

**Vernon L. Wood – Seward, Nebraska**

**Motor Machinist Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class  
LCT 673**

Dad first heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as he was crossing the Seward County Courthouse lawn after watching a Sunday movie matinée on December 7, 1941.



Figure 1. Dad in 1945

Shortly after graduating from high school dad joined the Navy. He was sent to Farragut, Idaho for boot camp, leaving Nebraska in June 1943 by troop train. The train ride took about three days. Two memorable stories come out of boot camp. The first involved the drill sergeant asking for volunteers who were master painters. Dad volunteered as he had done some painting while in school. He was picked and the job involved using mops to paint a boiler room – real quality master painters at work. The second involved the need for experienced truck drivers. The actual job involved using wheel barrows to clean up around the barracks.

After boot camp dad was shipped out to diesel school in Champaign, IL. He was there approximately 16 weeks. There were women on the chow line, which was unusual as most of the time there were only men.

After graduating from diesel school dad was sent to the Chesapeake Bay area to learn how to run a landing craft tank (LCT). He was chosen to be part of a fifteen man and two officer crew. Dad began as a diesel mechanic. They practiced by going up and down the bay, learning to run the boat and shoot the 20mm guns.

Once the crew had learned how to run an LCT they were sent to New Orleans, LA to get their ship and head overseas. After arriving in New Orleans, they spent their time waiting on Algiers Island off shore from New Orleans. They were given the ship LCT

673. It was first put on the landing ship tank (LST) 616 for transport overseas. However, it was determined this was the wrong LST so their LCT 673 had to be taken off this ship. They had to wait longer to receive their orders. Finally their LCT was put on the LST 749. At this point they still did not know whether they were going to the European theater or the Pacific theater.

Finally it was determined they were going to the Pacific theater. This meant they would be passing through the Panama Canal. Their first stop, however, was Gulfport, MS to load ammunition which they did relay style from a warehouse. Talk on the boat was they were first heading to the Hawaiian Islands, but this never happened, they only got as close as 300 miles.

It is interesting to note that they traveled all the way across the Pacific Ocean in a two ship convoy, LST 749 and LST 700. Both of these ships carried 1 ½ LCTs. Neither ship had much in the way of fire power, so they were all worried that they would come in contact with a Japanese submarine in their journey. However, there were no problems. When they crossed the equator they had a big ceremony for those soldiers crossing the equator for the first time. The Old Salts filled a gun turret with ice cubes and cold water and all of the first timers got initiated by being dunked in the water. The first timers were also all given haircuts. On this particular day the weather was rather cloudy and cold enough that they wore coats.

Once they made it across the Pacific Ocean they went to the Admiralty Islands which are north of the Solomon Islands (where Guadalcanal is located). The first order of business was to put their LCT together. This involved big bolts, 6 or 7 inches long with square nuts 2-2½ inches across and 1½ thick. The water in the harbor where they needed to do this assembly was not particularly clean as there were a large number of huge ships in the port. The washers that had to go around the bolts were made of canvas and kept floating away. Finally their LCT 673 was put together. The first order of business was to go over to one of the big Navy tenders to get supplies (food, water, beds, etc.) for their LCT.

The next stop was New Guinea. Their LCT was placed on a landing ship dock (LSD) for this trip. They became part of FLT 2 LST 749 LCT(6) 673 Group 45 Flotilla 15 waiting to take part in the invasion of the Philippines in the Battle of Leyte Gulf (October 1944). After the beach landing the Japanese planes continued to bomb the area trying to destroy fuel tanks and the runways the Sea bees were building. The Japanese pilots came so close, as they made their diving approaches, dad could see the white scarves around their necks. This whole time dad and his fellow troops were shooting at them. The Japanese planes were going so fast that they missed most of them. Many of the raids were at night which kept the crew awake.

One of their primary responsibilities, once the beachhead was secured, was to unload Liberty ships providing supplies for the soldiers now on shore. When they had a boatload of beer or cigarettes soldiers from shore would meet them out in the bay, before they could get to the dock, and try to talk them into giving them some. This was illegal, but

dad's crew would sometimes barter for something they needed. Usually the shore police would catch these soldiers, with their now illegal goods, as they got to shore.

The invasion of Leyte was the only invasion in which LCT 673 participated.

In 1945 they went to Okinawa as the US was getting ready to invade Japan. When they arrived Okinawa had already been secured. There were a large number of ships in the bay. Just after they arrived in Okinawa they were notified that a typhoon was coming. The skipper did not know anything about the island, like where small boats should go to get out of the wind. So they just anchored with the large ships, destroyers, liberty ships, all kinds. The water was so rough and the wind so strong – even the cable on the anchor was swinging back and forth. They ran the ships engines in reverse to try and stay under control. They did this for 3-4 hours until the screws (propellers) got tangled up with rope and the motors stopped. When this happened the anchor cable snapped and they were washed ashore where they stayed until the storm passed. In the morning they found out they had been washed on shore more than a block across the flat beach. They were not the only ones who were washed ashore, many ships were washed upon the beach. At low tide there was no water on the beach and at high tide there was only 3-4 feet of water. Two tugboats pulled their LCT off the beach. After some minor repairs they were ready to go.

Shortly after the typhoon the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, meaning there would be no invasion of Japan. Dad's LCT next went to Nagasaki. The crew walked on shore around Nagasaki even though it was radioactive. They did not know how safe/dangerous it was. Their LCT was in Japan to ferry Japanese officials to shore. These officials had been captured in the Philippines and brought to Japan by ship. The area around Nagasaki was a real mess.



Figure 2. Nagasaki Bay (1945)



Figure 3. Crane in Nagasaki Bay (1945)



Figure 4. A hanger in Nagasaki (1945)

Dad and the other LCT crew members returned to the US directly from Japan to San Francisco aboard a victory ship.

Dad mustered out at Navy Pier in Chicago.