORTER none.

SUBJECT MAY 6 1942

LOCATION ~~Navy changes to whites. May first.~~

NAMES (L. TO R.) uniforms

CAPTION Robert K.Brooke in blue changes guard over to E.C.Theise in whites.

REMARKS:

Detroit News captures the U.S. Navy's change over to "whites." May 1, 1942.

Guard duty uniform went from blues to whites on May 1st and included leggings, guard belt, rifle, and bayonet.

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

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Museum display for George Alex Jr. LCI(L) 414 - The 1st Wing Commemorative Air Force Museum in South St. Paul, MN includes this display of his uniforms, photos and memorabilia. His well labeled sea bag, medals, diary, landing maps of Omaha Beach and the *414* deck log dated 6 June 1944 can be viewed. See more of his story inside this issue.