

LST 534

Newsletter

July/August/September 2008

Volume 11, Issue 3

In His Own Words

From time to time, I receive letters or correspondences from shipmates and/or their families. The following is one of those extremely precious and invaluable letters.

It was written by Cecil Cowart, SC2c, who was on board LST534 for a period of time as a cook. Cecil's wife, Margarat Cowart, and his daughter, Cecilia Verner, sent this personal reflection to me. I want to share it with you . It will be in two parts. Here is Part I.

"To Whom It May Concern:

The contents of this information are true to the best of my ability due to records that have been lost or misplaced.

On or about January 1943, I was working in Tallahassee, Florida, Leon County School, and the new jail and courthouse, all new construction. We were notified to register for the draft, so we went to the old courthouse to do so.

One time before I tried to enlist in the US Navy but was turned down, so I worked until March 1943 and was called into the Jacksonville, Florida post office for examination. I passed, believe it or not.

This was about January 1943, and then we were to be called in soon and were. I was scheduled to go to Jacksonville Navy Base for training but was sent to the Bainbridge, Maryland, Navy Boot Camp. We drilled, exercised, and then after a few months of this treatment I was called to a cook and baker school to be trained for sea duty cooking. I was there a month or so and passed and was assigned to sub school to which I didn't go because I broke my heel on my left foot and was delayed as usual. After about 2 weeks, I was assigned to a landing ship tank (LST) school in Solomon, Maryland.

As soon as I passed all

phases of cooking on a ship, I was assigned to 3 or 4 LSTs. Before this was all over I was assigned to LST 534 on which I stayed aboard from March 1943 to June 1943, then we left for regular sea duty. All together there were 4 ships I was on at different times. Then the big day came, the middle of '43 or late '43, and we set sail for destination unknown, Portsmouth, England, and then to South Hampton, England, where we loaded a LCM on our forward deck to haul to Glasgow, Scotland. From there, after unloading, we went to South Hampton, England, where we prepared to train for amphibious landing. During the beginning of World War II, we were followed by submarines for weeks while we were out there transporting troops to the beachhead and taking the dead and wounded to South Hampton, England, where they were moved to a hospital for those who

were alive. After about 3 months of this we were ordered back to sea. We traveled for miles and miles of ocean and had a few warnings of danger, but it soon wound down. We were ordered back to New York. Our crew picked up our ship in Evansville, and had several trial runs to be sure. We then proceeded to Norfolk, Virginia, to form a convoy to England.

We went around Halifax, Nova Scotia, Iceland, and some other places that passed me and can't remember that one, but we were stretched out for miles, ships, fighting ships, tankers, carriers, tin cans, cruisers, aircraft carriers, etc. We lost several tankers that night and other ships due to the German subs.

We finally made it to South Hampton, England, a week or so before the invasion began.

Then on June 5, 1944, we were informed we would be moving out of South Hampton, England, to destination unknown. At about 11:00pm, June 5, 1944, we set sail for a destination unknown. At that time only the captain knew where we were going. Just before we arrived on the Normandy beaches where we were headed, we were shot up by German planes day and

night. I was a pointer on a forward gun tub. This job was to direct the gunmen to fire at the time the target was pinpointed for accuracy, but we missed some because of the intense situation, but we arrived on Normandy Beach, France on or about 5:00am and were well welcomed. We saw hundreds of ships and planes in combat over Normandy, and we were in the thick of battle. We were real lucky to survive, and the Good Lord was watching over us.

We stayed several days after we unloaded the troops and tanks. We were not completely on the beach, so some of the tanks had to go in deep water but made it out without a single casualty. We were ordered to stay put and, while all this was going on, German planes were giving us hell and the troops on the beach plus the big German guns were busy too. We were close to 2 or 3 German gun emplacements, and the big battleships on close to the shoreline were firing and you could see the shells demolish the German fortifications. We were close to a hospital where the Germans were hiding in a hospital, killing our troops. They were floating all around us. We were ordered to go in the water and get all the bodies out and bring them aboard ship. Most were dead or would die.

After a few days, the paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines and saved this battle of survival. Some of the men taken out of the water had to be wrapped in sheets and with an identification tag. Hardly any were alive when we waded in the water almost to our shoulders, and the waves didn't help. But what saved us mostly were the paratroopers landing behind enemy lines, and I believe that is what gave our troops a chance to proceed with their destination. That saved the day and a lot of lives.

The ships off shore were sending big shells over our ship into the German emplacement. After we picked up all the bodies we could, there were other LST crew members doing the same. After the Germans were moved back from the beaches, it was quiet until about dark, and then the fireworks started up again dropping antipersonnel bombs close to our ship on the beaches.

After several weeks went by and after the Army pushed in to the outlying town around the shooting was quiet, and we could say thanks to the Good Lord for keeping most of us safe.

I had to keep time for meals for the crew and officers which was a full-time job,

officers, soldiers, and crew, over 500 people to feed. I had to see that all aboard the ship were well fed and ate mostly on time. I really didn't like to sleep below deck, but I learned to. After a while I'd moved my bunk closer to the ladder to topside. We had no casualties about ship except the bodies that we had to take to England. They said you'll get used to it, but that's a lie. I never did. Some of the fellows were deceased didn't have any identification, but they had to be processed for identification. We had several months of buzz bomb planes while we were tied up to a dock.

Just as soon as the German Army was pushed back inland for miles and miles did we relax. A few days after that episode, we left Normandy Beach and sailed back to England.

I had to get off the ship for a trip to London, England, but before I arrived there I got real ill, a stomach virus or something, and had to be sent back to the ship with help.

I guess it was the traveling on the train that made me sick. I stayed in South Hampton, England, to recover and they found out it was my appendix that had ruptured.

We went back to South Hampton, England, a few weeks later and, after arriving, I had to go to South Hampton Naval Hospital for appendix surgery but was back on the ship after about 4 weeks."

Part II of Cecil Cowart's story will be in the next issue.

Cecil Cowart is deceased.

In Memoriam

Fred Maddix, S1c



Fred Maddix, S1c, passed away this spring. Fred came from a family of railroad workers. Before and after the war, Fred worked the railroads. He lived in Florida when I found him as a crew member of LST534. Fred was a Christian and sent small bibles to many of us at the holidays. Fred ended up on oxygen full-time and moved to Kentucky to be with his family. Fred enjoyed learning about LST534.

He will be missed.
May he rest in peace.

Holidays

JULY

- 1 Canada Day
- 4 Independence Day
- 27 Parents' Day

AUGUST

- 3 Friendship Day
- 19 National Aviation Day
- 26 Women's Equality Day

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Labor Day
- 7 Grandparents' Day
- 11 Patriot Day
- 17 Constitution Day
- 21 International Day of Peace
- 22 Autumn Begins



BIRTHDAYS

August 11

Larry Gray
101 Forrest Hill Drive
Taylors, SC 29687

August 16

Luther Lyles
2407 Reynolds Road
Wauchula, FL 33873

August 23

Sammie Porter
5813 Seminole Ct.
Oklahoma City, OK 73132

September 1

John Stanley Primmer
19410 East Cameron Road
Rockford, WA 99030

September 11

Myron W. Pully, Jr.
63 Yorktown Road
Newport News, VA 23603

October 27

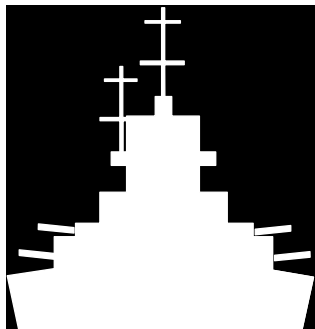
Johnny Medeiros
c/o Sheila Sexton
1505 NE 55th Street
Ocala, FL 34479

October 31

Oscar Cress
9701 East Hasket Drive
Dayton, OH 45424-1615



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LST534

LST534 Newsletter

Just for Fun

Just for Fun is a column meaning just that – FUN!

Thanks to Roger Lee for his contribution to this edition's column:

The last fight with my wife was my fault.

My wife asked, "What's on TV?"
I said, "Dust!"



A beggar walked up to a well-dressed woman shopping on Rodeo Drive and said, "I haven't eaten anything in four days."

She looked at him and said, "God, I wish I had your will power!"

Nautical Terms:

*In memory of James Richard Drew who contributed to this column until his passing.
Contributed by Willie Gunn.*

Poop deck—stern of the ship, derived from the Latin word *puppis*.

...not to be mistaken for...

Head—the ship's bathroom comes from its location at the bow, or head, of the ship. It's there for the very practical reason that the bow of a sailing ship is always downwind.

**Editor and Comments:
Linda Alvers**

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