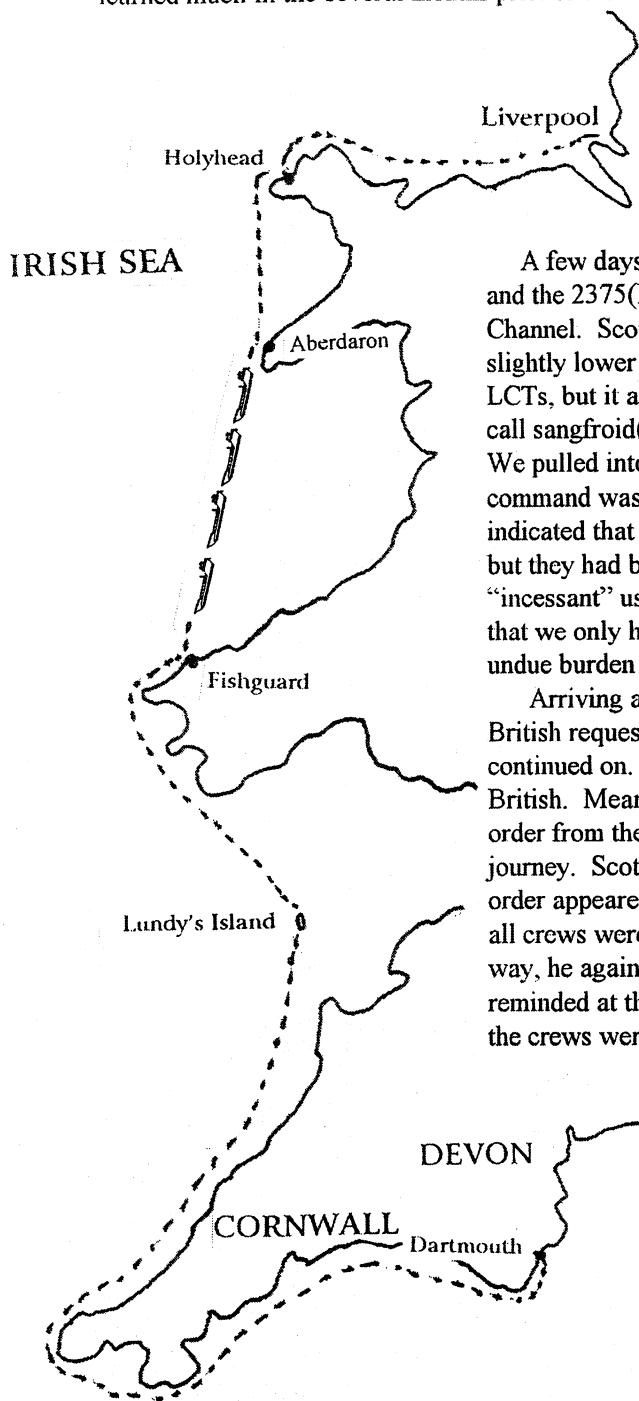


Learning Seamanship the Hard Way

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My first introduction to an LCT(A) came in early April, 1944. I was fresh from Columbia University Midshipman School, and my only introduction to salt water sailing was a conducted tour of Long Island Sound. It doesn't have to be written that I really did not know the stem from the stern of the vessel of which I was going to be "officer-in-charge." The eleven crew members were already aboard. As a whole they were young boys, slightly lesser in years to myself who was twenty-two. Two of the men had had experience with the brig, and one was an epileptic soon to be discovered in the midst of a fit: another bit of education for the new officer-in-charge. As we were to find out at Dog Green, Omaha Beach, in June, they were brave and dutiful men who had learned much in the several months prior to the invasion.



Two hours after boarding the craft at Liverpool, the harbor master came aboard to ask if we might move the boat to another pier. We did, but only after knocking a barge loading grain from under its chute and, in doing so, taking on a load of grain ourselves. To this day, I do not know how we managed to move the boat. It was such a terrible experience that I blocked it completely from my mind.

A few days later, our 2227, along with the 2309(Scott), the 2273(Lane), and the 2375(McVey) were in convoy on the Mersey, heading for the Irish Channel. Scott was c.o. only because (thank God) his serial number was slightly lower than mine. None of the four officers had experience with LCTs, but it all frankness it was Scott who had enough of what the French call sangfroid (gall) to lead us on what would become a truly antique voyage. We pulled into Holyhead at dusk, not knowing that the British coastal command was monitoring our every move. A later report from that center indicated that they had wanted the group to continue sailing on to Fishguard, but they had been unable to contact us because of what they called our "incessant" use of the radio. But what the British never seemed to grasp was that we only had one officer per craft and to sail on would have placed an undue burden on each.

Arriving at Holyhead, the 2227 boat reported an engine defect, but the British requested that this boat should be left behind whilst the other three continued on. Scott refused, for the first but not the last time antagonizing the British. Meanwhile the 2227 engine was repaired, which brought another order from the British that the convoy should immediately proceed on its journey. Scott again refused, arguing that the crews needed rest. Another order appeared, requesting that Scott sail at 0200 but when that time arrived, all crews were sacked out. When Scott was awakened and told to get under way, he again refused, going back to his bunk to continue his sleep. We are reminded at this point of what Scott really had--sangfroid. Finally, at dawn, the crews were aroused and the convoy sailed at 0710.

Scott had been supplied with charts for the sail, but in his mind, the shortest distance between two points was a straight line. Unfortunately his straight line ran right across a submarine training ground then being used by three of these vessels. I myself suffered a minor shock when suddenly a sub began to surface on our port side. It was even more disconcerting when the sub captain, apparently thinking he was lost, began to hail us in a German accent. Not really German though; it was a Dutch submarine.