

condition, had minimum freeboard when loaded because of the extra armour and with their side rails cut to permit side loading, had problems in the heavy seas and some did flounder and breakup. Engine spare parts were almost non-existent as was a shortage of line and cable. The staff engineering officer did manage to procure handy-billys for the group.

The British had added 2000 to the US hull number, therefore the US LCT 008 became US LCT(A) 2008; the US LCT 124 became US LCT(A) 2124, etc.

Most of the officers assigned to the LCT(A) group came from Small Boat Flotilla 20 which had completed their small boat training at Little Creek in late December, 1943. Coming back from a holiday leave, they were advised that the flotilla was disbanded and they were assigned to something called the Gunfire Support Group in England.

With a day or so of training with LCT(6)s at Little Creek, they arrived at U.S. Navy Base II, Rosneath, Scotland in January to wait for their craft to be converted to LCT(A)s at British shipyards. This took time, and there was no more training in Scotland. One by one, the crews were ordered to proceed to the British shipyards where their crafts were converted. Only then would they see the type of craft on which they would sail. These crews would have their familiarization, training and shakedown cruises combined by sailing from Tilbury Docks near London, down the Thames, through the Straits of Dover to Dartmouth. Others would do the same "hands on" training sailing from Liverpool to Dartmouth. Some were lucky enough to get their crafts in time to make a few beachings in the Fabius I and Tiger dry runs. Some made their first beaching at Omaha. A few weeks before D-Day each craft was assigned another officer, among which were some veterans who had served in the Med and who became OinCs, some were plucked from other flotillas and some came on their first assignments.

For those who want to further pursue the saga of the LCT(A)s, we suggest the article in US Naval Proceedings, May/June, 1994, by Ray Cluster, and also the tale, attached to this report, by Victor Hicken on the convoy of four LCT(A)s sailing from a Liverpool shipyard to Dartmouth.

Another group of LCTs who had an innovative assignment in the assault wave were the LCT(SP)s. These 10 Mark 5s were designated as Fire Support Group Five and were loaded with self-propelled 105-mm howitzers of the 58th and 62nd Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Their mission was, at about 8,000 yards from the beach, to commence firing afloat to deliver neutralizing fire on areas on and behind the beach. Firing would commence at H minus 30 and cease at H minus 5. They would clear the area and return to unload the artillery units at designated beaches at H+90. It is interesting to note that at their training base in England, a concrete LCT was built to permit practice in loading and unloading the artillery units.

Most of the balance of the LCTs came from Flotillas 12, 17, 18, 19 and 26 which had their training at the Solomons Amphibious Base in Maryland. Some were newly formed from flotillas which had participated in the Mediterranean operations. Others had newly arrived in England.

THE CHANNEL CROSSING

The twenty seven hour channel crossing from England to Normandy will not be forgotten by the LCT officers and crews. LCTs and LCT(A)s in the assault group LCT O-2 got underway from Portland in pitch black darkness at 0330 on the morning of June 5. They had done this once before on the morning of June 4 but all were sent back to the harbor because of the weather related postponement.

LCDR Leide, Commander, Task Group LCT O-2, wrote in his action report on the confusion to form up the convoy in the early morning darkness, "For some reason, yet unknown, certain LCTs of Force "U" (those going to Utah beach) were coming into the North Ship Channel against the signals. In addition, other units of Force "U" which were at anchor outside Portland Harbor, got underway at about the same time the Force "O" vessels were steaming out. As a result, the crafts of the two forces became badly mixed up. It took the better part of four hours to separate the crafts of Forces "O" and "U" and, as a result, the LCT convoy was never at its originally intended formation. The weather did the rest."

With each craft flying their assigned column and number in column flags, some order was restored at dawn. All will remember the stormy seas and the difficulty in station keeping during the night. Commander Leide continues in his action report, "During the hours of darkness (June 5-6) the convoy became more scattered so that at dawn, instead of being eight miles in length and four abreast, it was twenty odd miles long and completely lacking in column formation. However, the situation was far from hopeless. The early waves were in position and the balance had sufficient time to arrive at the rendezvous area soon enough to proceed to the line of departure as scheduled."