

Joint Issue of

ELSIE ITEM

and the

DECK LOG OF THE USS LCI(L) 713



Official Newsletters of the USS LCI National Association and
The Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum

ISSUE 123

WINTER 2023

Original Flag Flown on
USS LCI(L) 713
Commissioning Day



Inside this Issue...

- LCI-713 restoration & updates
- Gerald Atherton Memoir Part 2
- Amphib Training Center Revisited



The Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum

Home of the LCI-713

MISSION

The Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum (AFMM) is an Oregon Non-Profit organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the USS LCI 713. Our Mission is to preserve the history of the Amphibious Forces in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, to educate the public on the rich naval maritime heritage that the Amphibious Forces have played in our nation's history, and the importance of preserving historic naval ships for future generations.

INFO

www.amphibiousforces.org
www.facebook.com/lci713

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AFMM Board of Directors

Please feel free to contact any of us with any comments or questions.

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The "Deck Log of the LCI-713" is the Official publication of the AFMM. Membership is available to anyone interested in our mission of historical preservation and education. For more info please visit our website

This publication is a collaboration of the USS LCI National Organization and the AFMM.

Notice: The AFMM or USS LCI National Association are not responsible for the accuracy of the content. There is an immense amount of research that goes into some of these articles and we rely on the diligence of the author of each article.



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



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

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

Latest Happenings

A Message from the Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum

Dear AFMM and LCI National Association members and followers:

Things are happening at the AFMM and on the *LCI-713*.

First, we would like to introduce two new directors to our board:

A big welcome to Robert Wright and Steve Adams. We thank Robert for taking on this new role which is in addition to his current role as LCI National Association President. Steve Adams, a current LCI crew member and restoration expert extraordinaire is also upping his game as an AFMM director. Pete Stolpe had to resign from the board due to personal issues but remains onboard as a crew member.

A bit of progress on our hull repair: We have met with Vigor Industrial Shipyard which has agreed to provide us with a quote to perform drydocking, hull cleaning, survey and possibly some repair on the most problematic areas. This is good news, and we will use the estimate to start a new fundraising campaign.

Did you see that cover? Another fabulous historical flag was added to our displays from the commissioning of the *713*. Thank you to our friends at the Millbury Massachusetts Historical Society. And stay tuned for an article in the next issue on all of our historical flags.

Checkout the restoration article in this issue for more info on the new flag as well as an update on other recently acquired historical artifacts. And, of course, all the great progress made by our crew.



The 713's commissioning flag flies again.

The support we receive from our membership is outstanding and we thank you all for your support. We are counting on it and together we will get that *713* in shape for the next generation. Please help us with a donation in this season of giving.

We wish you all fair winds and following seas!

Hope you have a wonderful Holiday,



Rick Holmes

AFMM President

Yes, I want to help launch the LCI 713!

Please fill out the form and return with your check or we accept secure donations online via our website's donation page: www.amphibiousforces.org

For more information, call Rick at 541-226-5427 or email afmm@amphibiousforces.org

Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum
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Note: If you don't want to use the form, it's ok.. However, please keep us up to date on your contact info for our mailings. Thanks!

Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____ to help get the LCI-713 underway.

- Lifetime Membership \$500 Lifetime Veteran \$100 Annual Member \$20
 Lifejacket Memorial \$250 (We will contact you for an inscription)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____ Vet (Y) or (N) _____

LCI or Ship affiliation _____ Branch/rank _____

Other ways you may show your support:

- My company offers a matching gift program.
 Contact me about setting up an automatic monthly direct donation.
 Send me information on including a legacy gift in my estate plan.
 I would like to volunteer.

My Gift Is: In Memory of In Honor of

Person's name _____

Comments: _____

Observations from Officers Country from Robert E. Wright Jr.

Important Notice to All LCI Veterans of WWII

During my most recent trip to the WW2 National Museum this summer, I was asked if I knew any WWII Veterans who would be willing to participate in a video interview about their experiences during The War. The WW2 Museum indicated that they would be willing to send their video interviewer to any veteran's hometown to conduct these interviews. Veterans, if you wish to have your participation in history documented for future generations to view, this is your opportunity to tell the story of your LCI and your fellow LCI crew members. We have already had several Association members commit, and we would like to have as many more as possible to cover all the various LCI operations in WWII.

Family Members of Living LCI Veterans please encourage them to participate if you feel that they are able. Please call me to begin the process. My phone number is 517-548-2326.

Membership Renewals: 2023

I am writing this message in the middle of October 2023. After editing and printing, and the US Mail cooperation, we hope you received this Winter 2023 issue before Thanksgiving so it could be shared with family.

I will mail the individual 2024 membership renewal notices around the middle of November. Please take the time to return yours when it arrives in the mail. Your membership is the reason the USS LCI National Association continues to honor the service of the LCI sailors during WWII since 1991.

To the Crew of the Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum

I am in awe of your dedication to LCI history and the continuous efforts to restore and maintain *LCI 713* as a floating Museum. I hope that the members of the USS LCI National Association will continue their generous support of your worthy endeavor this year and into the future.

As 2023 comes to an end, and 2024 begins...

We can look around our world and see the insanity that seems to have gripped nations everywhere. As individuals, we can only continue to hope and work for a better tomorrow for ourselves and our loved ones. I wish everyone, Good Health, and all the Happiness that the Holiday Season brings.

Robert E. Wright Jr., President



Gator Gossip

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

In our last issue of Elsie Item Fall 2023, I included a painting of *LCI 814* on the front cover. This reminded Bill Armstrong Jr. of his paintings of *LCI(G) 455*.

His son sent me this email...

I'm sitting at the kitchen table with my dad, William L. Armstrong. He is 98 years old, and we believe he is the last surviving crewmember of LCI 455. We were reading Elsie Item magazine and he told me that he had painted two pictures of his ship...I am sending a picture of the two paintings and of him. Maybe you can use them for the next edition or give me a call and I will get you hooked up with dad on a phone call.

Bill B. Armstrong (son)

I decided to do both – use the paintings in this edition and talk with Armstrong by phone. See the back cover and a four-page article in this issue.

I spoke to “Big Bill and Little Bill” (how the family keeps them apart) by phone in September. Armstrong’s memory is good, and he was able to relate many of his stories about serving on *LCI 455* from 1944 to 1946. His son repeated my questions for his dad who has some hearing loss after nearly a century of life and a pounding from naval guns.

After forty plus years of teaching, Armstrong needed a hobby in retirement. He took up painting to capture some of his

memories from the Navy. Those paintings and his story in this Elsie Item will provide his family, including two great grandchildren, some of their genealogical history.

The Armstrong’s have served their country well. William Armstrong Sr. served in the Army during WWI. During WWII he worked in a munitions factory making the explosive RDX.

Armstrong’s older sister Francis Armstrong YM3/c, served in the Navy 1943 to 1946 as a yeoman at Norfolk. His son Bill was a Lieutenant in USNR from 1978 to 1981. He was a dental officer stationed at Beaufort, South Carolina.

Sometimes a simple picture will jog the memory and inspire you to share a story with readers of Elsie Item and with your family.

This issue also includes the Deck Log of The USS *LCI(L) 713*. The volunteers at the Amphibious Forces Memorial Museum (AFMM) continue their restoration efforts on *LCI(L) 713*. See the photos of the work they’ve completed during the past year.

AFMM also shared a historical record of the Amphibious Training Base at Solomons, Maryland. Jerry Gilmartin visited the base this year and photographed many of the memorable locations for comparisons then and now.

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

LCI 713 Restoration Update

By Jerry Gilmartin

Work continues aboard *LCI 713*, especially with the nice summer weather we have experienced. New projects were both started and completed, and several interesting artifacts were donated to the ship.



An exciting project that Steve Adams has begun is the vent supply fan and duct mounted outside the bridge on the starboard side. Steve studied the drawings then designed and custom built a ductwork manifold.



Cutting the deck to install the new fan.

Then Steve had a fan housing cylinder made, then installed an “off-the shelf” fan inside. It supplies 2/3rds the airflow of the original fan. He worked with John, Rick, Jerry, and Mark to connect the fans electrical switch down inside the Messing and Clipping Room. Now the fan can be operated from inside the ship where the original controls were mounted!



The custom-made manifold mounted to deck.



Installing wiring conduit up through the deck.



The fan control box in process of being connected in the original location in the Clipping Room beneath fan.



The crew loading 1000 feet of wire cable onto the winch drum and connecting to anchor.

Next big project was also involving Steve! His stern winch engine rebuild and installation was completed, and the crew helped install 1000 feet of 3/4 inch anchor cable onto the drum. Now the *LCI 713* has a fully operational stern anchor winch! This event marks the completion of another milestone for *LCI 713*!



Steve explaining how he rebuilt the engine to Robert and Richard "The Wright Brothers" as Rick and Dave look on.



Steve tuning engine while Mark assists.

A fabulous artifact of the *LCI 713* history was received in June! John Ragno went to visit Millbury Massachusetts who sponsored our ship in 1944.



Here is Doug Bowker and Sharon Anderson showing John the flag while he was in Millbury. This flag was flown over USS LCI 713 on September 18, 1944. the day of Commissioning as a U.S. Navy Ship of War

John did not ask for the flag explicitly, they decided to send it to us as a BIG SURPRISE after he had returned to Oregon.



The Commissioning flag returning to LCI 713.

The city leaders of Millbury presented the Sponsorship plaque to Captain Parris in 1944. The flag is not in the photo but would be just above the center of the back row of people.



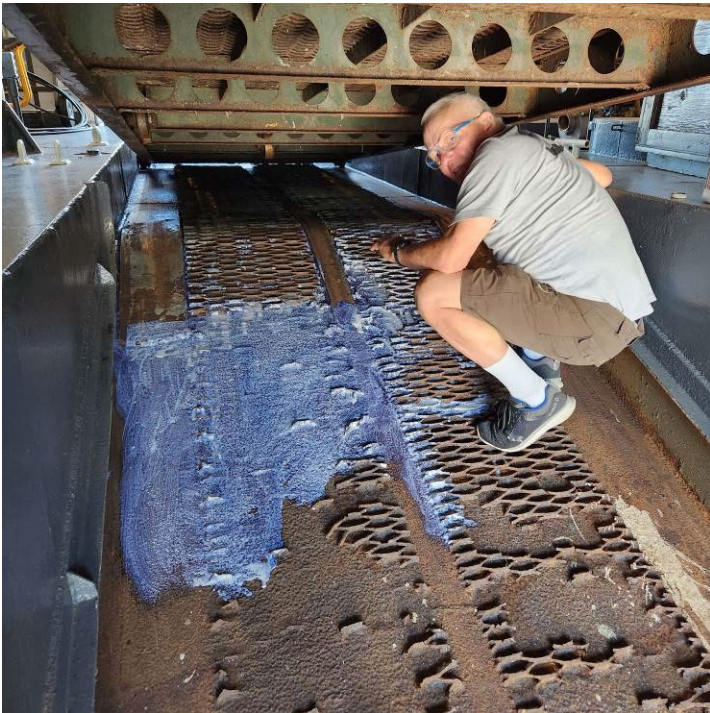
USS LCI(L) 713 Commissioning Ceremony. The man presenting plaque is Doug Bowker's Grandfather Harold, of Millbury Savings Bank.

Some major preservation work was completed on the bow ramp in July.



Pictured are Rick and John are busy needle gunning rust from the grating.

There were some dirty jobs completed!
Thanks to the crew for all the hard work!



Mark crawling beneath the bow ramp to paint on Rust Converter "Corr-O-Seal" Primer before applying a new coat of paint.

As always there are lots of things to be built and painted! Steve created the spar at his shop using the ships blueprints.



John paints the wooden Towing Spar (aka "Fog Buoy") that helps the ship maintain spacing in a convoy.



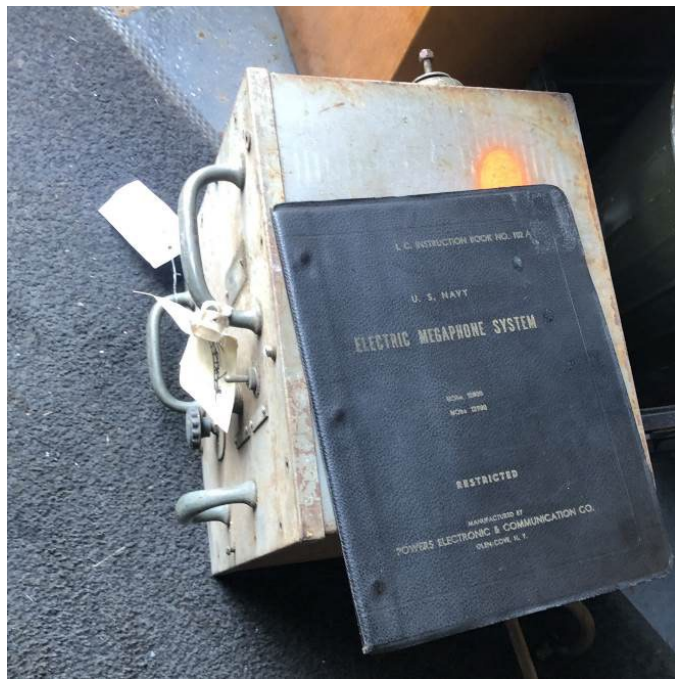
Still other restoration was done on the Conn Seats by Lin and Steve.

We were fortunate recipients of a complete set of LCI 350 class Ships Blueprints.



Shown above, John and Steve are cataloging and storing the blueprints for future use.

Now comes a story of several artifacts that literally ‘fell in our lap’ and it involves players from four other historic vessels. Battleship USS *Texas* BB35 in Galveston, Submarine USS *Pampanito* SS383 in San Francisco, USCG11 (83366) *Tiburon* (D-Day Rescue Cutter) in Seattle, and *PT658* in Oregon. It all started in Galveston, where upon a visit to see the Battleship *Texas* in drydock, Jerry met with radio room restoration volunteers Konrad and his dad Bill Werzner. They donated an Electric Megaphone Amp to the LCI that Konrad had obtained in his vintage electronics searches.



Amp with Ops Manual on LCI 713.

A week later, Jerry visited Seattle to visit Matt Levy of *USCG11*, moored on Lake Union. While touring the boat, Jerry saw two electric coffee urns exactly like the type needed for our Galley. Matt had one extra and had obtained them recently from Rich Pekelney, Curator of submarine *Pampanito*'s surplus artifacts. Matt realized that the sub had two extras of the exact type of Electric Megaphones that were needed for *LCI 713*! So, Matt helped us call Rich to

ask for the megaphones. A week later, Pampanito Museum agreed to donate the megaphones! So, we traded Matt one Coffee Urn in return for one Electric Megaphone! Everybody wins!



Jerry with the coffee urn from Tiburon.



“New” Coffee Urn mounted in the 713 galley! As seen in the old photo above the Urn.

Mark still wants to refurbish it a little and install the glass sight tube (stored inside) and a new top handle.

Next was the trip to submarine *Pampanito* to meet Volunteer Rich Pekelney.



Rich in Pampanito's workshop showing the two Megaphones and portable amp he donated to LCI 713.

Now we had to take the megaphones home and find somebody who could test and repair them to working order! Meet Bill Holeman, USS *PT658* crewman volunteer, who is an amateur tinkerer and "electronics wizard".



Bill tested the vacuum tubes inside of the amps and supplied working tubes for those missing. Now both Megaphones and amps are tested good.



Officer on LCI Bridge shown using Electric Megaphone (Photo grabbed from LCI Training Film).



Amp shown connected to Megaphones for testing and microphone gain adjustment.



Here is the refurbished amp after installed on the LCI, modeled by crewman Bubba.

Bill Holeman also suggested installing a variac to reduce the operating voltage of the amp from 120 down to 100 volts AC. So, he donated one that Jerry just finished installing and testing. Note: Variac Dial and white label strip is just to the left of Marks headphones.



Jerry shows Mark how to turn on the amp. Notice red "Power On" light, also notice Megaphone and Cord storage basket below Marks elbow.



The final test, John Ragno was not sure how loud the Electric Megaphone can get! It is REALLY LOUD! See him holding his ears!

So that is the story of how four historic vessels all can work together and help each other get what they need to be successful museums! Thanks again to Konrad Werzner and his dad Bill on the Battleship *Texas*, BB35. Matt Levy and his crew in Seattle on USCG-11 *Tiburon*, Rich Pikelney Curator aboard WW2 Submarine USS *Pampanito* SS383, and Bill Holeman of USS *PT658* "Save the PT Boat" in Portland OR, our next-door neighbor!

Thanks to them and many others, we have a proper Coffee Urn in the galley, and a working authentic Electric Megaphone aboard the *LCI 713*! We also have a newfound working relationship with three other historic ships!

USS LST-325 Cruises Mississippi River in 2023

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

The last fully operational landing ship tank went on its annual cruise during August and September 2023. The *LST 325* is a museum ship with a home port on the Ohio River at Evansville, Indiana. This is the only WWII configuration LST afloat in US waters.



A volunteer crew of 45 embarked on a three-week cruise up the Mississippi River to Lacrosse, Wisconsin. They docked at Riverside Park in downtown Lacrosse for four days. Thousands of visitors were able to tour the ship.



The Wheelhouse is a bit roomier than an LCI.

Next stop was back down the Mississippi to Dubuque, Iowa. They docked at Mississippi River Walk in Dubuque from September 7 to 12. Again, throngs of people (including your Elsie Item Editor) from all over the Midwest flocked to view this historic ship.

Their final port before heading home was the Hannibal Riverfront in Missouri. Visitors to Evansville and other river ports pay \$15 for a one-hour tour. Thousands of people walk on the deck of this ship each year.

The revenue generated keeps the ship operational and afloat for the younger generations to see.



The volunteer crewmember (left) explained the workings of a 40mm gun mount.

LST-325 participated in landings at Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, and Normandy. The ship made 43 trips from England to the Omaha and Utah beaches. Repairs and upgrades had been made at Norfolk in preparation for the invasion of Japan. The war ended before *LST-325* was sent to the Pacific. For more information visit www.lstmemorial.org.

Amphibious Training Base Solomons Maryland

By Jerry Gilmartin

The story of the United States Navy Amphibious Training Base (USNATB) Solomons MD. Comparisons of then and now.

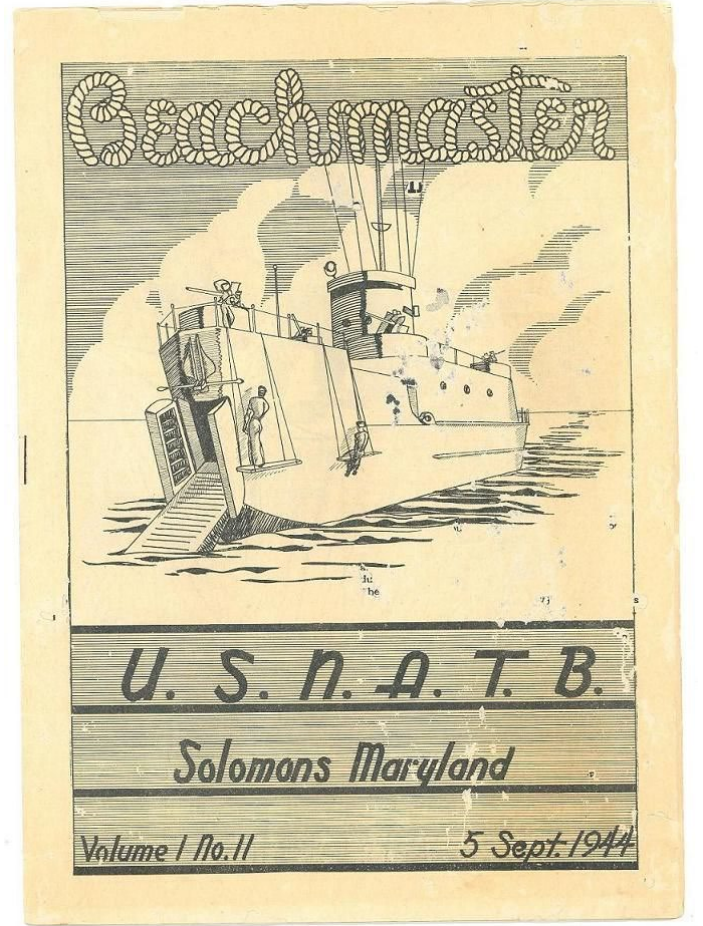


Logo of the "Gator" Newspaper

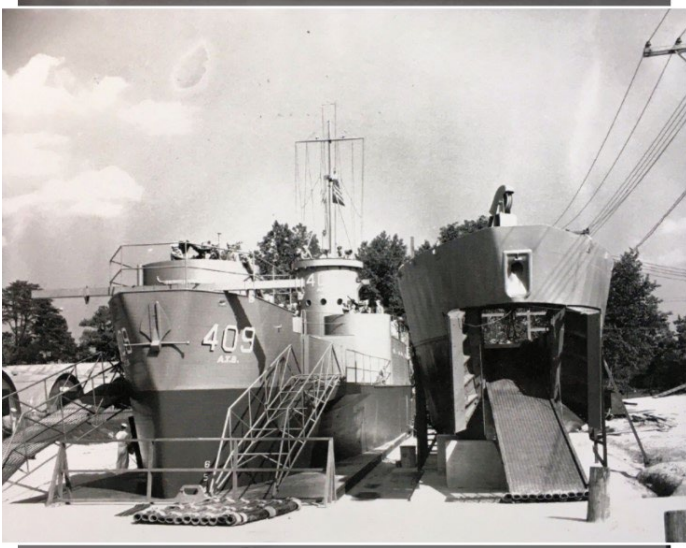
Establishment Order on July 3, 1942, by
Navy Dept
Official Activation in April 1943
Deactivated: Feb 6, 1945
Closed: April 1, 1945

This is an abbreviated story of the Amphibious Training Base formerly located on the Dowell Peninsula near the small town of Solomons, Maryland. It was only considered as an afterthought by the brass in Washington DC that the Amphibious Forces would need a safe area to train the thousands of men needed to crew hundreds of newly designed landing ships to be used in the upcoming invasions. James Worth, on his *LST493* website explains:

"The base suffered throughout its existence from the label of "temporary base." From the beginning in August 1942, many of the amenities normally afforded a Naval base were not developed at Solomons. At its peak on July 22, 1944, the base housed approximately 10,150 men for training in amphibious assault procedures. Power, water, barracks, and myriad other requirements were woefully lacking. Training curriculum was constantly evolving as amphibious concepts were brainstormed, initiated, and revised." James Worth's father Bill was a crewman on LST493 during WW2.



Newsletter cover from USNATB



Two wooden mockups of LCIs were built on base near the Seamanship School buildings.

The LCI(L) 409 Mockup was first “Commissioned” and placed in service on August 9, 1944, by Rear Adm. F.W. Rockwell and Base CO Capt. W.R. Cooke. The OIC of the Seamanship School, Lt. Paul Craska, welcomed the party on board the Mockup Ship.

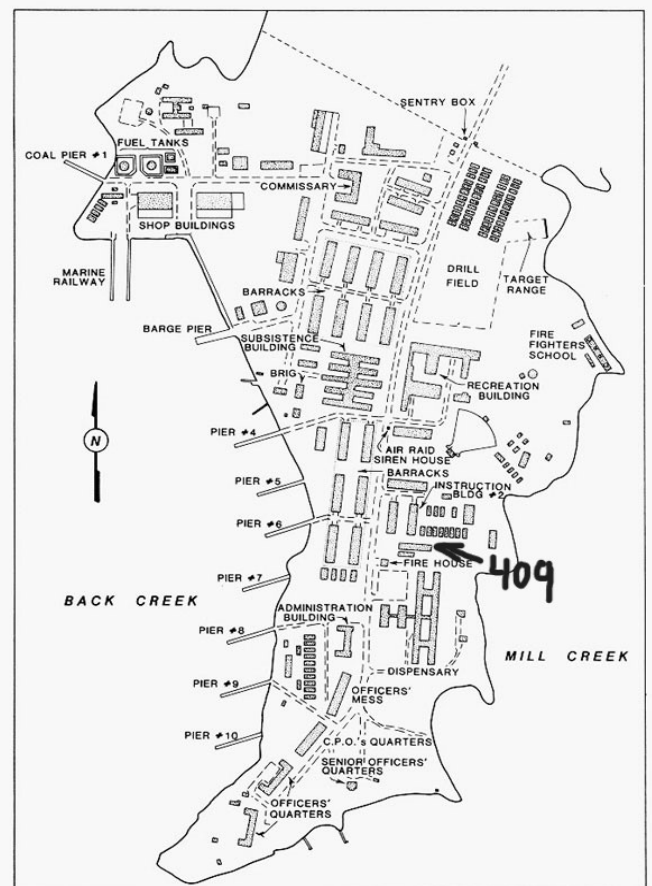


Mockups were used extensively to train crews in gunnery and seamanship. In the background you can see students outside the training building complex.

Map reference “409” (at the right) shows where the mockup site was located.



Gunners receive pointers on the operation of the 40mm Bofors cannon inside the Training Building at Solomons.



Adapted from "Map of Amphibious Training Base, Solomons, MD., Showing Conditions on June 30, 1945, P.W.D. No. 1185." Public Works Div., Potomac River Naval Command.



Aerial view of southern part of base in early 1944. LCIs can be seen at several piers.

The entrance to the former Base still has the Gate Sentry Boxes on either side of the road. There is also a Roadside State Historic Marker which is located 20 feet before the gate.



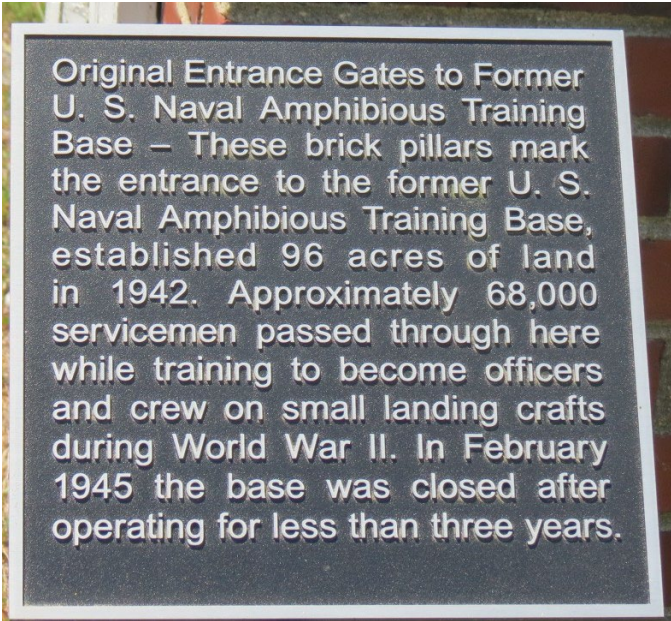
This sign states that 68,000 sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and soldiers were trained here between 1942 and 1945.



Modern day map of Calvert Marina shows some remaining base structures.



What the original Gate House looks like today.



This is the plaque near the Gate House.

Many of the old buildings on the base were torn down by the State in 1947 and proceeds used for State Projects. Very few original buildings remain standing today.



Recently, the Windward Harbor Townhouses and Mill Creek Condominiums were built and now stand over what used to be the Drill Field, Shooting Range and Fire Fighting School.

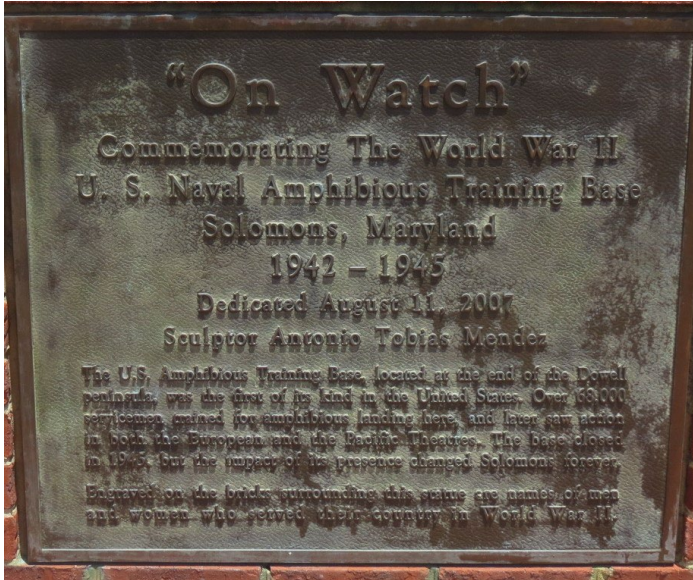


A notable remaining base building is the original Captains quarters, just off the south end of the main road.



The "On Watch" Statue and Memorial located on shoreline just south of Captains Quarters. The Statue was dedicated August 11, 2007 and was sculpted by local artist Antonio Tobias Mendez.

The “On Watch” Statue is surrounded by several dedication plaques and memorial bricks of veterans.



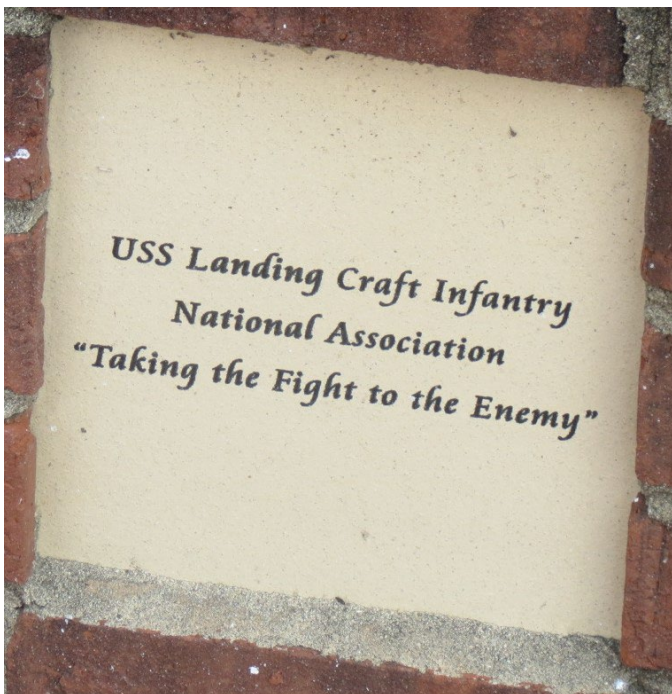
The statue sculpted by Antonio Tobias Mendez was dedicated August 11, 2007.



Admiral Sherman was the Chief Naval Operations (CNO) October 1949 until he died in July 1951. He was CO of USS Wasp in 1942 and Commander Naval Air Groups Pacific in 1945.



LCI 680 was in the Pacific Fleet LCI Flotilla 5 and was Commanded by Lt. William West and Lt. Gerald Rickels.



Here we see the plaque dedicated by the USS LCI National Association!

The memorial is in a very peaceful setting and has a great view of the channel to the harbor!

If you venture down to the old Piers, they have all been renamed and tailored for pleasure boat usage. The Charter Boat Pier used to be Pier 8



Looking out from Charter Boat Pier

The next pier just north of Charter Boat is now called Pier K, about in the same position as old Base Pier 7.



K Pier used to be Pier 7

The “new” Calvert Marina Office Building is near the head of old Pier 4 which is now renamed to covered pier F. Several adjacent piers are now covered, in the location of the old base “Barge pier” Now called “D” Pier.



Calvert Marina Office



Strangely surviving is the old base Brig, now used for Marina storage.

Up on the NE shoreline on Back Creek, is the still operating Marine Railway and Washburn’s Boatyard.



*Washburn’s Boat Yard Shop Building
Inside Washburn’s Shop Building. Note the Lifting Trolley I Beam tracks.*



Just north of the Washburn’s Yard Building is a boat storage facility with an old US Navy *LCM 8* being converted. Just on other side of old base fuel tanks.

Just outside of the Washburn’s Yard Building (labeled as “shop buildings” on base map) is the location of the old Marine Railway, now converted into a Travel Lift in active use.



*Bow ramp ex-Navy *LCM 8* being repurposed.*



This Travel Lift is in active use.



Fittingly, there is an Ex-USN Yard Patrol Boat USS YP 685 moored at Pier “BB” just east of the “On Watch” Monument. She was used for training US Naval Academy Midshipmen until retired in August 2012.



These unused Marine Railway Traction Motors could lift a ship on a cradle up a submerged ramp and out of the water.

Directly across the Back Creek is located downtown Solomon Island, where the Calvert Marine Museum and Lighthouse is located. Inside, they have a good display about the Solomons ATB, complete with a model *LCI 553* built and donated by Former USS *LCI* Association President John Cummer.



The LCI 553 model is displayed with a model LCS and LCT.



Also seen was this rare glass souvenir ashtray from the base.



The historic lighthouse just outside of the museum.



Other noteworthy items inside the museum include this 1944 base scrapbook donated by CMM Ronald Essex.

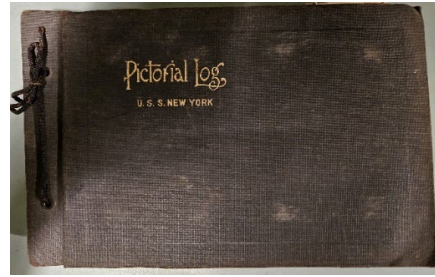


The final edition of the base Newsletter "Beachmaster" donated by CMM Jesse Trott.

Overall, the trip to see the "Cradle of Invasion" at Solomons was worthwhile. I was surprised to see they had so much inside the museum related to LCI. I really want to see inside that scrapbook!

Photographs from Another Age - USS New York 1916-1922

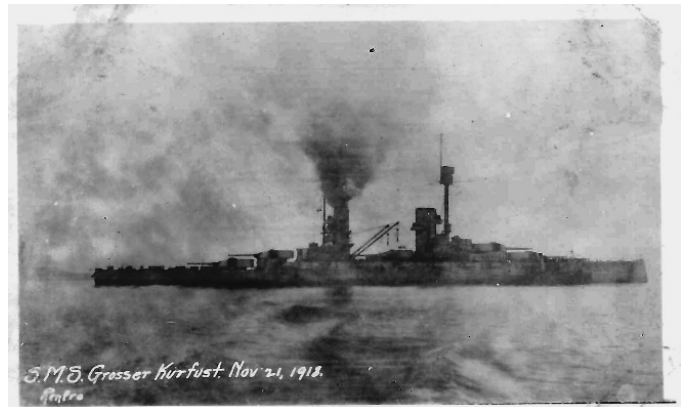
By David McKay



This magazine generally deals with amphibious warfare, particularly of LCIs, during World War II. Here is something completely different. The AFMM recently acquired four "Pictorial Logs" that were once the property of Yeoman 1st Class R.G. Wessell who was assigned to the battleship, USS *New York* (BB-34) during World War I. The photos show dates from 1916 to 1922.



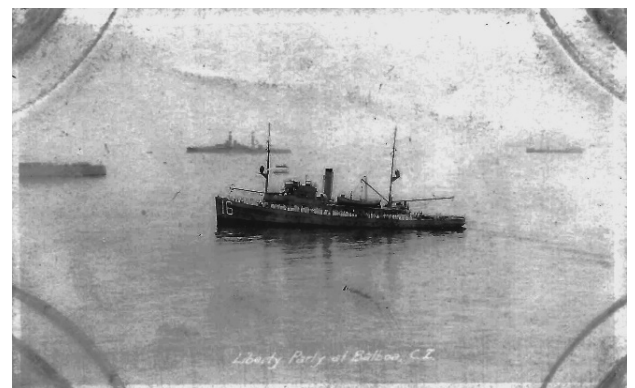
The picture above shows "Great Men" on board the USS *New York*. From Left, Admiral Sir David Beatty, (commander of the British Grand Fleet). Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman (commander of US Battleship Division 9 and later Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Fleet). The King-Emperor George V. Admiral Henry Mayo (Commander in Chief, US Atlantic Fleet). Edward, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII and after abdication, the Duke of Windsor).



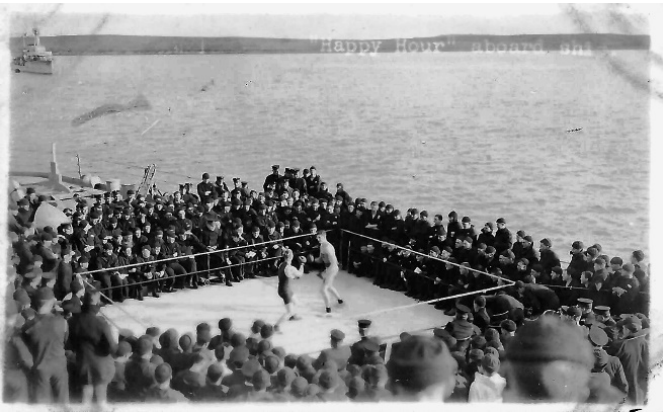
As a result of the armistice ending hostilities, the German High Seas Fleet sailed to the British naval base at Scapa Flow to be interned. This photo shows one of those ships, the German battleship SMS *Grosser Kurfürst*, anchored there. The German fleet was later scuttled to maintain its honor.



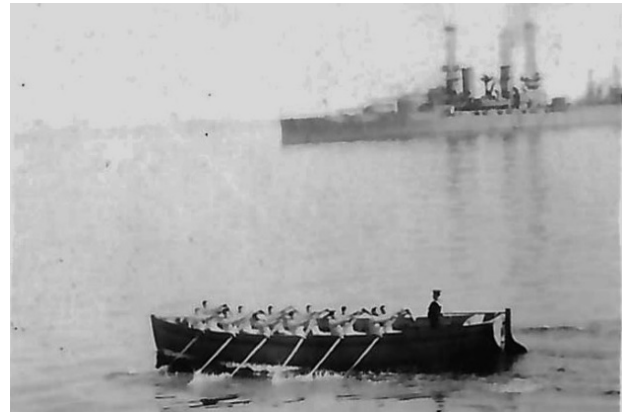
A cartoon from another era (Don't take offense)



USS *Partridge* (AM-16), a minesweeper, somewhere off Panama. She was new in 1920 and served for twenty-five years until she was sunk off Normandy in June 1944 trying to keep the transport area free of mines.



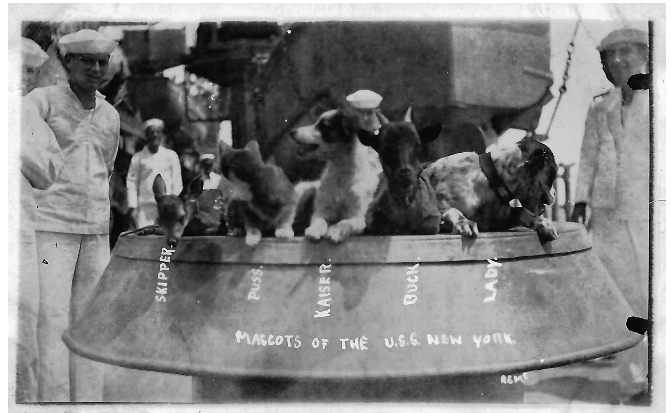
Boxing was a very popular sport in the Navy back then. While the Navy was in the United Kingdom during World War I, Edward Morgenweck, Storekeeper 1st Class, from USS Kentucky won the welterweight championship of the combined "Grand Fleet" in 1918.



In 1920, if you were going to conduct an amphibious landing, you would be going ashore in boats like this.



"I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here."



Most ships had one or two mascots. The USS New York had five: 3 dogs, 1 cat and a deer.



One of the gun crews with anti-flash protection.



There is always a Marine somewhere.

While these are pictures centers on the battleship *New York*, there is an amphibious warfare connection. The current naval ship bearing the name *New York* is a 25,000-ton amphibious transport dock that can carry up to 800 troops as well as vehicles to the enemy's shore.

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

By Gerald W. Atherton with copy editing by Jeff Veessenmeyer

Part 2 – Invasion of Luzon: (Part 1 published in Elsie Item #122 Fall 2023)



Atherton: Our trip to Lingayen Gulf took five days and the convoy was the largest a person could imagine. Another group had come up from New Guinea and joined with us. All together we made up a convoy that was 70 miles long, and being in the middle, you could see nothing but ships completely to the horizon on each side of you. It was the largest one ever assembled in the Pacific Ocean. I heard later that the ships behind us had been in an air attack and some ships were hit. The attack was so far behind us in the convoy we were not even aware of it. This convoy consisted of over 800 ships.

The *LCI(L) 759* had some of General MacArthur's aides and war correspondents on board. The ship's position was on the far right of the convoy and within sight of islands that were about one mile or so out. "I was listening to a radio that could pick up news broadcasts, recalled Atherton. "I heard Tokyo Rose say that a huge American convoy was steaming north just off Negros Island. The island she was referring to was

in fact the island I was looking at. It gave me the jitters to know that about a mile away, some Japs were over there looking at us."

On the morning of January 9, 1945, *LCI(L) 759* pulled into Lingayen Gulf. The battleships and cruisers were already there. They began a bombardment of the beach with their 16, 12, and 8-inch guns. "From where we were it looked as though the entire island was being blown to pieces," said Atherton. Later, he saw the landing crafts and the assault waves going in and they disappeared from view because of all of the dirt and smoke in the air. A few planes attacked the ships, but they were immediately shot down.

After the troops landed, the LSTs came in with supplies and equipment. The tail end of the 70-mile-long convoy was still coming into the bay late in the afternoon. The strategy of this operation was to land the troops here where resistance would be

low. Troops would fight their way overland to Manila about 100 miles south.

The next day *LCI(L) 759* changed their anchorage and was assigned a position in the vicinity of the cruiser that General MacArthur was on. About ten other ships joined them to form a large defensive circle around this cruiser. This was done for added protection of the cruiser in case the enemy had found out where MacArthur was and launched more air attacks.



Air attacks at Lingayen Gulf were met with a wall of steel from the hundreds of warships anchored there.

The # 1 troop compartment on *LCI 759* was used by correspondents to write up their stories on typewriters and to sleep. They would broadcast stories from another ship that was equipped with the necessary equipment. Once MacArthur waded ashore to set up a command post, *LCI 759* was assigned a new anchorage in the bay. Atherton no longer felt the safety of a tightly secured and heavily protected VIP anchorage. The crew was warned of the Shinyo suicide crash boats at night. These wooden motorboats with an outboard motor were part of Japan's Special Attack units. They were driven by one man with 700 pounds of explosives in the bow. They'd crash at high speed into the side of a ship. When this weapon was discovered, the order came to fire on any boat in the bay that was

underway from sunset to sunrise. "None of our own boats were to be moving around during this time. If they did, tough luck for them," Atherton recalled.

Atherton: Another nighttime threat was from "swimmers." This is what sailors called Japs who would be in the water with their heads under a wooden box or something floating. The swimmers would work their way close to a ship to throw hand grenades up on the decks or climb aboard to attack a night watch. Crews would take turns at guard duty at night patrolling around the decks and shoot anything floating close by. I had a 30-cal. rifle with me in the conning tower on signal watch. One night in the moonlight, I could see a small black object about two feet big slowly drifting toward us. When it got to about 100 feet from us, I saw it was a wooden box or crate, so I shot it. I'm sure I hit it. At the time, I hoped that there was a Jap under that box, and I could take credit for at least getting one. However, after the war was over, I would tell myself it was only an empty box. It makes me feel a little better about it, even though it was the enemy.

Nobody felt safe at night. Some crewmembers slept on deck, but worried about swimmers. Some slept in their bunks below and worried about crash boats. One morning Atherton came on deck and saw the bow of a nearby ship floating straight up. That's all that was left after being hit by a crash boat. Luckily the *LCI(L) 759* was ordered out of Lingayen Gulf and sent up a small river. It was only about a mile upriver to a small town called Dagupan. "We tied our bow line to a post on the porch of a house that was located on this riverbank. We

became good friends with the people who lived in this house.” The *LCI(L) 759* crew escaped the war here for the next six weeks.



LCI(L) 759 docked at Dagupan for six weeks.

Dagupan wasn't a very large town. There were little shops where we could buy small things for souvenirs but very little to choose from. Japanese soldiers had been occupying this town only two weeks earlier. “We were cautioned not to eat anything on shore. Once I bought a banana for five cents. It felt good to get in on shore to walk around and stretch our legs some,” Atherton remembered.

Atherton: While in this small town of Dagupan, one of the privileges we got for having news correspondents on board was to be interviewed. A recording of my interview was sent to my home radio station. Later, my parents received a letter from the Wichita, Kansas radio station KFBI, and told them of this record and when it would be on the air. My parents went to the radio station to hear it being played on the air. After it was played on the air, they gave it to my parents.

Atherton: While standing my signal watch, I began to notice a very large, nice house about two blocks away. There was a tall,

about eight-foot bamboo fence, enclosing the whole yard. Two soldiers would walk sentry duty back and forth on the outside of the fence, at a large entrance gate. I was high enough in the conn to see over the top of the fence and see the large front porch on this house. On two separate occasions I saw General MacArthur with his cap on and his corn cob pipe, pacing back and forth on the porch, hands clasped behind his back as if he were doing some deep thinking. My binoculars brought him up as close as our bow. He was apparently using this house as temporary living quarters.

Because of the great admiration and respect the Filipinos had for MacArthur, they arranged a "ball" to be held in celebration of his birthday. They put up banners across the tops of streets announcing this and the date with the words "all allied forces welcome." They stated that they would provide a live band and girls to dance with. They underestimated how many would come to it.



General Douglas MacArthur was often seen smoking his iconic corn cob pipe.

The dance was being held in their school auditorium, and it was packed from wall to wall with service men. There were about 500 to 600 service men of all branches, and the town furnished about 30 girls to dance with. It was fun to hear the live band and see some of the Filipinos dancing while in a war zone. Next day, two Jap soldiers were discovered hiding out in the basement of that school. They were captured and taken prisoner.

Atherton: We were sent back to Leyte later in March. We participated in three more small landings. One of these, however, was somewhat different from what we were used to. A group of us LCIs loaded with our infantry men were escorted to a river by destroyers. The destroyers remained out in the bay for our protection. The LCIs proceeded up this river that wound around deep into the jungle. It was only about 100 feet wide, and it was so crooked that once I looked sideways across the tops of the trees and I saw the top of the mast of the ship ahead of us going in the opposite direction. The scary part was that the banks of the river were so close to us on both sides, that a Jap could have thrown a hand grenade and hit us. We had also heard rumors of the Japs having big guns up in the hills that could pick us off. That's when the destroyers out in the bay would have come in handy. We went up this river, twisting and turning for about one or two miles. We came to a much wider place in the river and on one of the banks was a small wooden dock. One ship at a time, we pulled alongside this dock, unloaded our soldiers there and used the wide place in the river to turn around and go back. I was glad to get out of there to the open sea again, but as it turned out, not a

single shot was fired. The infantry men that we unloaded ran into some resistance farther into the jungle. This was in June of 1945. We returned to San Pedro Bay. The war in the Philippines was winding down.

“He said it was called an atomic bomb, or something like that.”

Atherton: One afternoon in August of 1945, I was in the conn at my signal watch while we were anchored at Leyte, with everything peaceful and calm. All of a sudden, I heard my communication officer running up the ladder to where I was. He was very excited and said they had just heard on a radio, that one of our planes had dropped a bomb, just one bomb, on a large Japanese city and it completely blew away the whole city in one blast. He said it was called an atomic bomb, or something like that. This man is nuts, I thought, possibly cracking up from the strain we had been through. No one in the world had ever heard of such a thing, and I had never heard the word "atomic." I had heard of the word "atom," but atomic, never. After he blurted all this out to me, he turned around and ran back down the ladder.

“Ships were firing tracers in the air, firing flares that came down on parachutes, and flashing the letter V by blinker light.”

A few days later, again, still sitting at anchor, I was in the conn on signal watch and it was getting late in the evening. The sun had set, and it was getting closer to darkness. The ship had a nice peaceful roll in the small swells, and everything was nice and calm. Far across the bay to the other

side, probably six miles away, I heard some ship hold down on their foghorn. Then another ship began blowing their foghorn, then some closer to us, then some began ringing bells; all of this was like a chain reaction as more and more ships began doing this and it got all around us until we were doing the same. In addition to all of this, ships were firing tracers in the air, firing flares that came down on parachutes, and flashing the letter V by blinker light into the air. We had a mortar type gun called a pyrotechnic gun and its purpose was to fire flares that would float down on a parachute. We had never used this, but I helped drop pyrotechnic shells into it myself. The news had just come over the radio that Japan had accepted our peace terms for unconditional surrender. The war was over. All these different colored lights and flares reflecting off the water lit up the whole bay with a pale, greenish hue, and you could see almost like it was dawn. With navy regulations that no alcoholic beverages can be drunk aboard ship, our captain had our lifeboat lowered into the water, and five of us at a time, got to sit in this boat and each got to drink two cans of beer. He told us to punch holes in the cans so they wouldn't be seen floating around in the water. This celebration in the bay lasted until around 10 or 11 P.M. It was a night to remember.

Prior to when the atomic bombs were dropped, their captain had told them that before long they'd be going back to the US and be converted from an infantry craft to a gun boat. The ramps would be removed and rocket launching pads would be installed. The *LCI 759* would be involved with the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Being converted to a gunboat would mean that

they would have to run parallel to the shore about 100 yards out and launch rockets. The dropping of the A-bombs of course changed all these plans. It was expected, that had the invasion of the Japan mainland taken place, the casualty list for both sides would have been extremely high. As horrible as the atomic bombing was, it probably saved more lives than it took.

Atherton: After the war ended, we naturally thought we would be going home, but we were mistaken. We received orders to go to Okinawa, and on Sept. 6, 1945, we left the Philippines. We were in Okinawa hardly more than one hour, until we were on our way to Shanghai, China. We had heard rumors that our purpose for going to China was to do patrol duty on the Yangtze River. A 30-cal. machine gun was mounted up in the conning tower. It wasn't there for more than a few weeks because we never did any patrol duty. The trip to Shanghai took about a week in the South China Sea. This turned out to be a very rough sea. When we got to about 800 miles off the China coast, we were informed a typhoon was approaching.

Our flotilla commander decided it would be best to ride it out where we were. We had most of the day to prepare for it. We moved about anything and everything that had any weight to it to the lowest place in the ship we could find. This included extra ammunition, rope, paint, grease, buckets, mops, brooms, etc. To ride it out where we were, we would go 12 hours on the course that we had, which was into the waves, then reverse our course 180 degrees, and go with the waves for 12 hours then reverse again 180 degrees into the waves for 12 hours. We kept this up for two days and two nights.

When we turned to reverse our course, I believe it was the worst, because we would be caught in what we called "the troughs." It might be hard for someone who has never been on the sea during a hard storm to comprehend how bad it can get. We recorded in our log what the waves were at least six feet and the wind we estimated to be from 60 to 70 knots. We had moved what we could down low to help make us bottom heavy, to help keep us upright and not capsize. As the storm worsened, our ship would just rise in the air on a huge wave, and it was like being on the top of a pointed mountain peak. Where I was in the conn, I could look down on both sides to about 25 or 30 feet from the surface. When in those troughs, I had about 30 feet of water higher than my head. When that broke away, we were sitting on that mountain peak of water again. The bow would slam down hard, and the ship would shake, then the fantail would be out of the water and our screws would speed up. This was because they were spinning in the air, and you could feel the vibration of them speeding up. When they hit back into the water, you could feel them take ahold again. The sky was overcast but we could see the sun through it. One of our officers had me help him while he used the sextant. He was sighting through it at the sun while I used a stopwatch. When he would say "mark," I would press the button on the stopwatch. For me to do this, I locked one of my legs around the iron post on our life rail, so I could stand up. He had to do the same.

“The cooks simply made sandwiches after the first meal during the storm.”

Meals were something else. The cooks in the galley were having a terrible time. Things were falling out of the cabinets onto the deck, and sometimes it was food, like syrup, milk, or something else liquid. At mealtime, we would always file past a window to the galley, and cooks would hand us a tray already filled. During this storm, I was up to the window to get my tray, and just as I reached for it, the ship made a sharp roll. The cook who had my tray slid backwards to the back side of the galley, about ten feet, while standing up and holding my tray. It looked as though he was standing on roller skates and skating backwards. When the ship snap rolled back, he came sliding back to the window, and when he did, I grabbed my tray. When I sat down to eat, I used my left hand to hold the tray, and by lifting it up and down, in unison with the ship's roll, I could keep it level and not spill my food. Also had I turned loose of it, it would have gone crashing down along the table at someone else. About six inches is how high I was lifting the end of my tray. The cooks simply made sandwiches after that first meal during the storm.

When I went down below to my bunk to sleep, I laid on my back, locked my legs around the outside edges, and hooked my arm through the chain supporting my bunk and laid my head on my hand. I had hoped that in this way I could get a little sleep. Once while in this position, the ship heaved up, then sideways. It left me out in the air, off my bunk, landing on the deck. I was lucky not to get hurt. That same night, while in my bunk, we rolled way over and I heard a crash above me, which would be the galley. Something was wrong, we didn't snap roll back; just stayed over there. We all

assumed we were capsizing. Everyone jumped out of bunks and started running to get topside. Our ladder had a handrail, that is supported by zig-zag type iron rods that held it in place. These iron rods that supported the handrail are what I was using for the steps to get up out of there. The actual steps to the ladder were tipped up to my left side. By the time we got topside, the ship righted itself and made its roll back. A rope was eventually strung from the bow to the stern on both sides of the ship. We were to walk inboard of this rope any time we had to go out on deck and hang on to it. I had to use this to get to my conn for signal watch. One of our crew, I remember, was afraid to go below to his bunk to sleep. Whenever he wasn't at his watch, he spent his time sitting on one of our mess tables with his life jacket on. However, I'm sure that wouldn't have helped had we capsized.

The storm finally let up, and we proceeded on to China without incident. I had heard years earlier how the Yangtze was sometimes called the yellow river. As we were cruising along and getting closer to China, I noticed a place in the water where it was a funny color of yellow, right next to the deep blue. It was a very distinctive looking thing where the two colors met. If I were to be in the water there, I could have stretched both arms out, and had my right hand in the blue and my left hand in the yellow color. We were still out too far to see any land, but I'm sure it was part of the Yangtze that was flowing into the Pacific Ocean.

LCI(L) 759 entered a place showing on the charts they were in the mouth of the Yangtze River, and this is where the ship anchored for the night. It was like dropping

anchor out in the middle of the ocean because no land could be seen anywhere. It was because the land around there was flat. A British convoy came in there at the same time.

Atherton: One of the British ships called me on his blinker light and asked if we got through the storm alright. I told him we did, and I asked how they made it. He replied they had lost one oiler and one tanker sunk. We heard later that our flotilla commander received a "well done" from his superiors for bringing all his ships through that storm safely. The following morning, we went on up the Yangtze to Shanghai. We had two mine sweepers ahead of us, sweeping for mines, just in case there were any. We were the first Allied units into Shanghai after the war ended. We pulled into Shanghai on Sept. 9, 1945. Only a few weeks earlier this had been under Japanese occupation. I saw a Jap destroyer tied up to one of their docks, apparently caught in there when the war ended. We were all told to put on our dress white uniforms as we went upriver. We took a turn out of the Yangtze into a river called the Whangpoo River. This led us directly into Shanghai. As we got further into the city, the riverbank was lined with thousands of people waving, cheering, and bands playing. I saw what looked like a school had let their entire group of students out on the bank, to see us come upriver. We of course felt pleased and honored. The Whangpoo, I would judge, was about 1/4 mile wide. We tied up at a wooden dock on the opposite side of where the main part of the city is. We LCIs tied up with one ship directly behind the other, like cars parked bumper to bumper. The river had lots of sampans and junks. We were told that sampans were their

homes, that they simply lived in these boats. Some sampans had as many as eight to ten people living in them. They were propelled by a tiller like pole in the back, with a flat paddle on the end, and with a sideways back and forth motion, much like a fish's tail, it would move them on the water. They were very good at this. This also was our only means of transportation of crossing this river when we went on liberty in Shanghai. We usually paid them whatever amount we wanted to and sometimes there was some bargaining over the fee.



The view from a plane as US warships enter Shanghai on the Whangpoo River.

Shanghai's money situation after the war was a mess. There were three different kinds and colors of money. There was one kind with a value of 500 Japanese yen to the American dollar. Another kind was a little less, like 350 Chinese yuan to the American dollar. The most common that they used was 180,000 yuan to the American dollar. These usually were in denominations of 10,000-yuan bills. When Atherton would exchange an American \$1.00 bill for this money, to be used on liberty, he would receive 18 of these 10,000-yuan bills. He couldn't get it all in his billfold and have any room for anything else. Shanghai's population was estimated to

be between seven million to eight million people.

Atherton: During our stay in China, we got liberty every other day from 12 noon until midnight. Our first trip into town on liberty was quite an experience. We flagged down a sampan and they took us across the river into the city. As soon as we set foot on shore, about 100 coolies with rickshaws, all came running towards us at the same time, wanting our business. We picked one out, I was with seven of our crew, and each rickshaw would carry two of us. They started towards the downtown area, which was alright with us, because none of us knew where we were going anyway. After getting to what looked like to us was downtown, we had the coolies stop; we paid them what we thought it was worth and got out of the rickshaw and walked around. A wide boulevard like street was one of the main streets. Its name was called the "Bund". Also, it was "Manking Road." Mostly all the street traffic was three kinds. It was rickshaws, bicycles, and pedestrians. Some of the bicycles were three wheelers, and had a seat made like the rickshaws. They could also carry two people. We called them pedicabs. There were many stores, businesses, eating places, hotels, just like any large city would have, but their economy had been bad, I'm sure. There were beggars on the streets, and places where we could exchange our money. They had been occupied by the Japanese until recently, so they all were as curious of us as we were of them. Once I stopped on the sidewalk to light a cigarette, and I was immediately encircled with about 100 Chinese, all holding their hands out for me to give them a cigarette. I had to just turn them down and

walk on. It was a rare occasion if you found someone on the street that could understand any English. A lot of the stores and businesses had someone who could sometimes understand a little English. To purchase something in a store was another experience. They didn't have any adding machines or calculators, only a thing called abacus. They could move these rings back and forth with the tips of their fingers very rapidly. They were experts at it. Once in a store I saw a pure silk tablecloth, pink, with a large hand embroidered peacock on it. I asked the merchant how much. He quoted some two million yuan. I asked him how much in American money. He used his abacus and quoted a price something like \$6.00 and some cents. After bargaining with him a little, I paid him almost \$4.00 but not quite. This is pretty much the way business and transactions were. I was in a place and bought a beer. The price was 90,000 yuan.



LCI 971 on the Whangpoo River, Shanghai in November of 1945.

At night there were plenty of nightclubs and places to dance. They usually had live bands and could play a lot of familiar music. Late at night, they'd get in another rickshaw to the river. There were

always plenty of sampans eager for business to take sailors back across the river to the ships. If they got back after midnight, they were penalized and had to miss the next liberty. It was so dangerous in Shanghai that anyone caught coming back from liberty alone was automatically restricted. Everyone always had to go in pairs or more whenever going on liberty. When in downtown Shanghai, if a person ventured too far away from the main part of the city, you would see a sign which read "out of bounds to military personnel". They all felt sure that if a person got too far into the outskirts of the city, you would probably never get back.

Atherton: One night we were in a dance place, and I noticed a Chinese couple come in and sit at a table not too far from ours. On top of the table, he placed a large thing which looked like a loaf of bread, wrapped up in a newspaper. When the waitress brought his order, he unwrapped this paper and it was a loaf of paper money, with each bill folded in half. I doubt that it was much more than \$20.00 in American money. There were money exchange places, easily to be found along the sidewalks, and each one had a chalkboard with that particular day's ratio value. This was because each day or so, the money value would fluctuate, and every time we went into town, we would check and see what the money ratio was for that day. I saw quite a few Australian and British soldiers and sailors before we left. All of us spending money each day was helping their economy. My friend and I went to a nice eating place one day, and it was on the 7th floor of a building. I ordered a steak dinner, and the food wasn't too bad, considering

everything. About halfway through our meal, I realized I had not seen a single cow in the countryside as we came up the river. All I saw was caribou, or water buffalo. This didn't do my appetite any good. Before we left, I went to the men's restroom, as I had to use the toilet. Inside the rest room, near the door, was a man standing there. He had a handful of square paper about four inches square. When he saw me go into a compartment where a stool was, he handed me three sheets off that paper. There was no paper in the stool compartment, not even a holder to put any. I suppose if a person needed more, you could ask for more.

The flotilla left Shanghai and went about 60 or 70 miles up the coast. They entered another river called the Yung River. It wasn't quite as wide as the Whangpoo and was bordered by many small villages. They waved as the ships passed. When they would meet small Chinese vessels flying the Chinese Nationalist flag both ships lowered flags in salute. Several miles up this river, they entered a city called Mingpo. The flotilla included some LSTs. No shore liberty here. Chinese Nationalist soldiers were marched to the dock and loaded on board. Loading these men became quite a problem. Not even one of them could understand a word of English. A certain amount had to be loaded into the different bunking quarters, and nobody could understand if you told them 40 in this one, 50 in that one and so on.

Atherton: I noticed that nearly all of them were short and thin. I doubt that any of the Chinese on our ship was over 5'5" and couldn't have weighed more than 100 pounds. When we ate our meals, we had a

rope strung up to barricade them from our mess tables. As many as could get in our dining area, behind this rope barricade, would just stand there and watch us eat. I think it must have been an unusual sight for them to see the different food items on our trays, and how we used a knife and fork. They looked hungry, and some of us offered them food from our tray, but each one would smile at us and shake their heads no and refuse to take what we offered them. Some of the Chinese soldiers we had on board were wearing pistols at their side. They didn't look like they were all the same size and caliber. Some had rifles. We had been told that the Chinese soldiers we were transporting would be disarming the Japanese on Formosa. We pulled into Kusun, Formosa on October 17, 1945. As we were nearing the wooden dock to tie up, a Jap soldier was on the dock still carrying his rifle. To tie up to a dock, one of our boatswains mates tossed a heaving line. This Jap soldier laid his rifle down, pulled in our rope and placed it on the bit, picked up his rifle and walked on. It was a strange sight for us to see. We unloaded our soldiers, then moved out into the bay and anchored for the rest of the day and night. The following day, we returned to Ningpo, China for a second load.

After returning to Formosa and unloading their Chinese soldiers, *LCI(L) 759* tied up to the dock for the night. Each ship placed an armed guard for sentry duty on the dock. A small motorboat passed by, with four Japanese soldiers. They stood up straight, faced the sentry and gave a courteous bow. It seemed strange to face an enemy like this that they had been fighting only a few weeks earlier. Later the same

night, Atherton took his turn as sentry on the dock.

Atherton: There were a few dim streetlights scattered along the dock, so I could see a few feet around me. Around 10:00 p.m. eight Japanese soldiers came out of the surrounding trees, sneaked up on a small shack, and acted strangely, peaking into it. I walked toward them to get a better look and when they saw me, they scattered into the trees. They returned later and instead of going to the shack, they turned and came straight toward me. I don't ever recall seeing a sentry for the other ship astern of us. I was near our bow, and if the other sentry happened to be near their fantail, we would be at least 330 feet away from each other. As they got closer, I was getting scared. I had been carrying my rifle on my shoulder. It was a 30- cal. and the clip had 15 rounds in it. I didn't have a round in the firing chamber. I felt like I wanted to yell for someone on the ship to give me some back-up assistance, but I knew most of them had gone to bed anyway. I also felt that I should handle it, since I was the guard at the time. When they got 60 feet from me, I brought my rifle down to "port arms." They didn't stop, but kept walking toward me, all eight of them. These men were not armed with guns, but I had no way of knowing if they had any other kind of weapon. By now I was so scared I hardly knew what to do. I was staring them straight in the eye, and they were staring at me. I swung my rifle up and quickly worked a shell into the firing chamber. They stopped about 30 feet in front of me. We stared at each other, probably for only a few seconds, but it sure seemed like a long time. They turned around

and went back into the trees, and I never saw them again.

Years later, this incident came back to haunt Atherton. He began to have nightmares after he was discharged. He dreamed he would be out in a jungle, laying down behind a fallen coconut tree, pinned down by Japanese snipers. They would shoot at him. He'd hear bullets wiz past his head. He could only see their eyes and head. When shot back, his bullets would simply fall out the barrel to the ground. He'd wake up in a sweat. This went on for almost two years. He read about how nightmares were common for returning veterans. He wasn't alone. He believed the sentry duty incident was the cause. After that the nightmares went away.

Atherton: Our orders finally came to start for home on December 16, 1945. The flotilla started down the Yangtze River in single file all flying our "homeward bound" pennants. A US cruiser was anchored in the river. We lowered colors to salute. The cruiser was playing "Anchors Aweigh," on a loudspeaker. It was quite a thrill for us. Our first stop on the way home was Saipan, in the Marianas Islands. After a few days at sea, some of our ships were beginning to have engine trouble. They were beginning to wear out. We towed one for two days at a speed of 1.5 knots. Here, we were trying to get home, out in the middle of the ocean, and going a little less than two miles per hour. We could hardly tell we were moving.

When the flotilla reached Eniwetok, the crippled ships were left there for repairs. One with a leaky bow was told to "back into the sea." This meant for them to go backwards with their bow low in the water

until they reached the Navy base at Eniwetok. The rest of the flotilla went on to Saipan arriving on Christmas Day, 1945. After minor repairs and replenishment, it was on to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Atherton: As we were getting closer to Hawaii, we were getting Hawaiian music on the radio. The ocean had a pleasant, leisurely roll to it, and the weather was nice and sunny. The Hawaiian music blended in with the setting, and it was very nice. Seven days after we left Saipan, we pulled into Pearl Harbor. The city was still very congested but not nearly as much as our first visit. We got homogenized milk, the first we had in one and a half years. It was delicious. Also, bakery pies and apples. A crate of apples was placed in one of our passageways, and we could get one anytime we wanted it. I had almost forgotten what these things tasted like. Try going for a year and a half and not tasting milk, except

powdered, or any fresh fruit, and you will see what I mean. On my first liberty into Honolulu, I went straight to a restaurant. My order was a chocolate malt, with a bacon and tomato sandwich. It was mouthwatering to even think about it. When the waitress took my order, she knew I had just come in from far out in the Pacific, simply by my order. Three weeks later we were in San Pedro Bay again...this time in California. We were told by one of our officers that we had covered about 60,000 sea miles. This would be far enough to have gone entirely around the earth a little more than two times. My discharge date is April 4, 1946. I had been in the Navy 2 1/2 years.

The map below shows the LCI(L) 759 route from California to Pearl Harbor, New Guinea, Philippines, Okinawa, China, Formosa, Saipan, Pearl Harbor and back home.

SOURCES: O.H. Wienges WWII Collections & University of SC Digital.



William Armstrong Jr.

SM3/c LCI(G) 455

By Jeff Veesenmeyer

One day Bill Armstrong and two buddies were out back of their high school in Rogersville, Tennessee smoking cigarettes. They got caught by their principal. They should have been in class plus smoking on school grounds was not permitted. This was 1943 and the world was at war. So, the principal gave them two choices. They could follow the rules and stay in school, or they could enlist in the service. “Well, we thought about it,” said Armstrong. “And we all decided we’d just enlist in Navy together.”

They finished their junior year, turned 17 and had their parents sign for them. Then Bill Armstrong, Jake Cupp, and Sid Davis went to Nashville and enlisted. They were sent to San Diego and all three went through boot camp together. Their adventure had begun.

Armstrong was born January 11, 1925. He’ll be turning 99 in 2024 and still has vivid memories of those war years. His son, another William Armstrong but with a new middle initial, helped with compiling his dad’s stories, photos, and Navy memorabilia. The Armstrong family refers to father and son as Big Bill and Little Bill even though Little Bill is entering his 70s.

Armstrong first heard about the attack at Pearl Harbor while sitting at the Presbyterian Church in Rogersville with his family. He was just starting high school. He could never have imagined how this event was going to change his life.



Bill Armstrong SM3/c

After bootcamp the three buddies were split up. Armstrong was sent to gunnery school. He learned to shoot and maintain the 20mm and 40mm guns that were primarily used for anti-aircraft defense. He would shoot at drones for gunnery practice. Armstrong was assigned to a ship on 5 January 1944. His initial thought when he first boarded the *LCI(G) 455* was, “Boy is this a little ship.” He would soon find out that his little ship would have a big ship capability. *LCI(G) 455* was slated for conversion to a rocket ship. It’s been said that the rocket LCIs had more firepower than a cruiser for about five minutes. Their primary job was to keep beach defenders hunkered down until the first wave landing craft hit the beach. LCI rocket ships were also able to provide cover fire for the underwater demolition teams (UDT) that cleared paths for landing craft.

The *LCI 455(G)* left San Diego for Pearl Harbor in January. Armstrong soon realized that the lowly seaman got all the

garbage details on a ship. He loaded rockets one day in an ammo locker on the bow of the ship. The sea was rough off San Diego and he got good case of sea sickness. He and buddy Bob Draper would get assigned to cleaning compartments, galley details and any other dirty job. They decided the only way out was learn a rating like signalman. They became striker signalman and studied together. Armstrong would eventually become a signalman third class petty officer. No more garbage details for him.



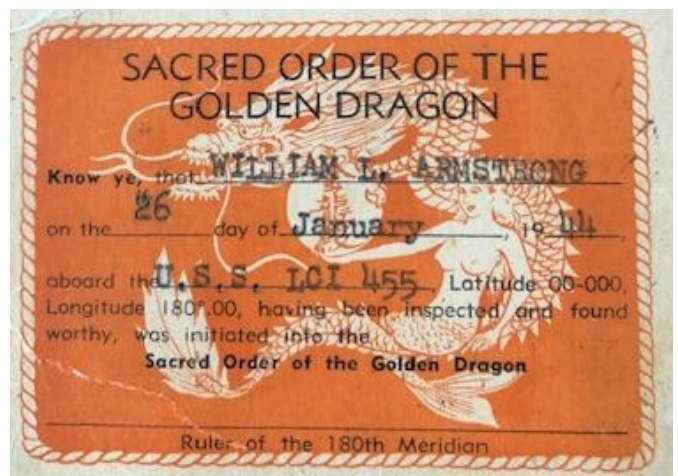
Bob Draper and Bill Armstrong take a break between work details.

LCI 455(G) would be supporting the leapfrog invasions across the South Pacific. The ship crossed the equator at 180 degrees.



Part of Bill Armstrong's line crossing initiation was this sexy pose in bra and panties.

longitude during this time. The centuries-old custom of "crossing the line" ceremony was held on the *LCI 455(G)*. Pollywog sailors have been initiated when crossing the equator, for their first time since the days of tall-masted sailing ships. The ceremony is fun for some and painful for others but always memorable. Armstrong became a proud shellback on 26 January 1944. He still has his card showing membership in the Royal Order of the Dragon.



Armstrong's shellback membership card would keep him from having to go through the initiation ever again. He still has it.

Armstrong's first invasion was at the Marshall Islands in February 1944. The landings at Eniwetok were still etched in his mind over 40 years later. He painted the scene of *LCI 455(G)* off the coast of that little island in 1986. He included signal flags with a message that only a signalman with knowledge of physics would understand. See the painting on the back cover of this issue. The flags read EMC2...Einstein's theory of relativity.



Armstrong painted this at age 71. He included the signal flag message EMC2 (Energy = Mass x Speed of light, squared) the famous equation Einstein published in 1905.

During July and August of 1944 *LCI 455(G)* participated in invasions of the Mariana Islands. At Saipan, Armstrong witnessed the horrific final day of the battle. Hundreds of civilians jumped off a cliff to their deaths on the rocky shore below. Some chose swimming out to the US ships. The crew of *LCI 455(G)* rescued a number of soldiers and civilians from the water.

At Guam *LCI 455(G)* was assigned to support the UDT swimmers. The LCIs provided constant cover fire while the teams cleared the beach of obstacles and collected recon information.

While *LCI 455(G)* was anchored off Saipan one night, a signal light from a sub chaser flashed at them. The message was "Is

Bill Armstrong on your ship." "Yes," he signaled back. The next message asked if two visitors could swim over. The skipper of *LCI 455(G)* gave his permission. The two sailors who swam over were Armstrong's buddies from home, Jake Cupp and Sid Davis. "We posted a couple of guys with rifles in case they encountered sharks during their swim," said Armstrong. The three friends had a good reunion while halfway around the world. When it was time to head back, skipper Roy Davis upped anchor and gave them a lift, dropping them off for a much shorter swim home.

Their next invasion was at Palau. This was one of Armstrong's scariest memories. He spotted a mine floating dead ahead. He notified the officer of the deck, speed and direction orders were made. They missed the floating mine. Gunners fired at the mine but were unable to detonate it.

A new terror faced the Navy at the Philippines. This is where the kamikaze planes began making suicide dives into ships. Armstrong watched Jap planes crashing into ships. One of his shipmates was hit with shrapnel. This was the only casualty on *LCI 455(G)* during all their combat actions.

On Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945 the crew of *LCI 455(G)* provided rocket and fire support for the landings at Okinawa. The attacks on ships increased ten-fold at Okinawa. The kamikaze planes came daily for three months. Plus, now ships were being attacked by suicide boats as well. The Shinu (Sea Quake) motorboats would crash into an anchored ship at night with explosives in the bow. "One night we spotted a crash boat," said Armstrong. "Our

skipper gave chase.” They pounded the boat with all guns blazing until it blew up. A crewmember had painted a duck riding a rocket on their conn. Now he added a scoreboard for each crash boat they sank. They sank three of them at Okinawa.



A rocket blasting duck emblem and scoreboard were painted on the LCI(R) 455 conn by an artistic shipmate.

The war ended soon after the fall of Okinawa. *LCI 455(G)* wasn't returned to the US until 1946. Armstrong was sent to Norfolk to be released from the Navy. Rogersville, Tennessee is in the northeastern corner of the state and about 400 miles from Norfolk. Because he was from Tennessee the Navy sent him to Nashville to be released. Now he was 500 miles west of Rogersville. Signalman Armstrong just stuck out his

thumb and signaled for rides all the way back home.

Armstrong had quit high school to join the Navy in 1943. After the war he went back to school, got a degree in education, and spent 42 years as a teacher and principal in a grammar school. He had learned the value of learning and passed it on to the younger generations. Learning to be a signalman got him out of those awful garbage details.

He was married to Catherine for 73 years. They had a son who served as lieutenant in the Navy and daughter who was a teacher. His family includes a grandchild and two great grandchildren. They live in Elizabethton, Tennessee. It is in the picturesque foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. He will turn 99 on January 11, 2024. He is the last surviving shipmate from the *LCI(G) 455*.



Armstrong also painted this picture of the LCI(G) 455. No specific event was intended. It just shows his little ship in the vast Pacific Ocean. There is a message on the signal flags that reads...LCI.

In Memoriam

LCI 163
Frank Zoske

LCI 691
Jacob “Gil” Myllymaki

LCI 670
Richard A Piper

LCI 711
Harold Laabs



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

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Christmas Dinner 1945

Served alfresco with ocean side seating aboard the USS *LCI(L) 455*. Turkey dinner with all the trimmings was enjoyed by diners while overlooking beautiful Ulithi Lagoon. Bill Armstrong Jr. SM3/c was among the attendees. Now 98 years young, Armstrong wishes all a happy and healthy holiday season. (See his story and details of his painting in this issue.

