



Elsie Item

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

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

ISSUE 122

FALL 2023



“Early Morning Landing”

By Ken Adair Sr.

Inside this issue...

- Forgotten War Part 5 - Green Island invasion
- Signalman's memories on LCI(L) 759
- LCler witness to last kamikaze



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

MISSION

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

usslci.org



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

ABOUT US

- What We Do
- Officers & Executive Board
- AFMM-LCI-713 Alliance
- Non-Profit Status

THE STORIES

- Featured Stories
- Story Archive
- Share Your Story

THE ELSIE ITEM

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

THE LCI EXPERIENCE

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

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

Your Story



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

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

Contact Us



EDITOR

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

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Email TheCrew@usslci.org

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

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

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

The U.S.S. Landing Craft Infantry Association was organized in May of 1991. Presented here is the summary of Our Financial Results for the last 2 Years

USS Landing Craft Infantry National Association Inc
Financial Results for the periods ending

ASSETS	May 31, 2023	May 31, 2022
Current Assets		
Bank of America - Michigan	28,402	29,115
TOTAL ASSETS	28,402	29,115
LIABILITIES & EQUITY		
Equity		
Net Assets Prior 6/1/2016		
Opening Net Assets 2006	90,564	90,564
Additions 2006 to 2016	-81,686	-81,686
Total Net Assets PRIOR 6/1/2016	8,878	8,878
Net Assets After 6/1/2016	19,523	20,236
Total Net Assets AFTER 6/1/2016	28,402	29,115
	June 1, 2022 to May 31, 2023	June 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022
Support, Gains and Revenue		
Direct Public Support (Donations)	7,442	8,265
Membership Dues	4,410	5,145
Other Types of Revenue	468	355
Total Support, Gains and Revenue	12,320	13,765
Expenditures		
Elsie Publication	12,823	12,790
Other Operating Expenditures	211	1,125
Total Organization Operating Expenditures	13,033	13,915
Total Addition to Net Assets	(713)	(150)

During July I went to visit the World War II Museum in New Orleans. I met with the Director of Curations. We reviewed the collection of historical LCI news photos, from the war, that the LCI Association had donated to the museum's permanent collection. The WWII Museum plans to have these digitized and add them to their online museum when time and effort permit. We will be adding more to that collection later this year. The museum is planning a 25TH Anniversary Party in 2025 to commemorate its opening which members of our association attended June 6, 2000. Any members who might like to attend, watch for details.

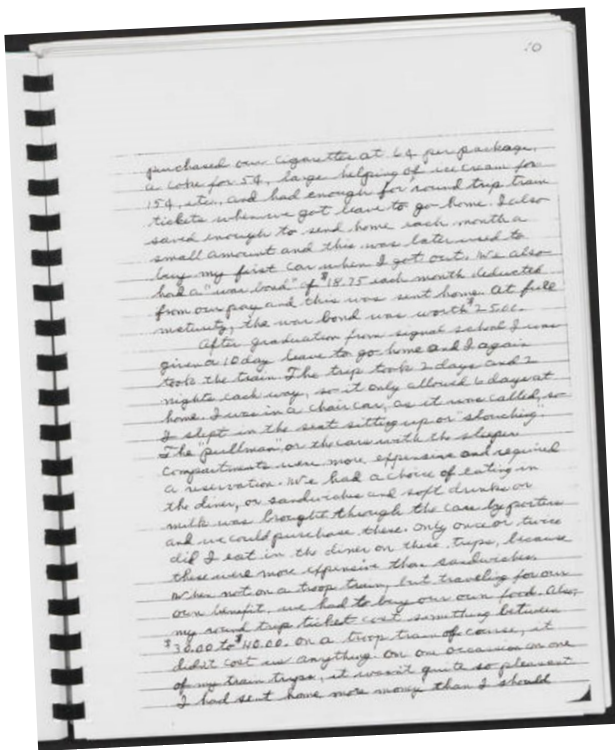


Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

Personal handwritten memoirs, letters, and stories are turning up in many veteran's memorabilia. Some include more details than oral histories or interviews will ever capture.

A great example is the handwritten story by Gerald Atherton. It was transcribed and saved online by the University of South Carolina.



His 118-page navy biography includes details, thoughts, and emotions seldom shared or remembered by most veterans. Fortunately, Atherton had the *LCI(L) 759* deck log to help with dates and details. His story provides so many unique memories that I'll be sharing it in two parts. Part 1 for this Issue 122 will cover his story from Pearl

Harbor Day to the Leyte invasions. Part 2 will be in the Winter Issue 123 of "Elsie Item." It takes him from Luzon to China occupation, then Formosa and homeward bound. The following letter tells how I discovered this remarkable story.

Mr. Veesenmeyer,
I have enjoyed reading The Elsie and Deck Log of the *LCI-713* for the past several years. In my search for information on my dad's LCI experience I found this collection with a wonderful story of the *LCI-759*. You may have already published this story in a prior issue. Just wanted to bring this to your attention if you haven't seen it. I found the transcribers to digital of the hand-written story may have lacked a military background in some of their interpretations of the writing.

Greg Erickson - Plymouth, MN

Editor's Note: Thanks for sharing this Greg. The story had not been previously published. Now it has.

COVER PAINTING: By Ken Adair Sr. is a fictional rendering of a landing. His acrylic painting was created for *LCI(L) 814* shipmate Curtis Culpepper SM2/c. Culpepper participated in landings at Okinawa and minesweeping/occupation operations in Japan. The ship earned two battle stars while assigned to Flotilla 19. Adair manages the Facebook page "Remembering the LCI Vets."

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

In Memoriam

LCI 30
Frank Grief

LCI 227
Donald Green

LCI 233
Roche Dupre

LCI 421
Bill Harless

LCI 570
William Williams

LCI 594
Robert Bansky

LCI 633
Charles Wolk

LCI 472
Earl Carlin

LCI 944
Joseph Rosenthal

LCI 1055
John Arruebarrena

LCI 1074
Joseph Gage



The Forgotten War

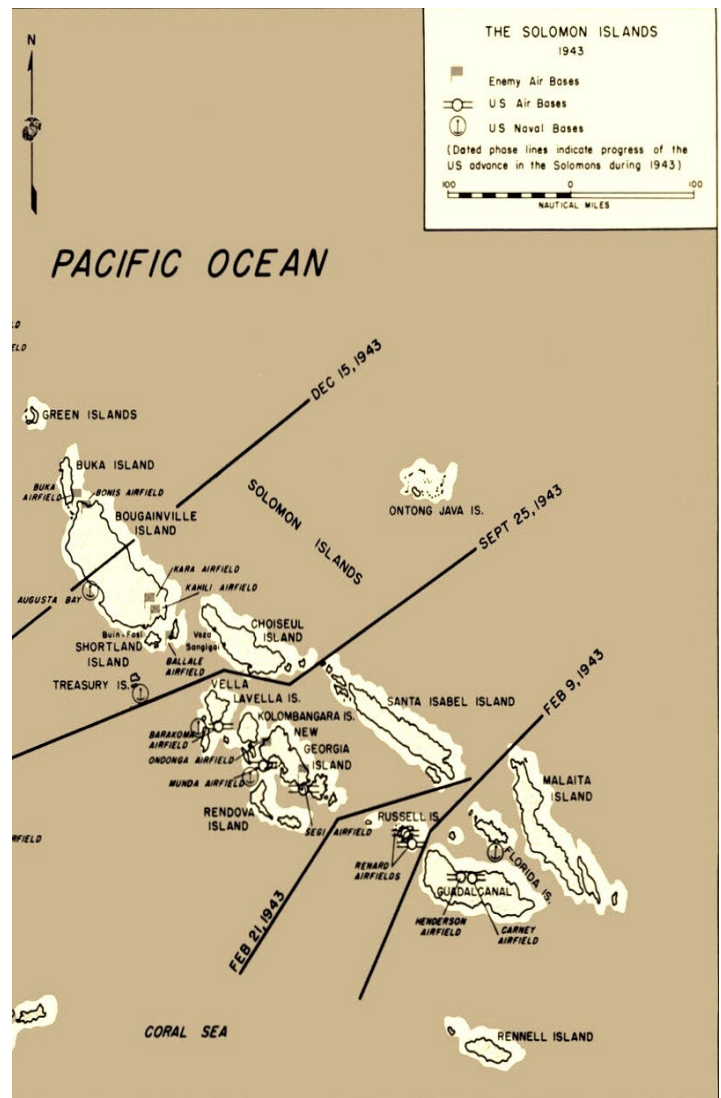
by Robert E Wright Jr

Part 5

The forgotten war took place far from the eyes of the public in an area of the world few people had any knowledge, except for the stories of the travels of early explorers in the 1700's and 1800's. For the men who had been sent to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, this was the only part of the world that held any meaning in their day to day existence. First hand they experienced the myths promoted in the travel brochures back home of the beautiful South Seas paradise. The South Pacific where they fought, was just jungle and swamps and misery. If you were lucky you would survive to go home to your family and attempt to forget the misery of this place. The families of the dead and missing soldiers, sailors and airmen, often only knew that he was missing or buried somewhere in the South Seas.

During the nights of February 7-8, 1943, the Japanese Navy evacuated their surviving troops from Guadalcanal, thereby conceding defeat of their land forces for the first time in the Pacific War.

During the year of 1943 U.S, Marine and Army Divisions, aided by the New Zealand Forces had moved up the Solomon Island chain, capturing the Russell, New Georgia, Vella Lavella the Treasury Islands. Naval and air bases had been established on Bougainville. All of these operations were components of Operation Cartwheel and its goal to cut off and neutralize the major Japanese fortress of Rabaul on nearby New



Britain. Just one year earlier, Japan had been able to launch a number of major naval operations from Rabaul which had devastated the U.S. Navy forces which were valiantly attempting to protect the US Marines following the Landings on Guadalcanal.

Cutting off Rabaul from the main islands of Japan had also prevented food, fuel and war materials from being supplied to all of the Japanese bases and containing large

numbers of their military forces still located among the other islands in the Solomon's chain that had been bypassed during the year of 1943. From the newly established bases like New Georgia, the Treasury Islands, Bougainville and Guadalcanal, Air Corp, and U.S. Naval units went on patrol night and day attempting to intercept any Japanese movements of supplies or reinforcements from one island to another. It was a dangerous game for the cat because the desperate mouse was heavily armed.

The Allies in the Southwest Pacific Theater of operations at the end of 1943 were still suffering from shortage of everything including manpower, shipping, aircraft, food and other war materials. The majority of the Allies war production was being stockpiled in England in preparation for the planned invasion of the continent of Europe scheduled for early 1944.

Also, in 1943 the decision was made to begin the central Pacific campaign. The Southwest Pacific Operations had been under the overall command of Army General Douglas MacArthur from his headquarters in Australia. The new South and Central campaigns would be commanded by Admiral Chester Nimitz from Hawaii. Splitting the Pacific into 2 separate theaters of operations required reallocating some of the forces already present from the South Pacific Command. This resulted in the Marines Divisions being withdrawn, along with all their equipment, supplies along with their Navy support

vessels. From that point the Army was on its own to conclude Operation Cartwheel.

Just north of the major island of Bougainville was the small Island of Buka and above Buka was the still smaller Green Islands. Buka held a sizable Japanese garrison with a naval and air base. To cut off the enemy on Buka, Allied planners, remembering the lessons learned from New Georgia, decided to capture the Green Islands, which was only used by the Japanese as a supply point for inter-island traffic. On the Green Islands they planned to establish an additional Army fighter and a small naval base. These would add additional Allied resources that could be deployed against barge traffic and the enemy air attacks originating from Rabaul.

This was a time in the war when shortages in the South Pacific became even more acute. All of the Allied Naval Air and Ground Forces were already committed to multiple operations. The Marines on New Britain were being transferred to the Central Pacific command. The US Army and Australian Divisions in the theater were still occupied on Bougainville, and also preparing for the future assaults along the north coast of New Guinea. The only available infantry unit was the New Zealand 3rd Division occupying the island of Vella Lavella. The 3NZ as it was designated had already established itself as a capable fighting force a few months earlier during the cleanup operations on Vella Lavella. For the Green Islands this would be a complete New Zealand show from the landings to the

final mop up of the Japanese forces and eventually became the garrison force.

The landing on the Green Islands would require a substantial amount of pre-invasion intelligence. The Japanese were currently using the islands for a transit point for their inter-island barge traffic. What the Allies needed to know was if a large force could be successfully landed. And once you secure the islands, would they be suitable to construct the runways and the advanced PT base. Two separate missions were planned. The first recon mission would be by PT boats to determine if the opening to the lagoon was large enough to allow the amphibious craft to enter the lagoon. In the darkness of night of January 10-11, 1944 two PT boats entered the passage to the lagoon and took sounding. The results were positive.

Operation Squarepeg

After the success of the first survey operational planning became serious. Aerial photographs were ordered and a second naval reconnaissance mission was planned to perform hydrological mapping of the lagoon to determine if the island was suitable for an air base, and finally to determine the strength and defenses of the Japanese force occupying the Green Islands.

The second mission was comprised of 30 US Naval personnel who would perform the hydrographic survey, determine suitable landing beaches and finally, if there were suitable sites for the new air and naval base. Accompanying the US Navy experts was a

protection force of 300 New Zealand infantry soldiers of the 3rd Division.

The recon force was loaded aboard 3 APD's, the *Talbot*, *Dickerson*, and *Waters*, at Vella Lavella during the day of January 30, 1944, and arrived off the entrance channel to the Green Island lagoon just before midnight. The PT boats that had conducted the initial survey rendezvoused with the APDs to guide the LCVPs to the narrow inlet. By 0050 hours 12 boats had been unloaded on the western side of the lagoon without incident.

When the sun came up the landing force was surrounded by the native islanders that the men on watch failed to detect. Fortunately they were friendly and not Japanese sympathizers as was previously assumed.

The surveys proceeded throughout the morning when a native informed the landing party of a hidden Japanese barge. The commander of the naval force was US Navy Commander J. MacDonald Smith, who was also Commander of LCI Flotilla 5. Commander Smith decided to investigate the hidden barge.

The following describes the encounter with the defenders. "In we went crouching low. It's a good thing that we were, for the moment our bow hit that quiet little strip of sand all hell broke loose. In considerably less time that it takes to tell the air filled with lead. Over the side not 10 feet away was an expertly camouflaged Jap Barge. Alongside was another. The Japs (two of those barges would carry about one hundred

men) had dug themselves pill-boxes in the coral cliffs that rose steeply behind the beach behind the hideout. They were in the overhanging trees also. On their first burst of heavy machine gun fire they killed the coxswain. They knocked out both bow gunners before they got off a shot. In fact they hit everyone forward of the motor except Commander Smith – who was standing without a helmet up by the ramp. He was the only one left who knew how to run the boat! I was couched behind one of the natives just at the center of the boat. All the time the Japs were pouring machine gun and rifle crossfire into us from all directions, including above. Our boat was stuck on the beach and the occupants were dropping like flies. The New Zealand officer (Lieutenant O’Dowd) fell wounded. Another murderous burst from the machine gun not 10-yards away cut down the overhanging branches and covered the stern half of the boat. Through this, two New Zealanders with as much guts as I ever hope to see were pouring fire from their Tommy guns back into the inferno. One jap fell from a tree but I saw no noticeable drop in the deafening fire that we were taking.

Commander Smith had ducked down at the first burst but had his back to the coxswain and didn’t know that he was dead. He kept shouting “BACK ‘ER OFF- BACK ‘ER OFF”, and finally looked round at the shambles and was that nobody was left to back ‘er off but himself. Cool as a cucumber he crawled back to the wheel keeping below the gunwales. He got the thing in reverse after a few anguishing seconds that

seemed eternities. The wounded gunner summoned his last strength and tried to help. The Japs were still pouring gunfire into us and no one will ever shake my belief that it was a pure miracle that prevented them from killing every soul in that boat. After a couple of agonizing tries the boat slipped off the sand and floated. Up to that moment I was quite sure that we would all be killed and was praying only that God receive us properly. Now I began to pray that God would get us out of here - but it wasn’t over yet. Commander Smith was backing off blind and taking a quick peep over the side now and then. Any minute we were likely to hit one of the numerable coral heads and be stuck again but we missed them somehow. The enraged Japs kept on firing until we were a couple hundred yards off-shore, but after we got out of point blank range they did not hit anything.

We heaved that branch over the side and patched up the wounded the best we could. The boat looked like a slaughterhouse. Our boat suffered more than 50 percent casualties and everyone forward of me had been hit.”

Lt. Robert Hartman USN

The Japanese responded to the “commando raid” by transferring around 100 reinforcements to the Green Islands. It is not known why the response was so limited. Maybe they viewed the raid as a divisionary tactic by the Allies similar to the Choiseul raid before the landings on Bougainville. Maybe it was just luck.

LCI(L)Flotilla Five
Report of Operations 12-17 Feb 1944

12 February 1944

Love Time

1150 Beached at Kukum, (Guadalcanal)
embarked 15 men and 4 officers of the Third
New Zealand Division. Major Groom,
commanding troops embarked in *LCI 433*.
Brig. Gen. Dumas USA, also embarked as
observer. Robert Greenhalgh, and Barrett

McGurn correspondents for Yank magazine
taken aboard.

13 February 1944

1508 *LCI's 433 443 444* and *359* beached at
Juno Beach Vella Lavella to embark
officers, men of 3rd N.Z. division and
supplies.

1630 *LCI's 360, 434, 445* and *435* beached

1730 *LCI's 436, 358, 446, 357* beached

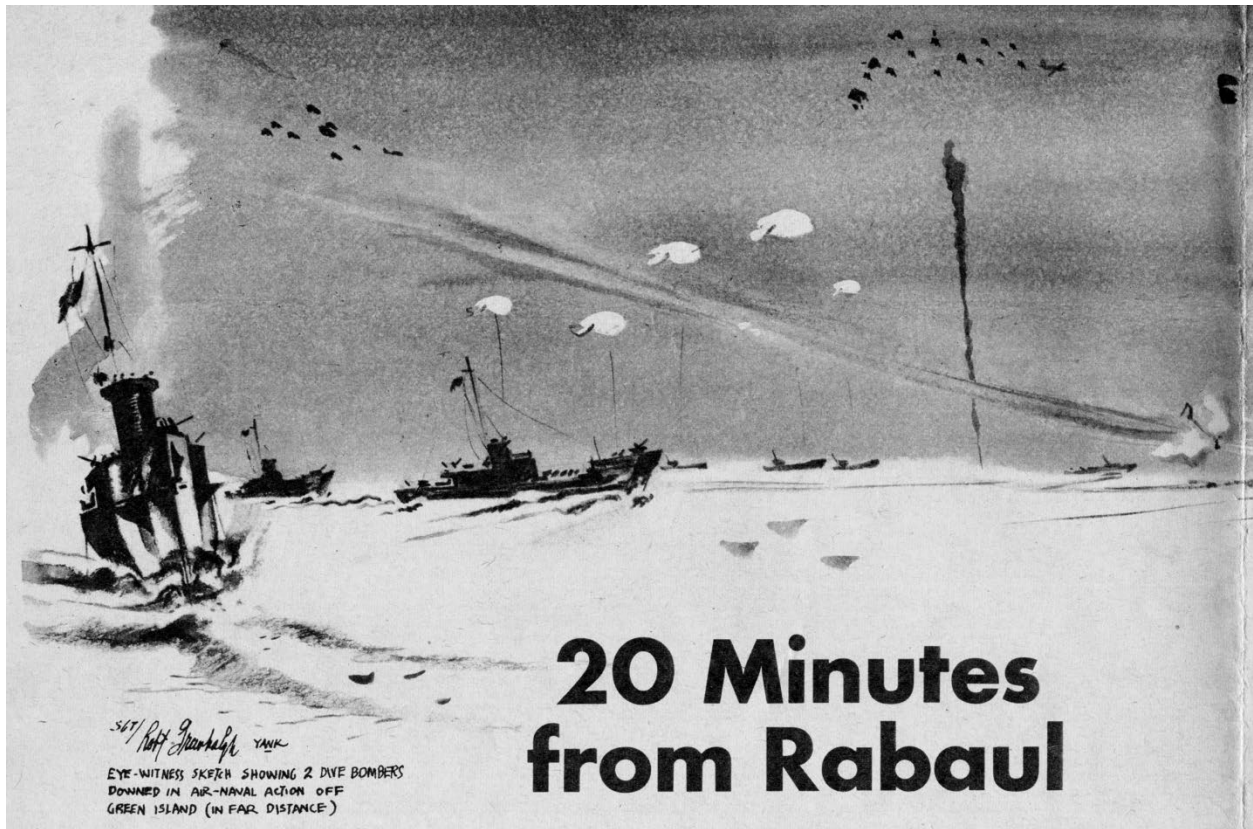
2345 Task group underway with Waller unit
guide.



Embarking officers and men of 3rd New Zealand Division with their supplies.



We pickup Operation Squarepeg as reported by the Yank Magazine



By Sgt. BARRETT MCGURN
YANK Staff Correspondent

WITH THE NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE INVADING GREEN ISLAND

Our assignment is to capture the Jap-held Green Island group, an atoll eight miles long shaped like a broken ring. It is 100 miles deep inside a Jap-controlled triangle whose points are Rabaul, Buka and Kavieng. A fighter plane can reach Rabaul from Green Island in only 20 minutes. a bomber can make a round-trip in an hour and a half.

For the job we have a force composed principally of New Zealand Infantry but

including American Seabees, air and other naval personnel. The New Zealanders will do the ground fighting; the Seabees will build a fighter strip in the jungle, with the construction deadline set at 20 days after our landing. (This airstrip in turn will cover future leapfrog advances to the north toward Kavieng, Truk and Tokyo.) Landing beaches and an airstrip site were chosen 15 days ago by a commando force in a 24-hour raid.

There are many ships in our convoy, from lumbering LSTs to tiny PT boats that scoot along like water bugs. A number of

destroyers race along the skyline, alert against Jap planes.

As the convoy sails up the Solomon Islands slot - past Rendova, Vella Lavella, Treasury and Bougainville - the South Seas seem at their loveliest. The water is blue and smooth as a table, the sky bright and sunny, the evening gentle and soft, the sunset a tender composition of rose and peach and blue.

"You'd pay good money for a trip like this in peacetime," says a CPO in the U. S. Navy.

"This way you get paid for it."

"It's been a proper pleasure trip so far," agrees Lance Bombardier Charles Grut of Auckland, N.Z.

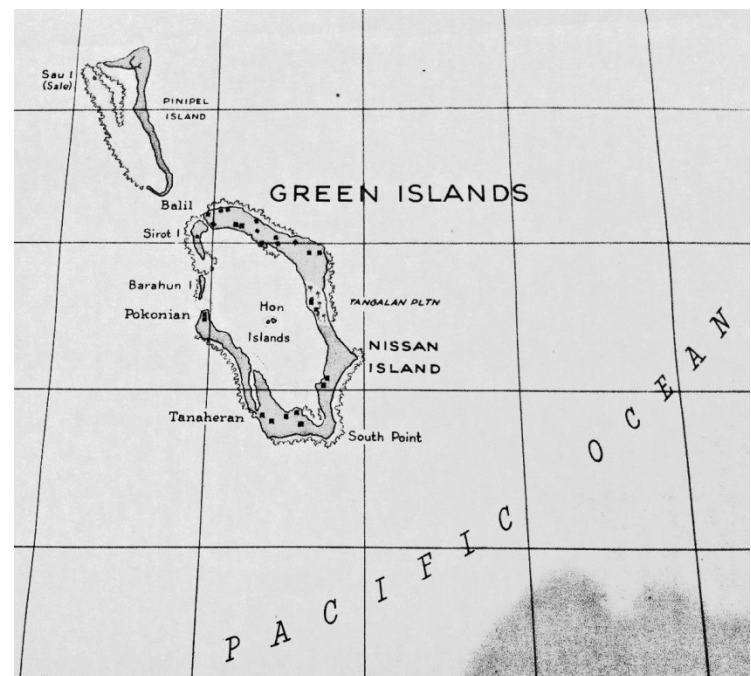
The ship's record player gives out with Dinah Shore's "Star Dust," Tommy Dorsey's "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" and discs by Artie Shaw, Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Laughing New Zealanders play the Salvo game sinking imaginary warships on a score pad. A few talk about the landings ahead.

"Oi don't know about this nine-inch foxhole business," says one. "Oi'll dig moine bloody deep, oi will." He's referring to the theory that a shallow fox-hole is better because you can jump out it the Japs toss in hand grenades. "There are 100,000 Japs on New Britain, 50,000 on Bougainville and we're 40 miles from Buka." observes Jack Cumming, a jut-jawed professional soldier and battery sergeant major from Auckland. "We're right in a trap. We're nearer to Rabaul than the Americans are at Cape Gloucester. I think it's pretty cheeky if you ask me, we've got a bloody nerve, you

know."

In spite of his comments. Cumming and the other New Zealanders are looking forward to the job. Some still gripe about the times they were promised combat and didn't get it. "They promised us we'd go into action when we came to Guadalcanal," Cumming recalls, still bitter, "but they never took us. We squealed plenty about that. But we're used to it. When we went to Fiji we were told that we'd go into action and that was two years ago. This is only our first action now."

The night before D-Day dawns, the first reports of enemy counterattack come in. A patrol plane ahead says that it has "erased" a Mitsubishi bomber. News comes of a Jap destroyer outside Rabaul and another 58 miles off Wewak. We hit the sack early.



At 0130, D-Day, we are awakened by the jangling of signal bells in the engine room and by the heaving and twisting of our little LCI as it speeds, slows and executes quick

turns. We doze off again and then awake for good at 0400.

"They've laid three eggs on us so far," Ernest E. (Butch) Allan S1c from Muskegon, Mich., announces cheerfully. "One came pretty near the last LCI. We didn't fire; we didn't want to give away our position. We've been on GQ (general quarters) since 0130."

At 0700 we near Green Island, a long flat strip of bushes, palms and many other close-grown trees, including some bamboo. From the sea the atoll suggests the southeastern shore of Long Island or perhaps the coast of Florida. Some of the New Zealand infantrymen are already ashore. They went in at 0630, and now they are combing the two abandoned coconut plantations where our LCIs will land at 0830 and the LSTs at 0900.

In tight formation 13 planes fly above us, one showing a signal light. Then a Jap plane flashes in to attack, slim-winged and black. Thin bright lines of gunfire from one of our escorting destroyers mark the path of the plane as it spears down almost vertically.

Thirty feet above the deck of the destroyer it digs in, checks its drop, levels out and races the length of the can, fleeing out over the bow without attempting to regain altitude. Water and smoke heave up from bomb misses.

A moment later the plane goes down as a Corsair streaks onto it from above. Then a destroyer brings down another enemy aircraft. Thick black columns of smoke

stand on the horizon for many minutes afterward, marking the spot at which each Jap plane plunged.

Now the LCIs perform their intricate dance for life, racing in wide twisting circles to make themselves difficult targets for any Jap planes that may slip through the screen. But none does, and nine of the enemy are shot down.

"Boy, it's rugged," grins a red-headed New Zealander. He's wearing the standard Kiwi helmet, an inverted soup plate covered with burlap. "And to think I'm supposed to be best man today at a wedding in Wellington." A friend laughs. "You're having more fun here," he says, "than you would at a wedding." Red nods in agreement.

"Everybody into the troop compartments, and get your gear ready," an officer orders. Below decks the troops slip on jungle packs and rifles. Left behind is a pulp magazine, *New World Thrilling Serials*.

The husky, well-fed Jap marines at Green Island, important stop on the way to Tokyo, folded up when an Infantry force of New Zealanders landed on their beaches, hungry for some knockdown and drag-out war.

We are just passing through the mouth of the lagoon. The Pokonian Plantation point, from which the Japs might have mounted a murderous assault on the oncoming vessels, is silent.

As LCI flagship, *LCI(L) 433*, our vessel leads its wave. Running in 20 feet from shore, it lets down its bow ramps with a clatter, and the first of our 200 men file into

the knee-deep water. The jungle undergrowth is so thick that a machine gunner one foot from shore would be invisible, but nothing happens as we wade to the bank and scramble up eight feet of tumbled coral. The jungle, feels good as it wraps around you, putting you on even terms of concealment.

So far so good. No sign of the enemy at all. Then, as a second LCI moves in 100 yards south of us, the Japs make their first appearance. From two barges hidden in the brush and coral overhanging a cove, Jap

machine guns open up on the New Zealanders as they wade in.

"We went for our bloody lives as fast as we could lick," says Lance Cpl. Ashley Petty, Auckland commercial traveler (you'd call him a traveling salesman), a couple of hours later. "There was more spray coming from my propellers than a PT." The LCI, and LST and two U.S. Navy barges return the Jap fire.

For the rest of the day there is little to remind us of war except the protective



This Kiwi was doing some poetic speculating during the first night the Jap bombers came over.

Hellcats, Corsairs, Aircobras and Warhawks skimming the palm tops, and the "pow-phsss" of the New Zealand 25-pound artillery shells flying overhead toward Jap camps. The enemy deserted their barges, ending the scrap. Nobody is hurt. The rest of invasion day is so beautiful it's weird. Between spells of hacking away at the hard coral earth, digging slit trenches for the rough night that probably lies ahead, men go bathing or lie nude in the sun on the white sand beneath coolly stirring palms. "Ah, she's beautiful, isn't she?" exclaims Pvt. Frank Black. Wellington accountant "It's not a bad war. Oh, this is marvelous."

Others chop open green coconuts with machetes and drink the milk. Everything is fine, observes Pvt. Neil Palmer, Taihape (N. Z.) farmer, except for the American K rations we'll be eating for two or three days. "I hope you don't mind us saying it," he tells me, "but we New Zealanders can't eat your K rations."

Meanwhile the Seabees have gone to work. A party begins surveying for the fighter strip at 0945, three quarters of an hour after their landing. By 1315, Seabee bulldozers have smashed landing ramps out of the steep coral banks, and 2,500 tons of material are ashore. By nightfall the Seabees have built four miles of roads for our 90 vehicles, ranging from one-ton jeeps to 37-ton shovels and tractors.

Since Green Island has no fresh water the Seabees are evaporating 200 gallons of drinking water an hour from the lagoon brine by noon of D Day, and 30,000 gallons

a day within another 48 hours.' In five days the Seabees have the airstrip site lit up at night like a ball park, as they press the work on a 24-hour basis. The 500watt lamps are turned off only when the sirens whine the Conditions Red, sending the Seabees scrambling for trenches scooped out along their way by mechanical ditch diggers. The first night falls, and one U. S. Army intelligence officer, a captain, puts on pink pajamas. At midnight the "chug-chug-chug" of the first Jap plane comes over. There is a moment of silence as the pilot cuts his motor and dives to release his eggs. Then the motor catches on again and the plane chugs off. The bombs crash with a "thwud, thwud" as the men squeeze low in their jungle slit trenches and foxholes.

Ten or 15 planes come over after that, with six Conditions Red and five hours and 50 minutes of alerts. Only 25 bombs are dropped and nobody is killed, although five natives are wounded.

The second day brings tropic bliss again; the second night only two bombs are dropped during four Reds, and night fighters from Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, shoot down two of the Jap twin-float, single-engine raiders. On the third night there are no attacks at all.

We owe our freedom from effective Jap air assault to the neutralizing of Rabaul. In two months of preparation for the Green Island seizure, 2,200 tons of bombs have been dropped on Rabaul and 790 Jap planes shot down there. In the three days our convoy was at sea, bomber strikes against Rabaul

were stepped up to three a day. For good measure, the seldom-used Jap strip at Borpop, New Ireland, only 90 miles from Green Island, has been knocked out.

A disgusted knot of Kiwis gather around a typed sign tacked onto a palm tree on the second day: "As there is ample opportunity at the moment, shaving will be carried out daily, except where permanent beards are desired."

"No bugles yet," groans one New Zealander. "We'll get them tomorrow."

The same day a second clash with the Japs occurs, when a patrol combing Sirot Island - located at the break in the ring that forms the atoll - comes upon 22 Japs. In the first flurry five New Zealanders and 10 Japs are killed. In the game of nerves that follows as the two parties lie silent and invisible for scores of minutes at a time, the remaining Japs are destroyed with no further New Zealand losses. Across the lagoon, at Tangalan Plantation, two Seabees on bulldozers attract sniper fire but are not hit.

The friendly black natives of the atoll lead the way to three Jap 20-mm antitank guns - fine portable automatic weapons, well-blued and oiled. They are near the Pokonian Plantation point at "Blue Beach," where they could have taken a nasty toll of boats and men.

Infantry battalions set out to comb the Green Island group and LCI gunboats, *LCI(G) 67* and *70*, tour the shore-line, destroying barges and one enemy PT boat, already

damaged but seaworthy enough for Japs still hiding to have used in making their escape.

The final push is set for 0730 of the fifth morning. Natives report that the Japs have concentrated at an abandoned American mission at the southern end of the ring.

Working through the jungle from Pokonian and Tangalan, the infantrymen by the fourth night have advanced within 1,000 yards of the mission on either side. According to native estimates, the New Zealanders have the Japs outnumbered, but the attack may be costly; in the jungle, very often the only way to locate a hidden enemy is to receive his fire.

On the morning of the drive, riding south over a road freshly cut by New Zealand engineers, we see many signs of the retreating Japs. At one point there is a conical hole, 30 feet deep, which the Japs have been using as a hide-out safe from all except direct hits from the air and sea. "It's dark, dreary, damp," says one correspondent examining the hole. "It smells of Japs. They're like rats; they like it there. No New Zealander would live in a place like that."

At 0730 the New Zealand artillery opens up behind us, its shells going over with a long whistle. A rooster crows and birds chirp in the trees. Half a dozen little brown pigs block the road, stare a moment, then wobble hastily away.

When we overtake the rear guard of the advancing battalion, the Kiwis are having their inevitable tea. "We had a bit of a lively night," says Lance Bombardier Cyril

Colbert, a Dunedin (N. Z.) salesman. "Five or 10 Japs got through A Company, so look out in the next 500 yards." The Japs have a heavy machine gun.

Our party of five leaves its jeep and starts ahead on foot. The jungle is like many American forests, except that the underbrush is thicker and deeper than a Nebraska cornfield and the ground is springy with dampness. The sweet fragrance of frangipani and the musky odor of mice touch our nostrils as we pick our way over roots and logs.

We catch up with the advancing Infantry and join the middle of three lines proceeding in Indian file 30 feet apart. As we pause, Pvt. Leonard T. Botting of Balclutha, N. Z., tells how he was attacked during the night. He has to be coaxed because he considers the whole thing faintly ridiculous. An unarmed Jap stepped across his foxhole, apparently in search of a weapon. Botting grabbed the Jap's leg. The Jap snatched an entrenching pick from a tree trunk and dug it into Botting's back. Other Kiwis opened fire and one was sure he caught the Jap as he went over a steep cliff.

The three lines resume the advance and then stop suddenly with much shushing for silence. "Hold it," comes the order down the line; something has been heard toward the lagoon. "New Zealanders on the left—pass it on" comes the explanation, and the march continues forward.

In a native garden another halt is called. Signalmen who have been unreeling a

telephone line hook it up and an officer speaks to the rear: "Movement slow. Bearing 22 magnetic straight for the mission. Yes. Yes. Aye."

The New Zealanders, finding that brush clicks on the metal of their steel helmets, have put them aside in favor of dark green slouch hats. These are pulled into as many designs as there are imaginations in the group—fedoras, natty pork pies, shapeless masses of hills and valleys. The Kiwis are wearing jungle suits like those our marines use—a splatter of browns and greens with yellow dots the size of silver dollars, so that the effect is of jungle shrubbery pierced by stray sun rays.

The soldiers pass a dozen fresh shell holes ringed with shattered bushes and trees. In one hole the smoke still clings to the brown earth. The signalmen hook up again and more news is relayed from group to group down the lines. "Latest report is the Japs have dug in behind the mission. Pass it back, will you? We have 900 yards to go."

Signs of the Japs multiply. Here is an opened wood packing case with a Jap label; there is a Jap officer's hammock, a flat rectangle of woven poles suspended from vines. Now we pass a half-dozen Jap enlisted men's lean-tos, cramped open-sided sheds with a slanting thatch roof set on four poles. They don't look very dry. Under one is a Jap sleeping mat, a nice souvenir, but our minds are not yet on souvenirs.

"About 750 yards to go," the lines are told at the next rest. "The Japs have dug in. The

30th Battalion has surrounded the mission and formed a perimeter." "Chin up, chap." quips one Kiwi, "The ice cream will be along in a minute." Suddenly the columns rustle with startling news. The 30th is in the mission and the Japs have vanished.

Moments later we are on the mission terrace. The ruins are tributes to Allied marksmanship. A 10-foot crater gapes in the lawn. The chapel and residence are wrecks of twisted wood and iron. Under one unshattered section of the main house is a huge store of Jap supplies in excellent condition.

There are 100,000 rounds of ammunition, 150 rifles, five more 20-mm antitank guns, six machine guns including one in a leather case, three or four mortars, a large number of gas masks, quantities of rice flour and various canned foods.

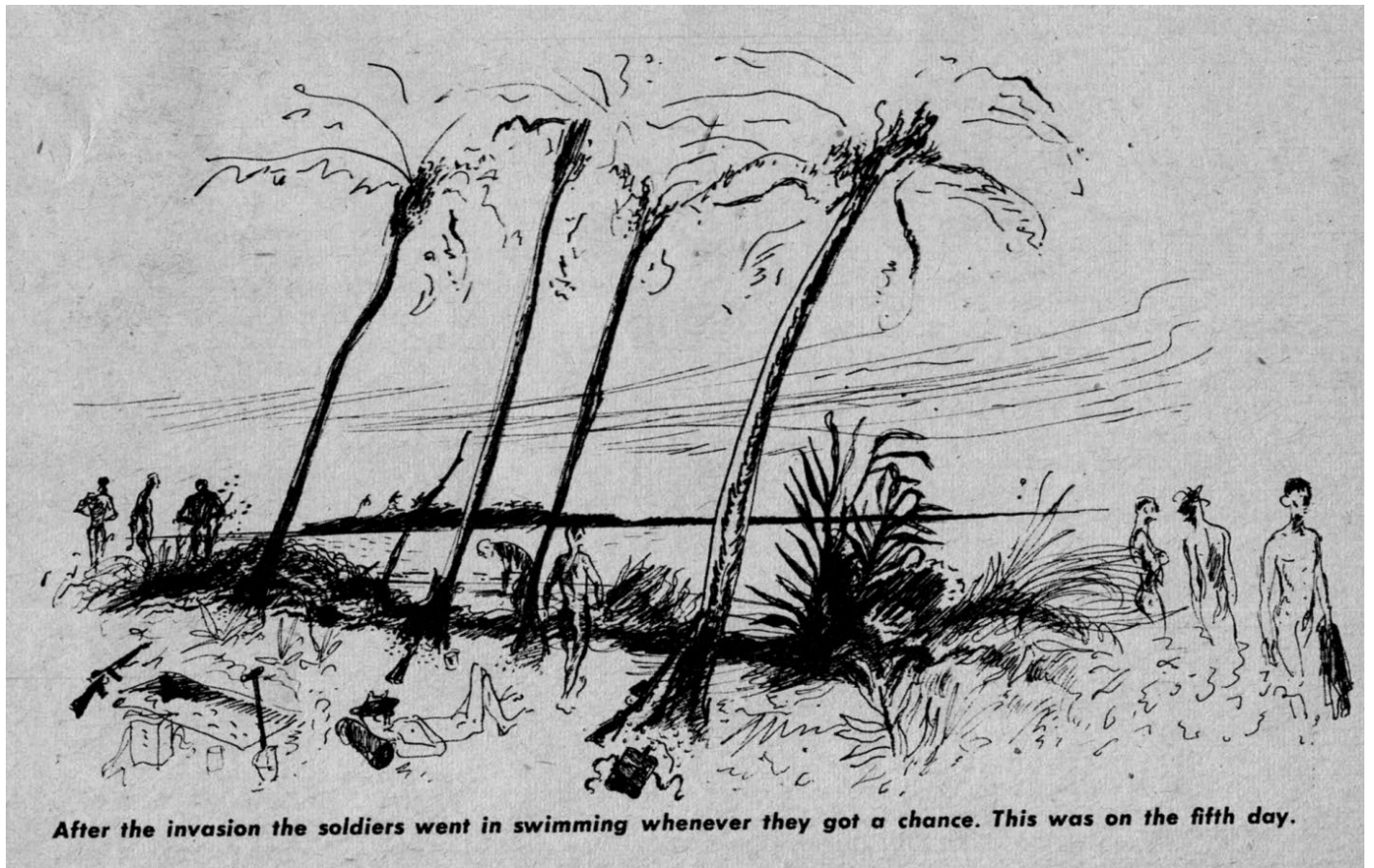
We find also three wireless sets, an outboard motor, a broken Singer sewing machine that probably belonged to the mission, and many Jap packs, split-toed shoes and good leather hobnail brogans. One New Zealander, already souvenir conscious, finds a Jap officer's leather case containing a wrist watch, fountain pen and clothing.

Evidence that the Japs, too, are souvenir minded is found in a Jap haversack whose shoulder straps bear the insignia of the New Zealand South Pacific Expeditionary Force, a pin with a crown, ferns and the word "Onward." "Off one of our dead blokes at

Treasury, I suppose," says a New Zealander. With the capture of the mission, Green Island is formally declared secured. With that come the post-mortems.

Something was wrong with the Japs here. They were all marines, husky, square-built fighters with a reputation similar to that of our own marines. They were well-fed, well-provisioned and armed with enough guns to have worked plenty of damage on the troops, ships and tanks that were brought in against them. At the mission they had an ideal spot for defense, coral cliffs dropping on three sides and a narrow neck of land across which a perimeter could easily have been thrown.

True, the odds were against them, but only five months earlier at Vella Lavella, the Japs fought to the end against even heavier odds. Although half-starved, they refused to escape through the barge route the Japs had running to Kolombangara. Two Japs on Vella even dared to attack a 13-man New Zealand machine-gun position, although one of the Japs was armed only with a pen knife. The conclusion seems inescapable that the Japs on Green Island, having learned of the Allied push up through Treasury and Bougainville, were convinced that they were soldiering in a lost cause, and were therefore ready to quit. But it has yet to be shown that the journey down the rest of the road to Tokyo will be anything but hard and bloody.



**LCI(L)Flotilla Five
Report of Operations
12-17 Feb 1944**

15 February 1944

0145 General Quarter sounded

0252 3 Sticks of Bombs dropped close
aboard port column of LCI's Div 2 no
damage or casualties resulted

0645 Bombs dropped 250 yards to port.

Uncertain number of dive bombers
approached from astern and port side.

Destroyers opened fire, 1 plane observed
brought down.

0750 Passed through south channel LCI's

443, 444, 445, 446, 359 and 360 proceeded
to assigned beaches at the east side of the
lagoon. Com LCI(L) Flot 5 with LCI's 433,
434, 435, 436, 357 and 358 proceeded to
assigned beach at Pokonian Plantation

Commander Smith used words sparingly.

References

Operation Squarepeg 2017 by Reg Newell,
Historian 3rd New Zealand Division My
Thanks to the Author for personally bringing
my attention to this Operation.

Yank Magazine Down Under The Army
Weekly April 21 1944

Photos Credits U.S. Navy



(facing page above) The LCI(L)'s of Flotilla 5 in two columns. In the near column the picture is taken from LCI(L) 444 with 359 directly astern the other unidentified LCI's in the column are the 446 359 and 360. This column landed at Tangalan Plantation on the east side of the lagoon.

(facing page below) The LCI's have entered the lagoon and making the turn to approach Pokonian Plantation the western side of the island. The LCI's are LCI(L) 433 Flag with Commander Smith, Com Flotilla 5 aboard then 434 435 436 LCI(L) 357 and 358 are not in the picture. A TBM Avenger flies air cover above the column. Two LCVP launched from the APD's in the first wave are exiting the lagoon.



LCI(L) 444 landed elements of the Third New Zealand Division at Tangalan Plantation on the Eastern side of the Lagoon on Nissan Island, Green Islands.

Operation Squarepeg Summary:

In the 4 weeks from February 15 to March 15 1944, the Third Amphibious Force in the Solomons

transported 16,448 men and 43,088 tons of supplies in 7 echelons of landings in the Green Islands

Last Kamikaze Found by LCI(L) 818 Crew Member

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

On August 15, 1945, the world rejoiced. The war was over. Japan had surrendered.

The Emperor's message was confusing. It never used the word surrender. His sentences rambled in an Imperial dialect many did not understand. "We have decided to effect a settlement of present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure." This wording left many citizens asking what it meant. For the radical war lords, it meant one thing. They'd go down fighting. Orders to lay down arms had not been received yet. Navy Captain Kozono addressed his air group. He told them surrender means the end of our national essence. To obey will be treason. Join me to destroy the enemy. His men shouted back their famous war cry, "Banzai."



Admiral Matome Ugaki poses for a final photo before he leads a final kamikaze mission.

At the Oita Air Base in northern Kyushu a similar scene was unfolding. Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki had commanded the naval kamikaze units. He was resolved to

die fighting. He had sent thousands of young men to certain death in kamikaze attacks. "I must pay for it," he said. Ugaki was preparing for the final kamikaze mission. He ordered three planes to be made ready. He wrote a farewell in his diary and called for vengeance. Ugaki arrived at the air base carrying a Samurai sword and wearing an airman's uniform with no insignia. When he approached the airfield there were 11 Judy bombers and 22 crewmembers waiting for him. He asked the men if they were all willing to die with him. Every hand went up. He joined one of the two-man crews, and they took off for Okinawa. Four of the planes developed mechanical problems and returned. At 1925 hours Ugaki radioed back that his plane was diving toward a target. Nothing more was ever heard from the remaining seven planes.

No reports of successful kamikaze attacks showed up in any action reports that night. It's likely they were all shot down by anti-aircraft fire or night fighter planes.

However, a log entry for *LST 688* did mention kamikaze attacks at Iheya Island north of Okinawa. It reported two planes dove on ships along the beach. One crashed in the water and the other hit the shoreline. The following morning a landing craft crew reported finding a plane crash on the shore of a nearby island. The smoldering remains of a cockpit held three mangled bodies. A short sword was found nearby. This report remains unofficial and unconfirmed.

Another amphib, *LCI(L) 818* was beached on Iheya. Crew members from that ship had witnessed a plane crash nearby during the night. Motor Mac Phillip Thompson from Indiana walked down the

beach the following morning to investigate the wreckage. He found a plane with two bodies. He cut some strips of cloth with lettering from the pilot's uniform. He couldn't read it but hoped to find somebody who could.



The LCI(L) 818 was beached on Iheya Island when the war ended. This photo shows the ship after the war, stripped of most guns and serving as LSI(L) 818 training ship.

Many years later Thompson still had the pieces of cloth with Japanese lettering and no idea what they said. He decided to donate them to the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. WWII author, Dan King examined the pieces. He is fluent in Japanese and was able to translate the writing on the materials. They read, "Chief Petty Officer Goto," and "103rd Attack Squadron." This confirmed that the pilot was CPO Takao Goto and his navigator was Ens Ken Isomura." This provided proof that the plane Phillip Thompson had found was part of the last kamikaze attack of the war. CPO Goto's plane was among the seven planes that flew to Okinawa with Admiral Matome Ugaki's final mission. It was not Ugaki's plane.

Kamikaze pilots were always honored with a special two rank promotion posthumously. This was not an officially

sanctioned "special attack mission." As a result, Ugaki and the 14 others do not appear on the official roster of kamikaze war dead.



Admiral Ugaki addresses kamikaze pilots before a special attack mission.

Phillip Thompson's hunch that the strips of cloth might be important was correct. It helped put final closure to the terror and destruction inflicted by the kamikazes. And it completed the final chapter to the life of Admiral Matome Ugaki.

Sources from the books "Blossoms from the Sky" by Dan King and "Kamikaze Terror" by Jeffrey R. Veeseemeyer

Biography of Gerald W. Atherton 1941-1946 – SM3/c USS LCI(L) 759

By Gerald W. Atherton with copy editing by Jeff Veesenmeyer



LCI(L)s 758, 687, and 759 in a nest at Shanghai, China 1945

“December 11, 1985: The contents in this transcript are written by me (Gerald Atherton) some 40 years after it happened. All the contents are true and accurate to the best of my ability. The story begins at age 16 when I was a high school junior in Maize, Kansas.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: This transcript is 118 pages long written in long hand. It was donated to the University of South Carolina in a collection by Lt(jg) O.H. Wienges Jr. The University scanned the pages and added it to their digital collection in 2022. It was discovered by LCI Association member Greg Erickson of Plymouth, MN. He forwarded the link to me. It’s one sailor’s memories of life on board an LCI during WWII. I’ve edited it down to an *Elsie Item* (two issue) length story. I used quotations only when a statement is completely in Atherton’s words. When not in quotes or set off by his name in bold, it is his story rewritten by me.

“One Sunday afternoon, December 7, 1941, my brother, and I rode our bicycles to the town depot. Some older guys were rolling dice on the freight dock. Another boy came running over and told us he heard on the

radio that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. I knew about Pearl Harbor because another friend had joined the Navy and I was writing to him at Pearl. I remember the look on my father’s face when we rode home and told

him the news. We listened to the radio the rest of the day. The next day at school we only talked about the attack. Our teacher brought a radio into class to listen to the President's speech."

During the next couple of years Atherton and his family experienced rationing, recycling, and war production. Everyone became involved in the war effort. Buying sugar, meat, and flour required ration stamps. Automobile tires could only be repaired or retreaded. His mom volunteered at the church to make scarves and bandages. The Atherton family all had jobs at a plant making tail assemblies for Beechcraft planes and wood/fabric gliders. After graduating from high school in 1943 Atherton worked at the aircraft plant nine hours a day, six days a week for 35 cents an hour. He received his "Greetings" letter soon after he turned 18.

His induction was at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This was the first time he'd been more than 60 miles from home. The bus ride was exciting. After a day of shots and physical he was told he was qualified for Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Coast Guard. He chose Navy. He was sent to Navy recruiting in Kansas City, Missouri to take the oath, then took a troop train to Farragut, Idaho.

"The troop train had 13 passenger cars all filled with recruits, recalled Atherton. "I watched all the small towns, farms, and mountains go by. We ate in the dining car. Everyone had a great time. We arrived in Farragut at 4 a.m. and marched to the chow hall. Then we double timed it to the barracks, to the buildings for uniforms, to the barbershop, and everywhere we went

somebody was hollering at us constantly. We met our company commander, and he showed us how to fold and stow our uniforms and gear. The first day of boot camp turned out to be the worst day I ever spent." Atherton described the next three months as grueling too.

Learning semaphore seemed impossible. There was a colored flag and hand position for every letter of the alphabet.

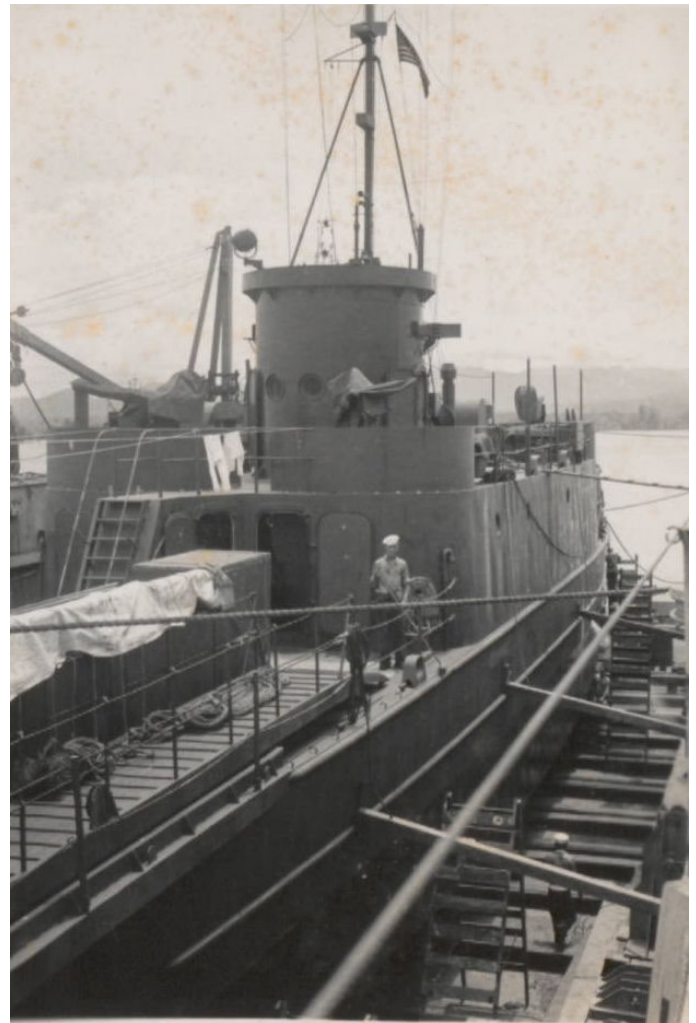
Atherton scored high on aptitude and was assigned to signalman school. Memorizing the signal flags and how to use them was agonizing at first. He went to class eight hours a day, six days a week. He learned the International Morse code and how to send and receive messages with semaphore flags. The dots and dashes for Morse Code were tough. Learning semaphore seemed impossible. There was a colored flag and hand position for every letter of the alphabet. There are flags with different colors, designs, and positions to spell out words. Then there were flags to send up on the halyard for course changes and turns. Eventually it all made sense and came together. He liked being in a specialized rating. His pay went up to \$66.00 a month. He had \$18.75 a month sent home for a \$25.00 War Bond. That money went towards a car after the war. He still had plenty of money. Cigarettes were six cents a pack, a Coke was only a nickel, and a big serving of ice cream was 15 cents.

Atherton would eventually love standing signal watch up on the conning tower. Watching sunrise, sunset and the stars while at sea was glorious for a kid who was used to looking at the wheat fields of Kansas.

“This little ship could have been placed on the bow of the carrier that I had just gotten off”

After graduation from signalman school, Atherton was put on the aircraft carrier USS *Bougainville* headed for Pearl Harbor. “I was on the ocean. Something I had only heard about and read about before. I cannot find the proper words to describe how that beautiful deep blue water appeared to me. Looking straight down from the fantail when the ship was cutting through the water and the water hadn’t filled up the gap yet, it looked like a giant scoop made in a big jar of grape jelly with a giant spoon.”

Atherton arrived at Pearl Harbor in July of 1944. He recalled seeing the overturned hull of a ship still submerged after the attack from two and half years before. He was directed to a small boat. “It was after dark and the bay had hundreds of ships of all kinds and sizes. I’ll never know how the man piloting the boat found my ship in the dark” wrote Atherton. The *LCI(L) 759* was tied up in nest of other LCIs. “This little ship could have been placed on the bow of the carrier that I had just gotten off! But it turned out to be a very worthy ship.”



Signalman Atherton stood his watches on top of the conning tower of LCI(L) 759.

The next day Atherton got the grand tour of his 158’ x 25’ flat bottomed ship and the crew of 30 enlisted and officers. *LCI(L) 759* was in the 7th Amphibious Force attached to 7th Fleet under Admiral Kinkaid. He spent the next two weeks at Pearl Harbor. The base was bulging at the seams with service men and women of all branches. In downtown Honolulu there was not enough room to walk on the sidewalks. They walked in the streets. Everywhere he went, there were lines. He waited a half hour to get a stool at a restaurant to order a hamburger. He stood in another line a block long. He asked the guy in front of him, “What are we waiting for?” “A table for a beer,” was the

answer. Once inside with a pitcher of beer and two glasses, he and his buddy were told, “Hurry up and drink, others are waiting for your table.”

On 17 August 1944 *LCI(L) 759* left Pearl Harbor in a convoy of 30 to 40 ships. Atherton’s main duty was to stand signal watch on conning tower, four hours on and eight hours off. He was ten feet above the gun deck with a view of ocean in all directions. He had learned his signal work well and was glad to be putting it to practical use.

“Nights were beautiful with moonlight coming across the water from the ship to the horizon. Some nights it was the darkest night you can imagine. And sometimes it would rain and rain. I stood so many watches in the rain my fingers got wrinkled,” Atherton recalled. “Sunrise and sunsets on the ocean can sometimes bring out colors that you had never seen before. The sunlight could cause a reflection from the dark blue Pacific onto the clouds, and it would color the clouds a pastel purple and pink and pale orange.” Phosphorus wake and phosphorus balls are a phenomenon Atherton would see at night. “On the darkest nights when you couldn’t see how the waves were breaking, we’d see phosphorus balls. A ball of light like a grapefruit that appeared to fly out of the air three or four feet from the bow. It could mess with night vision if looked directly into.”

About halfway to New Guinea they stopped at a tiny island of Funafuti in the Ellice Island chain. These dots on a map were part of Great Britain. They anchored *LCI 759* in a lagoon. A small sailboat came out with three natives aboard to transport

half of the crew ashore. The natives moored the boat 50 feet from shore and jumped out with bare feet to wade into the beach.

Atherton: We took off our shoes to follow them but couldn’t walk on the coral without tearing our feet up. We put our shoes back on and waded in as they laughed at us.



LCI 759(L) officers take a photo opportunity with the Funafuti tribal officers.

The island was about a mile long with 30 or 40 copper skinned men, women, and children living in thatched huts. They wore sarongs wrapped around their waist. They spoke very little English, so communication was mostly hand language. The island was covered in palm trees. One man took a rope tied in a loop and twisted it into a figure eight. He put a foot into each opening and the rope against a palm tree trunk to begin climbing. Atherton was amazed at what the native did next. “He used this rope along with his hands to hop up to the top of the tree. It was 60 to 70 feet high, and he did it in just seconds.” There were 14 sailors below. The native picked 14 coconuts, dropped them point first to the ground. After coming down he cut the point off so they could each drink the milk. “In spite of the hot sun, the milk was cool,” Atherton

remembers. “After we drank the milk, he broke the shells open so we could eat the coconut.” They spent several hours on the island, then sailed back to ship so the rest of the crew could go ashore and experience Funafiti hospitality.

The crew rested at Funafiti for three days. Then they upped anchor and joined another convoy heading for Milne Bay. Along the way they participated in the usual drills for general quarters, man overboard, and gunnery.

“One night I had the midwatch,” Atherton recalled. “The sea was heavy, as I stepped out of the hatch my foot slipped, the ship leaned, I slid down the deck and under the safety line. My arms went up just in time and I was able to pull myself back on board.” Atherton had no life vest. It was dark. The sea was rough. They were in shark infested waters far from any land. Being in a convoy meant no ships could pull out of formation. “Had I gone over, I’d have drowned. I wouldn’t have been missed for 10 or 15 minutes after not showing up for my watch.” Atherton realized he was very lucky.

At sea they wore their work dungarees. To wash their clothes, they’d fill a three-gallon bucket with warm water, add some soap, slosh clothes around, rinse them, wring them out and tie them to a rail to dry. One of Atherton’s friends decided to find an easier way. He tied a pair trousers to a rope and tossed it off the fantail at sundown. He left the pants out there on wash and rinse cycle until sunrise the next day. Atherton chuckled, “When he pulled them back in about all he had left was a shredded rag. He never tried that again.”

It was a nine-day trip at 12 knots from Funafiti to New Guinea. On long trips at sea the fresh water was rationed. Only a short freshwater shower was allowed every other day. The pumps could be turned on for sea water showers.

“For a sea water shower, you had to use soap called Saltwater Soap” and Atherton says, “I usually skipped this.” During this trip Atherton took the signalman third class test and passed it. He was now SM 3/c. His pay grade was upped to \$78 a month.

“I ate a meal once on the 758 and I could tell that their meals were not as good as ours.”

LCI(L) 759 arrived at Milne Bay, New Guinea on 9 September 1944. Most of the fighting in New Guinea was done and considered secure. But whenever at sea they were on constant lookout for mines, submarines, and enemy aircraft. They patrolled up and down the coast of New Guinea for the next two months providing various duties. They picked up troops and moved them to other bases up or down the coast.

They were always with the *LCI 758*. At night the two ships would tie up together or beach alongside each other. Atherton remembered, “I ate a meal once on the 758 and I could tell that their meals were not as good as ours. *LCI 759* had two pretty good cooks. They did a lot with what they had to work with.”

Without refrigeration they only had powdered milk, powdered eggs, canned fruit, vegetables, and meat. Fresh bread was baked daily. They had plenty of pineapple juice and navy coffee. The ships would stop at a supply base to pick up crates of food that were just stacked outside on shore. Occasionally a refrigerated ship was available for frozen meat.

The natives of New Guinea were very black. In remote places they looked like what you would imagine a tribe of headhunters in the jungle to be. In primitive areas the women had nothing on from the waist up and small children never wore a stitch of clothes.

One day an outrigger canoe was paddled out to Atherton's ship. It was about two miles from shore. The paddlers were two young boys about five or six years old. They handled the outrigger in heavy surf like old pros.

It was not unusual for the temperature to be 120 degrees. When beached at night hot steam could be felt coming out of the jungle. It was more comfortable to anchor a half mile out from the jungle. It was safer too. Malaria was a concern. The pharmacist's mate passed out little yellow pills each day. The quinine pills kept everyone on *LCI(L)* 759 from coming down with malaria.

For R&R they'd beach the ship, and each sailor could drink two beers on shore. They found an open area one time that had been cleared for softball with bases. They drank beer and played a ballgame.



A beer party and ball game at a jungle clearing. Their catcher even had a mask.

Nearby, Atherton found a fortified Jap foxhole. There were shell casings inside. He was tempted to jump in and take a few souvenirs but recalled a sign at one of the supply ports. BEWARE OF BOOBY TRAPS. "I didn't get the shells, because I might have jumped down on a land mine."

Atherton used his signal work several times a day. Semaphore could be used within 1,000 yards. Blinker light could be seen six to eight miles in the daytime. At night they would rely on radio transmission. It kept him ready for what was about to come.

In early November *LCI* 759 received orders to refuel and resupply. They would be joining a convoy for the Philippines. On 4 November 1944 they left New Guinea for Leyte. The large convoy included a flotilla of LCIs, a flotilla of LSTs, cargo ships, transport ships, destroyers, and a couple of cruisers. Along the way they drilled for general quarters, abandon ship, damage control and gunnery. The invasion of the Philippines had begun and so did frequent attacks against the invasion force by kamikazes. When general quarters was

sounded at night, Atherton could get from bunk to battle station, in under 60 seconds.

For gunnery practice a plane would fly along with the convoy towing a target banner. Ships would open up with 20mm, 40mm and 5-inch guns. Every third round from a 20mm was a tracer. The 40mm and 5-inch shells would explode leaving puffs of smoke they called ack-ack. Gunners were scored on their accuracy. Atherton recalled, "The sound from all those guns was intense."

On 12 November the convoy entered San Pedro Bay. "The bay was simply full of ships...hundreds of them," remembers Atherton. They were assigned an area with *LCI 758* to drop anchors. They had just secured the ship from being underway when anti-aircraft fire began. The bay was under flash and alert status. Enemy planes had been spotted. Pretty soon the ack-ack puffs filled the sky. "I saw my first Jap zero make his kamikaze suicide dive on an LST," recalled Atherton. "He dove into it amid ship, a large explosion and fire marked where it hit. I heard someone on the radio calling for medical help. There were a lot of sailors killed and wounded on the LST. Another kamikaze hit a cargo ship. Atherton watched the ship burn all day and into the night. It finally settled to the bottom of bay. Only the masts remained out of the water.

Atherton: "I made entries into the rough deck log that included speed, course, and what happened that day. Then it hit me. I began to reflect on what I had just witnessed. This wasn't a news reel at the theatre. This was war. And I was right in it. I got scared and my knees shook. I felt weak

and my heart raced. What I had experienced was just the beginning."

Atherton would witness many Jap pilots die. He saw one plane get hit in the air and disintegrate into thousands of pieces. Sometimes a plane's wing would be shot off and the plane would spiral into the sea. Some pilots would miss their target and crash into the sea.

Atherton: "On one occasion, I was watching a zero making a long shallow dive at a ship. He passed not far from *759* – I could plainly see the pilot's head with my binoculars. He came in low 20 feet off the water. As he neared the ship he was after he swooped up and tipped his wing over sharply trying to crash on the deck. He flew over it barely missing the ship, rolled, and tumbled on the top of the water, breaking into pieces just the other side of the ship." Prayers were answered on that ship. Atherton believes he witnessed over 300 kamikaze attacks at the Philippines.

On 5 December 1944 soldiers from 77th Infantry Division came aboard *LCI(L) 759*. They would be invading Ormoc on the western shore of Leyte. The city was defended by about 30,000 Japanese. The invasion force included a flotilla of *LCI(L)s*, a flotilla of *LCI(R)s*, destroyers, and several cruisers. At 0700 on 7 December the cruisers began a shore bombardment with their 8-inch guns. This was followed by *LCI* rocket ships. They approached a few hundred yards, turned parallel to the beach, and launched their rockets. The tree line disappeared in a cloud of smoke, fire, and dust. At 0800 the *LCI(L)s* began their landing approach.



Troops of the 77th Infantry Division load-up on LCIs for the Ormoc invasion.

Atherton: “We were still out a half mile from the shore, but the concussion from shells and rockets made me aware of the power of the bombardment. I could feel the vibrations of it all on my pant legs. I never was part of the practice landings. I didn’t know what to expect. My practice landing was the real thing.”

After the bombardment ceased the LCI(L)s moved in toward the beach. A black cloud of dust drifted out from the shore. The smell reminded Atherton of a farm field being plowed. The captain told Atherton to keep a watch on *LCI(L) 758*’s stern anchor. He couldn’t see the beach and didn’t want to drop their stern anchor too soon. They could run out of cable and lose the anchor for retracting off the beach.

Atherton: “I told the captain that I couldn’t see 758 which was just 100 yards away. We

were all scared, not knowing what to expect and not able to see what was ahead. The captain finally gave the order to drop the stern anchor. Shortly after, I received a message that we lost our anchor. The dust settled more, and we could see the beach.”

As soon as *LCI(L) 759* hit the beach, the side ramps were extended, and troops began rapidly unloading down the ramps. Atherton felt everything was going like clockwork. He was so curious he stood up in the conning tower fully exposed to see his first landing. A rifle shot cracked from the trees. Soldiers crouched for cover. One man fell. A sergeant went into the trees blasting with a machine gun. He returned smiling. He got the sniper. The soldier who had been hit by the sniper was wounded in the arm. Atherton realized he would have made a perfect target for the sniper. Lesson learned during his on-the-job training.



LCI(L) 759 crewmembers pose on a ladder in the work uniform of the day...shirtless.

The LCI(L) 759 was able to retract from the beach without the stern anchor. They got turned around and headed back to San Pedro Bay with the invasion convoy. On their way back to base they were attacked by 14 Zeros. This was more terrifying than the landing. They were all kamikazes. A destroyer was hit twice and sunk. The convoy fought kamikazes all the way back through bad weather and no sleep.

Hundreds of ships were firing at one Zero that was high up. He was looking for a big target.

Resupply at San Pedro Bay was always hazardous. Tied up to another ship for fuel, water, ammunition, or food left both ships vulnerable to air attacks.

One morning *LCI(L) 759* was tied up in a nest of three LCIs. The middle ship had obtained frozen meat from a refrigerator ship and was passing boxes of meat to the other two. A big breakfast was being planned with all three crews attending. Then a “flash red alert” came on the radio. The whole bay erupted in gunfire. Hundreds of ships were firing at one Zero that was high up. He was looking for a big target. Three ships together looked good. He tipped his wing and began a steep dive. Atherton was at his battle station on the conning tower. He saw an officer head down the ladder to the gun deck for cover...or escape. Atherton considered following him. They might need to go over the side to escape the plane.

Atherton: “Something inside of me told me I couldn’t desert my post in time of battle. I looked up at the plane. I could see the wings getting bigger, the round part of the engine growing larger. That is when before my eyes appeared the yellow telegram with my name on it, addressed to my parents telling them I had been killed in action.”

When people expect death at any moment, they might see loved ones or something from their past. Atherton saw what would happen soon thereafter. He could do nothing but watch. Suddenly fire appeared on the port wing of the plane and then the other wing blazed too. The pilot, lost control of his dive, couldn’t pull out, and crashed a couple hundred yards from the ships. The gunners on the center LCI ship were credited with the shoot down. The men on all three ships were within five seconds of death. Breakfast with fresh meat was served to three jittery LCI crews that day. When a hatch door slammed shut everyone dropped their forks and jumped.

Five days after Ormoc *LCI(L) 759* loaded up for the next invasion at San Jose on Mindoro. The convoy was bigger than Ormoc. In addition to LCIs and LSTs they had four cruisers and eight destroyers. Did the Japs know they were coming? While enroute a kamikaze attacked one of the cruisers. Atherton was on signal watch. The convoy was passing several hilly islands.

Atherton: “I heard a big explosion and saw a huge column of black smoke coming from one of the cruisers. A Jap twin engine plane with two 500-pound bombs hedge hopped over the hills and crashed onto the deck of the cruiser. Not a single shot was fired. A third of crew, about 400 men were killed.

The invasion force less one cruiser arrived at San Jose 0700 on 13 December 1944. They held positions waiting for orders. Then the roar from a squadron of B-25s could be heard. They came in at tree level along the beach and dropped strings of bombs. Several minutes later the cruisers and destroyers opened up with their barrage. The LCIs headed in before the smoke cleared and not knowing what to expect. "If anyone had been on that beach, I don't see how they could be alive now," thought Atherton. Luckily, they received no resistance during the unloading. "This was especially good because all the destroyers and planes covering the landing had made a speedy exit. That was scary."

Atherton: "After we retracted, I looked back and saw an LST that had moved in to shore to unload supplies. The ship was nothing but fire from bow to stern. A kamikaze had hit its target. When I looked seaward, I saw a dozen planes coming straight toward us at about 15 to 20 feet above the water. There is no way I can describe the fright that I experienced then. About the time the lead plane was within range of the 20mm guns it swooped up and banked to his left. I could see the meatball insignia on his wing. The other eleven planes had US stars on their wings. The lead US plane fired, and the Jap plane exploded."

After the convoy returned to base, Atherton learned how close they came to being in a sea battle. The destroyers and air cover were ordered to intercept a Japanese reinforcement convoy of 13 ships. There were seven troop-transports and six destroyers heading for the exact same landing beach. "We were just two or three

hours ahead of them." Atherton recalled. "Had we all met there at the same time, I would not want to even guess as to what would have happened. Our guys sank all 13 of the Japanese ships during the invasion."

One night, *LCI(L) 759* was returning to base at San Pedro. They were taking the shorter route through the narrow passage at Surigao Strait. This was the same location where RAdm Oldendorf ambushed and destroyed the Japanese raiding force with the classic "Crossing the T" naval tactic during The Battle of Surigao Strait. Night orders for Atherton were to only use the small two-inch blinker light. The larger 12-inch light could attract shelling from a Japanese shore battery. From about two miles ahead, Atherton saw the challenge code letter "W" from a blinker light. He immediately grabbed the 2-inch light and blinked the night's return code the letter "I."

Atherton: "The letter "W" blinked again only this time the dots and dashes forming it were faster. By this, I could tell the signalman up ahead was suspicious. We were taught in signal school that if the proper reply isn't given, the challenging ship is authorized to fire. I told the officer of the deck he would have to let me use my 12-inch light or we would be blown out of the water. He said I would have to take responsibility because the captain's orders said not to use the larger signal light. I told him I would because the ship ahead undoubtedly had their guns trained on us. Using the 12-inch light I signaled the letter "I" and we passed on. The other ship was a patrol craft guarding the straights. Had a Jap gun been on shore they would have opened up on us."

After returning to base at San Pedro Bay, *LCI(L) 759* remained in the area for several weeks. They were assigned to transport personnel around the Bay, delivering mail, and garbage details. Air attacks had diminished considerably since the invasion of Mindoro. It was a more peaceful and relaxing time. On January 4, they took on several army officers, news reporters and a couple of army signalmen. They had also been supplied with food that seemed much better than normal for an LCI crew. Something big was up.

Atherton: “Our captain was in the conning tower with me. We had Army Colonel LaFollette also. After waiting for a time our captain asked, ‘What are we waiting for?’ The colonel replied, ‘We are waiting for the *Old Man* to get aboard that cruiser.’ I think he meant the boss. Sure enough, a small landing type with several helmeted men in it pulled up alongside the cruiser. General MacArthur was in the boat, and he was piped aboard the cruiser.”



General Douglas MacArthur

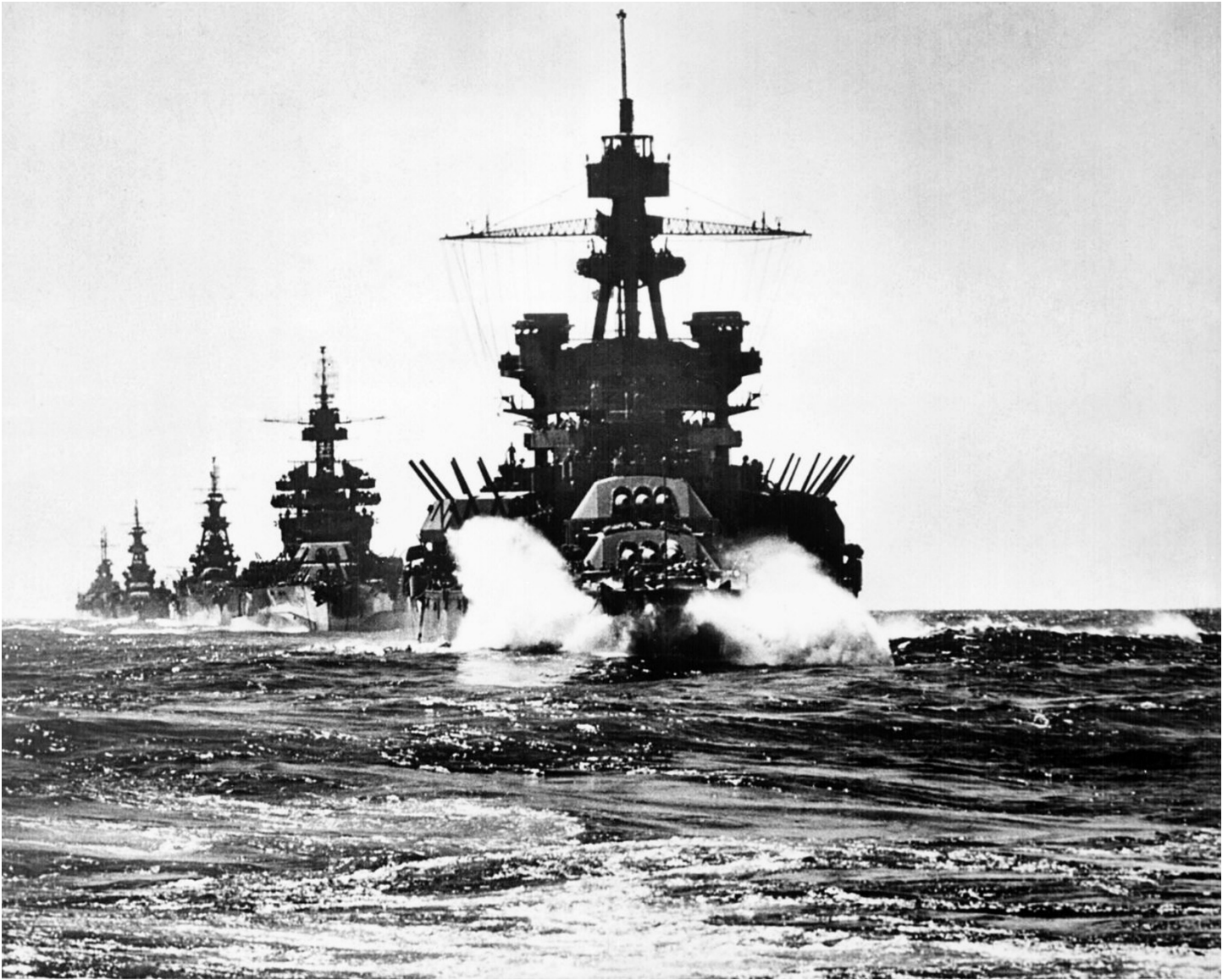


General Yamashita had 152,000 Japanese troops on northern Luzon. He prepared strong defenses around Lingayen Gulf.

A few minutes later *LCI(L) 759* moved out to sea and began forming into convoy formation. They were underway for the invasion of Lingayen Gulf on the island of Luzon. This was the biggest convoy so far in the Pacific War. The army officers they had on board were some of General MacArthur’s aides. The newsmen were war correspondents. The army signalmen had the job of setting up a radio transmitting station on Luzon. It had to be up and operating when our troops liberated Manila, so General MacArthur could broadcast his speech. “One good thing in our favor was our passengers,” recalled Atherton. “This meant we wouldn’t have to go in on the beach this time but stay out in the bay while the landing was taking place.”

Biography of Gerald Atherton to be continued in the next Elsie Item. It will include the Luzon invasion, MacArthur headquarters at Dagupan, V-J Day celebration, typhoon in East China Sea, Shanghai liberty, Formosa occupation, and going home.

Invasion of Luzon begins on 4 January 1945



A massive convoy of warships arrived at Lingayen Gulf on 6 January 1945. The lead ship is the USS *Pennsylvania* (BB 38) followed by USS *Colorado* (BB 45), and heavy cruiser USS *Louisville* (CA 28). There were 875 ships in the invasion fleet, the largest armada to date in the Pacific War. The army had 203,000 soldiers who would face 262,000 of Japan's best troops.

LCI 759 transported MacArthur's staff and correspondents to the invasion. This kept them from the danger of the landing beaches but not from the sea and air. Japan still had over 500 aircraft in the Philippines. Most became kamikazes. Japan also launched a new terror at Luzon. The Shinyo boats ("Sea Quake") would crash at high speed into ships after dark. They were packed with explosives.

See part two of Gerald Atherton's experiences on *LCI(L) 759* in the next Elsie Item.

Presidential and Naval Unit Citations awarded to Amphibious Ships during WWII

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9050

(as amended by the President June 28, 1943)

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, it is ordered as follows:

The Secretary of the Navy is hereby authorized and directed to issue a citation in the name of the President of the United States, as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction, to any ship, aircraft, or other naval unit and to any Marine Corps aircraft, detachment, or higher unit, for outstanding performance in action on or after October 16, 1941.

Presidential Unit Commendations no medal

USS LCI (G) 70	5-10 Nov 43 - Bougainville Landings. 5-9 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landings.
USS LCI (L) 1:	Jul 43 - Sicily.
USS LCS (L) 31:	4 May 45 - Okinawa.
USS LCS 51:	16 Apr 45 - Okinawa.
USS LCS 57:	12 Apr 45 - Okinawa.
USS LCT (5) 30:	6 Jun 44 - Normandy, France.
USS LCT 540:	6 Jun 44 - Normandy, France.

Naval unit Commendation no medal

USS LCC C-60149:	Sept 44 through Apr 45 - Anger, Palau; Leyte; Lingayen, Luzon; and Okinawa, Ryukyus.
USS LCI 10:	9-15 Jul 43 - Invasion of Sicily. 16-25 Sept 43 - Salerno Landings. 22 Jan - 3 Feb 44 - Anzio Landing. 5-23 Jun 44 - Invasion of Normandy.
USS LCI (6) 64:	24-29 Oct 44 - Leyte Landings. 15 Dec 44 - Mindoro Assault. 3-9 Jan 45 - Lingayen Operation.
USS LCI (L) 2:	10 Jul 43 - Invasion of Sicily. 10-22 Sept 43 - Salerno Landings. 22 Jan - 19 Feb 44 - Anzio Landings.
USS LCI (M) 356:	18 May 45 - Okinawa, Ryukyus.

USS LCI (R) 31: 18 May - 22 Sept 44 - Western New Guinea.
 20 Oct 44, 12 Nov 44 - Leyte Landing.
 7 Dec 44 - Ormoc Landing.
 9 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landing.
 7 Jun 45 - Borneo Operation.

USS LCI (R) 24: 22 Apr - 30 Jul 44 - Western New Guinea Operation.
 15 Dec 44, 9 Jan - 2 Feb 45 - Luzon.
 7 Jun - 1 Jul 45 - Borneo Operation.

USS LCI (R) 73: 22 Apr - 22 Sept 44 - Western New Guinea.
 22-27 Oct 44 - Leyte Landing.
 7 Dec 44 - Ormoc Landing.
 9 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landing.

USS LCI (R) 338: 2-7, Jul 44 - Western New Guinea Operation.
 4 Sept 43 - Eastern New Guinea Operation.
 20-26 Oct 44 - Leyte Landings.
 13-15 Dec 44 - Mindoro Landings.
 9 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landings.
 15 Feb and 16 Feb 45 - Capture of Manila and Corregidor.

USS LCI (R) 464: 17 Jun - 21 Jul 44 - Marianas Campaign.
 20-24 Oct 44 - Leyte Landings.
 6-10 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landings.
 26 Mar - 6 Apr 45 - Okinawa Operation.

USS LCI (R) 659: 19-23 Oct 44 - Leyte Landing.
 7-18 Jan 45 - Lingayen Landings.
 19 Feb - 3 Mar 45 - Capture of Iwo Jima.
 18 Apr - 14 Jun 45 - Okinawa Campaign

The crew of LCI(G) 70 with a Japanese torpedo that hit their ship, lodged in the engine room, but did not explode. They received the first Presidential unit Commendation for amphibious landings at Bougainville 5-10 November 1943.



LCI Member Attends V-E Day Event at WWII Memorial

Dixon Hemphill was among five WWII veterans who were honored at the WWII Memorial in Washington, DC on May 8, 2023.



Dixon Hemphill accompanied by a volunteer at the WWII Memorial on VE-Day 2023.

Ensign Hemphill served on *LCI(G) 514* during the last year of the war. He stayed on with the Navy as a reservist for 17 years and retired as Lieutenant Commander.

Now at age 98 he is fulfilling his bucket list. Next trip will be Normandy and the D-Day Memorials there. He is hoping to be fully healed from a car accident soon and go back to running for exercise and races.

The World War II Memorial honors the 16 million who served in the armed forces of the US, the more than 400,000 who died, and all who supported the war effort from home. Symbolic of the defining event of the 20th Century, the memorial is a monument to the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of

the American people. There are 4,048 gold stars at the memorial. Each represents 100 American who died in the war.

Located on the National Mall in Washington, DC the memorial is free and open 24 hours a day to visitors. It was dedicated in 2004.



Each veteran was introduced during the program. Hemphill is seated left of the podium.

Service, Sacrifice, Unity, and Victory

Through stone architecture and bronze sculptures, the World War II Memorial recognizes the ways Americans served, honors those who fell, and recognizes the victory they achieved to restore freedom and end tyranny around the globe.



Officers and Executive Board

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!

Officers

Robert E. Wright Jr.

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

John M. France

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

Richard Lovell

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

Lisa Bittle Tancredi

Secretary
Daughter of Robert D. Bittle
WWII, LCI (L) 944
3605 Woodvalley Drive
Baltimore, MD 21208
(410) 852-3928
LisaTancredi944@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Joe Flynn

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

Stan Galik

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

Dr. Michael A. Pikos

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

Chaplain Emeritus

Abe Laurenzo

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

Directors Emeritus

Rod Scurlock

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

Gordon Smith

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

Historians

John M. France

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

Dennis Blocker

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

Attention LCI Veterans and Associates

We need your stories now. Write Call or email John France.

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



VE-Day at the World War II Memorial in DC:

Five veterans salute the presentation of colors on May 8, 2023. Dixon Hemphill (seated in wheel chair) was able to attend the annual observance of war's end in Europe. The 56 granite pillars represent our 50 states and 6 territories. See more photos and details inside this issue.