

LST 534 Newsletter

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**This cover story is Part II of a II Part Series
in which Lt. jg Wayne Jens recounted his
World War II Naval experience, and his LST 534 days.**

Growing to Manhood in WWII: Part II

Although I read many books on ship, the book that was the most impressive was The Robe. As education officer I had several lockers full of textbooks for use by our crew who might be interested in taking correspondence courses. The only persons I found interested were the stewards that served our mess and did our laundry. I recall spending a great deal of time helping one of the stewards named Colbert as he worked on several of the courses. I have often wondered if his interest in future education ever paid off. An interesting bit of news when we were on Guam was that the B-29 pilots were taking bets that the war would be over by August. Obviously those boys knew that the big event was not too far away from happening but the fact that the atomic bomb was about to be dropped on Japan was not known to anyone I talked to on Guam.

Early in June we formed in convoy to Okinawa. The crew

knew that it wouldn't be long before we would be in the thick of it. Reports from Okinawa were that the Marines and Army were really catching hell on the island. Also that the destroyer picket ships protecting the fleet were just about all hit by Kamikaze planes. Since I was designated as Chaplain, the number of the crew that wanted a church service began to increase. Up to that time hardly anyone was interested in a service therefore none were held until we neared Okinawa. It was clear that these boys knew this might be their last chance to get religion. I don't recall what I said during these services or how many were held but I can assure the reader, they were not very professional but were from the heart.

We finally got to the harbor at Naha and found about a dozen of the LST's tied up to the floating dock that was set up by the CB's. We began to determine where and when we were to unload our cargo. On the early morning of the day we were hit, I had the watch and was stationed at the bow doors

on the dock when we were alerted that an air attack was expected and general quarters was sounded. My station was on the bow on deck as assistant gunnery officer, assigned to direct gunfire of the forward twin 40mm guns and the four forward 20mm guns and to be certain that no one failed to perform their duties. It wasn't long before we saw the Kamikaze approaching low in the sky toward our position. As I recall we were the first LST tied to the dock and in the northerly most exposed position. We were the shield LST protecting the other LST's. As the plane got closer and closer, the guns on the other LST began to fire and shortly thereafter we ordered our crew to open fire. As the plane began to dive toward us the shells from the other LST guns began to hit our ship. This resulted in many casualties on our ship from shrapnel. It soon was clear that the plane was going to dive into our ship and it seemed to me that I could see the pilot's grinning image as he hit our ship just below my position on the bow. All I can remember was the

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explosion and the upward movement of the deck. The next thing I remember were corpsmen tending to me and shooting morphine into my arm to stop the pain. My left leg was broken as well as the kneecap and I was told that a chain holding down the LCI broke and had wrapped around my leg. The ship was on fire and it soon began to sink even though we were tied to the dock at the bow. I heard later that the explosion in the tank deck has killed three of the CB's and had blown their bodies out on the dock. Of our crew I was one of the severely injured although several of our crew were hit by shrapnel from the hits by the other LST's. As it turned out, the war was almost over and I may have been one of the last Navy casualties in the battle of Okinawa.

As the ship was sinking I was strapped in the wire casualty basket and lowered over the side into a small LCVP and taken onto the island where I was sent to the army field hospital and after a while my injury was attended to by Army doctors. The doctors set the leg and kneecap as best they could and placed a cast on the leg and moved me to a field hospital tent where it seemed I stayed for about a week. Every night Japanese soldiers would infiltrate the area looking for food. During these night raids we would have to crawl into the slit trenches next to the tent to avoid exposure to the infiltrators. At those times all I

had for protection was my 45 pistol that could provide some protection. I knew with this experience that I was happy that I was in the Navy and not the Army or Marines. I was soon taken aboard the hospital ship Solace for the voyage back to Pearl. Before I left on the Solace, some of the officers from the LST 534 who were involved in patching the hole in the ship and raising her from the bottom found the 8 bottles of scotch in my locker and they arranged to get it to the Solace so that I could have it delivered to the marine who bought the Scotch from me. However as they were on their way to the ship they told me they had an accident and all the bottles were broken. At least that is what they told me as they arrived and said good bye. To this day I have never had that story verified!! The crew still had to work on the ship and get her ready for the assault on mainland Japan. Finally I heard that a typhoon hit Okinawa a month later and this was the final blow. This time the ship could not survive and it sunk again, this time for good!

I finally ended up in the Great Lakes Naval Hospital where I met my wife who was a volunteer Red Cross Gray Lady and in January of 1946 we were married even though I was still recuperating in the hospital. Meeting and marrying Dorothy justified my injury and my short tour of duty in the Navy was considered very worthwhile.

In the fall of 1946 Dorothy and I enrolled at Purdue University where Dorothy received her master's degree and in 1949 I was awarded a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering. Our first child was born at Purdue, followed by our second in Elmhurst, Illinois, the third child in White Plains, NY and the fourth child in North Tarrytown, NY. We have been married for 56 years.

Fifth Anniversary of the LST 534 Reunion

It is with extreme pride that I tell you about our reunion in St. Louis. We had a total of 36 guests. Here is the muster role:

Linda Alvers
Marian Alvers
Matthew Wachsman
Norris Long
Duncan and Carole Robey
Andy and Rose Cumella
Oscar and Helen Cress
Jim and Sandy Miller
Larry Lord
Willie and Marty Gunn
Larry and Opal Gray
Luther Curtis Lyles
Bill Dox
Alex Fielder and grandson-in-law, Terry Seymore
Spencer and Wilma Graham
Dave and Kathy Graham
(Spencer's grandson and his wife)
Margaret Cowart
Cecilia Verner
Odell and Alice Hill with their family: Pat, Terry and Kathleen

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Dan and Barbara Toole
Albert Straka
Monica Straka (daughter)

This year the LST 534 received the award for having the most attendees. Congratulations to us!

We opened the reunion on Friday morning, August 30th, with a prayer by William (Bill) Dox. Our candle was lit by Norris Long and burned continuously for the next 60 hours. Our candle glows for our deceased shipmates.

Our room was all decorated the evening before with everyone's help. It was quite festive and brought joy to all who passed by.

Friday was reunion day. We remembered events that have happened to all of us since we first met in Chicago in 1997. Such events as Princess Di's death, the airing of "Onto Rugged Shores," stepping foot onto an original LST from WWII. We aired another documentary. We lost shipmates. We found shipmates. We experienced the fall of the World Trade Center in New York. We went to war. And on and on.

Then we watched the tapes from past reunions. That was a hoot. A lot of laughs.

Friday night was game night. You really have to be there to describe the fun that happens on

game night. We played LST Bingo, Who Am I?, and the oven mitt game. We all went to sleep that night with a smile on our faces.

Saturday was Normandy day. Everything French. We watched tapes from our trip back to the beaches of Normandy.

Saturday night we dined at a local steakhouse. The dinner was delicious and the staff at Carmine's couldn't have been more fun. Dave, the head waiter, managed to size us all up rather quickly and contributed to a very fun evening.

Sunday morning we were served crepes by our very own Matthew Wachsman. Matthew was enlisted as a seaman 1st class on Friday, but this morning he was assigned chief cook 3rd class. Our crepes were individually prepared—ham & cheese, marmalade, chocolate, almonds. I took orders and Matthew served up these beautiful and delicious delicacies. This was a treat and one that Matthew will probably be expected to do each reunion. Bravo to the chef.

Sunday morning is also the memorial service which we all attended. This is sponsored by the US LST Association and is a tribute to our fallen military men and women.

We watched some footage of the LST 325 during lunch and then reconvened to pack up. We had a short time to rest before

attending the LST Association final banquet. We were all dolled up and of course, Rose and Andy Cumella served us tomatoes and mozzarella. Yummy!

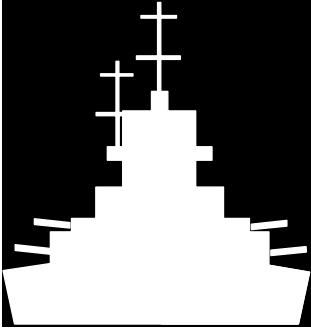
After the banquet, we gathered around, held hands, said the Lord's prayer as we blew out our candle.

Several thrills happened at this year's reunion. First, we enjoyed the company of new shipmates. Larry Lord came from New Mexico. Odell Hill came from Illinois. Spencer Graham came from Chicago. Margaret Cowart came from Florida. She represented Cecil Cowart, who was a cook in the Atlantic theater. Cecil died two years ago. And their daughter, Cecelia, not only came but helped me out a lot. Thanks Cecelia.

Other help came by way of Alex Fielder's grandson-in-law, Terry Seymore. Terry is now dubbed game meister and must come every year to be in charge of the games. Terry was actually a big help during the entire reunion. I appreciate your help, Terry! Spencer's grandson, Dave, and his wife, Kathy, were great sports. It was nice to have the spread of generations to keep the reunion young at heart.

Next year, we are going to Dallas, August 26th - September 1st. Let's plan on being there.

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Birthdays

October 1

Robert Ware
2602 Darwood Ct.
Mobile, AL 36605

October 2

Emmett Cull
PO Box 1885
Portolla, CA 96122

October 4

Leo Wilson
5 Malvern Road
Norwood, MA 02062

October 27

Johnny Medeiros
c/o Sheila Sexton
1505 NE 55th St.
Ocala, FL 34479

October 31

Oscar Cress
9841 41st St., North
Pinellas Park, FL 33782

November 8

Fred Maddix
7798 Forrest Circle
Glen St. Mary, FL 32040

November 11

Albert Straka
643 Foothill Road
Bridgewater, NJ 08807

November 20

Calvin Hesse
5045 Highway 956
Weiner, AR 72479

November 27

George Popham
6575 Juniper Dr.
Missoula, MT 59802

December 5

Norris Long
101 NE 31st St.
Oak Island, NC 28465

December 25

Bill Ayers
221 Westwood Ave.
Jackson, TN 38301

January 4

Ed Overstake
2170 Americus Blvd. So.
#49
Clearwater, FL 34623

January 14

Frank Frame
PO Box 1017
Jal, NM 88252

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