



LCT-546 UNDER FIRE

CATAclysmic CONFUSION AT OMAHA BEACH

Lawrence J. Bondi - Ensign (XO)

The crew of LCT-546 and the salty skipper, I feel, were responsible for guarding and caring for this green Ensign. I shall always thank them for the respectful consideration that they all showed for their Exec.

TRAINING AND OVERSEAS

LCT(6)-546 was built at the Bison Shipbuilding Complex--a 100+ year-old shipbuilding facility on the Niagara River near Tonawanda, New York, in September of 1943. She was sent along the Erie Canal by way of the Niagara River, and at Albany was floated down the Hudson River to New York City. The 546 was secured to the deck of the *USS Visciano* for transport to London's Tilsbury Docks on the Thames River. The three sections were then bolted together. Ralph Gallant (MoMM 2/c) takes up the account from London in December, 1943, to Dartmouth, Devon, U.K., prior to my arrival on board as Executive Officer.

LCT crew No. 5125 trained at Little Creek, Virginia and Solomons, Maryland, near Patuxent Naval Air Station. Our training LCTs were all Mark 5s. We were assigned to Lido Beach Long Island, and then to NARV 114 (Naval Amphibious Replacement Unit) and convoyed from NYC to Firth of Clyde, Glasgow, Scotland and overnight to Dartmouth, Devon, U.K. along the Channel Coast. Sir Francis Drake's house was on the west bank of the Dart River halfway to Dittisham, and Agatha Christie's Greenway Cottage was on the East Bank.

We billeted at the Royal Naval College (England's Annapolis) and from there we were dispersed to the LCTs. I was sent to Liverpool to ferry an LCT with a skeleton crew to Dartmouth. Upon arrival, I was assigned to LCT-546, but before arrival we witnessed the damage done to the stern of LST 289. German E-boats had attacked the LST during pre-invasion practice. Over 800 American troops were lost.

OMAHA BEACH

We made our way under our own power to Portland-Weymouth Anchorage and were briefed for the D-Day assault onto Omaha Beach Easy Red at St. Laurent-Sur-Mer. The 546 took on elements of the U.S. Army 29th

Division and crossed the English Channel under our own power to the shores of Normandy on 6 June, 1944. We landed on Easy Red at 0830 hours as part of the 6th wave and made two beachings before retracting under orders from the beachmaster.

After unloading a portion of the troops, all craft were ordered off the beach for close-in naval bombardment. We then transported wounded soldiers to a hospital LST offshore. Before bringing in another group of soldiers and equipment, we had to stand off while the *Texas*, *Arkansas* and destroyers bombarded the cliffs.

During various actions in the morning, we saw LCIs 91, 83 and 87 hit by 88s and/or mines. LCT-25 was burned on the beach with its DD tanks looking like a blackened skeleton of steel. The bodies in the water are still a vivid memory for me. Some were wounded, some were dead--it was difficult to determine until they were pulled ashore. We filled the rest of our tank deck with wounded to take to a hospital LST.

That evening an LCVP drifted against the 546. We tied it alongside and took care of the small group of cold, soaked and hungry remnants of an Underwater Demolition Team composed of 95 men and 5 officers. These few survivors slept on our LCT and in their LCVP.

At about 0200 (2 a.m.) on 7 June, a German plane coasted in and dropped a bomb closer to us than his target, the *Arkansas*. He was hit by a 5-inch 38 shell from the *Arkansas* and was quickly reduced to an orange ball of flames above the Normandy cliffs. On several evenings the "Bed Check Charlies" would harass us.

One afternoon a V-1 or V-2 rocket bomb landed on the shore between us and the Canadian beach to our east. On another sunny day we stood on the beach feeling the earth shake as our bombers raided the French city of Caen, about 20 miles inland.