

# 60 YEARS AGO

## Northwest Africa

During early 1943, the first American LCTs began arriving in Northwest African waters. They crossed the Atlantic on freighters that reached the Mediterranean in January. One of them, deckloaded on the Liberty Ship *Arthur Middleton*, was lost when that freighter exploded off Cape Falcon near Oran, Algeria.

In May 1942 the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that a substantial fleet of LST, LCT, and LCI as well as smaller landing craft be completed in time to take part in the cross-channel invasion of France then scheduled for February 1943. Although that operation was postponed in favor of the landings in North Africa, landing ships and craft fortunately did not lose top priority in construction. They were badly needed, both in the Mediterranean and in the United Kingdom, and the sooner they came out, the earlier sailors could be trained to operate them, and soldiers on how to use them.

Also in January 1943, Allied leaders met at Casablanca and authorized the invasion of Sicily set for July.

## Guadalcanal

At this same time in the Pacific, *Operation Pestilence* was underway--the invasion of Guadalcanal. The first LCT MK5s began to arrive in the South Pacific late in the fall of 1942, just in time for a renewed push to take Guadalcanal in early 1943. U.S. shipyards were turning out the new LCTs in large numbers in Sept-Oct and **Flotillas 5 and 6** were participating in the landings of February 1943 at Guadalcanal and the nearby Russell Islands.

On the morning of 1 February, a Destroyer squadron was escorting a group of LCTs to a landing near Cape Esperance on Guadalcanal Island. Just after the first LCTs had hit the beach, the force was attacked by Japanese fighters and bombers. One Destroyer, the *USS Nicholas*, took several hits and sustained casualties. Another, the *USS DeHaven*, took a direct hit in the magazine and sunk with great loss of life.

LCTs **63** and **181** managed to shoot down one of the attacking Zeros. When the attack was all over, the LCTs had rescued 146 survivors from the stricken *DeHaven* including 38 wounded--167 of the crew went down with the *DeHaven* to its grave in Ironbottom Sound. The LCTs that took part in this action were five of the six that had arrived at Tulagi in January and were loaded with troops, trucks, artillery, ammo and rations at Kukum--bound for the southwest coast of Guadalcanal between Cape Esperance and Verahue.

## BURIAL AT SEA PROGRAM

All WW2 veterans who were honorably discharged are eligible for the Burial at Sea Program. This ceremony is performed on a U.S. Naval vessel while deployed, therefore, family members are not allowed to be present. The ship's commanding officer will notify family members of the date, time and longitude-latitude of the committal service. For more details on this program, you should contact the **United States Navy Mortuary Affairs** office at this toll-free number:

1-800-647-6676 and select option 4.

## WILLIAM BAKER DIES

It is my sad duty to report that William D. Baker, XO on LCT-1040 and skipper of LCTs 34 and 1045, passed away on October 18, 2002. Bill was the author of *The LCT Story* that is posted on our web site. We exchanged many e-mails over the last five years and he was one of the first to send me content for our new web site. I have been told that his book will continue to print.

This is from the back cover of his book: "William DeGrove Baker comes from a long line of William Bakers stretching back to England during the Revolution, but it was a DeGrove ancestor, Michael Ellsworth DeGrove, who set an example by serving as a gunner's mate in the U.S. Navy in the War of 1812, the only relative ever in service. Born in Buffalo, New York, Baker was called to Navy duty on 1 July, 1943. His experience on LCTs in the Mediterranean and later the East Coast, entitled him to use the G.I. Bill for graduate education. He went on to teach English at several colleges during a forty-seven year career. Retired and a longtime trustee of the Greene County Public Library, he lived in Yellow Springs, Ohio."

Thanks Bill.....*Rich Fox, webmaster*

## THE BRASS MONKEY

In the heyday of sailing ships, all warships and some freighters carried iron cannons that fired iron cannon balls. A good supply was needed near the cannons, but how to prevent them from rolling off the deck?

The best method was a square-based pyramid of 30 balls next to each cannon. Problem--how to keep the bottom layer from rolling out from under the rest! The first solution was an iron plate but the balls would soon rust to it. The final solution was a plate made of brass--a *brass monkey*. Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts when chilled--so when the temperatures dropped too far, the brass would shrink and cause the cannon balls to fall off the *monkey*, hence the expression, "it's cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey."