

LST534

Documentary Newsletter

August, 1998

Volume 1, Issue 5

Introducing Your Host...



Mr.
Howard
K.
Smith

The essence of Howard K. Smith is the quiet, gentle, unassuming manner in which he writes and talks about the human condition in all its manifest forms. As an observer to life, he refined his basic journalistic skills and raised them to an art form. The rewards for such talent and expertise are reflected in the people he met, interviewed, wrote about and befriended. In sum, they were and are a cross section of familiar personalities that employed the wherewithal to reshape our world. He is uniquely suited to host our documentary on the LST534. As the last American reporter to escape wartime Berlin and the first to return when it ended, he brings to the program a perspective on that conflict few others share. He understands the war from the panorama of great battles, acutely aware that it is individuals and small events that make up the whole. The life of the LST534 represents a microcosm of that monumental engagement. Its tale is that of every man who took up arms to fight in what has been characterized as "the last good war".

We are pleased and proud to welcome Howard K. Smith to the LST534 family.

Written by Ron Pobuda

Update by Linda Alvers, RN, MSN

Going Home

The last leg of the journey to videotape people for the documentary took me back home to Evansville, Indiana birthplace of the LST534. Before I tell you about our distinguished interviewees, let me mention a word about going home. The crew consisted of me and Matt, in addition to Dan Welch, jib operator. By the time the shoot was over, I can safely say that Matt and Dan had a healthy perspective on Evansville, Indiana. Coming from the New York Metropolitan area, they were pleasantly surprised at the wholesomeness of the citizens. Not to mention how good the food was! Thanks to everyone in Evansville who helped us out the Radisson Hotel, the health club furnished weights for the jib, the American Airlines ticket counters, Mead Johnson, and everyone we bumped into along the way.

We arrived on May 1st. We checked into the hotel and went right to work arranging shot lists and reconfirming schedules.

Saturday morning we went to the home of Mr. Roman Ritzert, Chief Hull Inspector at the Evansville Shipyard. Roman told us stories about life inside the shipyard. It was like a city within a city. It had a cafeteria, a hospital, a fire department, sports teams, published its own newspaper a regular environment. Roman's job was to make sure all the welding was done to perfection so the men of the US Navy would be safe in the rough waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Roman remembers the day the LST534 was launched and christened by Mrs. C. S. Jones. He told us lots of stories about how eventful the launchings were. Roman could tell us about life in the shipyard as if it were yesterday. We all fell in love with Roman Ritzert and the guys of the LST534 send him a great big thank you for securing their hull!

Since our interview, Roman has had some heart trouble and was even hospitalized. So we also send him our get well wishes.

Sunday morning we were honored to interview Mr. Andrew Clark, author of the book entitled The Cornfield Shipyard. This interview was so much fun. He took us to the original site of the Evansville Shipyard and pointed out all of the areas of the shipyard activity and what took place at the different spots. At one point, it seemed like he brought the old shipyard back to life. You could just feel the energy and excitement of the time the bustling, thriving establishment. In the program, you'll see and hear Andy talk about the lives of the men and women who built the LSTs. Good job, Andy!

Sunday afternoon we went to Sunset Memorial Park Cemetery, where my father is resting peacefully. We were met there by the Vanderburgh County Retired Veterans Association. We owe them and the cemetery a huge thank you. This was footage we needed for the flag folding ceremony. These 18 retired veterans went through the rigors of a 21 gun salute again and again. We videotaped from all angles. They were happy when they heard me say, It's a Wrap.

Monday we were thrilled to interview Mr. Tom Lonnberg, Curator of History at the Evansville Museum of Arts and Sciences. Tom spent his time telling us how important the shipyard was to the local economy at the time. He explained how river cities were selected to have a shipyard and how it was born and then died with the war. He is very informative about the role the LSTs played in the war effort.

Tom then opened up the museum doors to us. The Evansville Museum of Arts and Sciences has the most spectacular model of an LST that I have ever seen. Tom graciously opened the display case and we were able to get great close ups and detail of the model. What an honor. It looks great on tape and will lend a real quality to the show.

The entire trip to Evansville was one of the best for me and the crew. It was made special because my sister Cindy joined us. She got a birds eye view of the inside track of producing a documentary. And what a help she was.

That was our last production except for the host we are videotaping Mr. Howard K. Smith on August 17th and 18th.

I've been asked if the newsletter will continue after the documentary is done the answer is YES! we will rename it the LST534 Newsletter!

More Crew Names:

Kelly Kissel – Research
Jennifer Roberts – Research
Dan Welch – camera & jib operator

Track that Ship

Thursday, March 8, 1945, Captain French received sailing orders. The LST534 got underway from New York Harbor enroute to the Pacific, newly outfitted with camouflage paint and four LCVP's. The route to the Pacific went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba through the Canal Zone (Crisitobal Harbor, Colou Harbor, Balboa Harbor) on to San Diego, California, arriving on April 12th.

On April 15th, the LST534 departed San Diego enroute to Pearl Harbor. She arrived on April 25th. At Pearl Harbor, some repairs were made and additional supplies and men were brought on board. The LST534 left the gates of Pearl Harbor on May 17, 1945. Little did they know their impending fate. The route to Okinawa was the Marshall Islands, Guam and Saipan. It was along this route that the men of the LST534 were initiated at the International Dateline.

On Tuesday, June 19, 1945, the LST534 arrived at Nakagusuka Bay, Okinawa.

Three days later, the LST534 was hit by a Kamikaze plane. This was the last Kamikaze attack in the Okinawa campaign.

Needless to say, the ship was damaged and in need of repairs. Before the ship could be repaired, the typhoons came and the LST534 ended up on a reef at Baten Ko, Okinawa.

The U S Navy decommissioned the LST534 on November 2, 1945. Captain French was detached and returned to the United States. Ensign John Pizmak took charge of the vessel. It was sunk off the coast of Okinawa on December 9, 1945!

Reunion

This will be the last time I get to talk to you about the reunion.

Lots of guys are coming with their families. It is going to be a blast. Bring all of your memorabilia as there will be tables for you to show stuff. Friday is full of fun things in the LST534 reunion room – we will watch the interviews of the guys, record messages for the time capsule and look at each others memorabilia. Friday night we are showing the movie that was playing the night of the Kamikaze attack – “The Constant Nymph”. So plan on popcorn, beer, soda and a good time.

Saturday is a time to watch the movies that Norris Long took on board the LST534, to watch more interviews or to browse the deck logs. But get ready for Saturday evening. A formal affair, we are having a cocktail reception at 5:00 p.m. At 6:00 p.m. we are taking a group shot. We are showing the long awaited documentary at 7:00 p.m.

Don't miss this special time for all of us.

A champagne toast will follow immediately after the documentary.

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness I have to tell you that we lost Mr. John Shipe, on July 10, 1998. He had a heart attack and valve replacement in late April and was recovering when he suffered a major stroke. He was hospitalized and never returned home. I know he was very excited about being reacquainted with some of his shipmates, especially Duncan Robey. He was planning on attending the reunion. We will miss him.

Condolences can be sent to his daughter, Linda Thomas, 7200 Terry Drive, Knoxville, TN 37924.

Ahoy, John.

OOPS! I missed a birthday

July 3

Ira Leonard, S1c
2335 Hawthorne Dr
Foristell, MO 63348

Birthdays

September 18

Donald Sabin, S1c
92 University Avenue
Providence, RI 02906

September 18

Roman Ritzert
Chief Hull Inspector, Shipyard
657 S Weinbach
Evansville, IN 47714

October 1

Robert Ware, GM3c
2602 Darwood Court
Mobile, AL 36605

October 2

Emmett Cull, F2c
P.O. Box 1885
Portolla, CA 96122

October 4

Leo F. Wilson, Lt (jg)
5 Malvern Road
Norwood, MA 02062

Get Well Wishes:

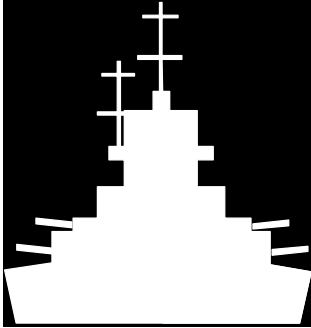
Dick Drew, S2c
290 Semicircle Drive
Demorest, GA 30535

Roman Ritzert
Chief Hull Inspector
Evansville Shipyard
657 S Weinbach
Evansville, IN 47714

John Cain, S1c (RM)
536 Barbados Street
Norristown, PA 19401

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JUST FOR FUN

Just for Fun is a column meaning just that FUN. Jim Sarres has graciously volunteered to keep this column going. We all know how Judge Sarres can keep us laughing! Thanks Jim.

Jokes From Jim

I read a book last night that brought tears to my eyes my checkbook.

I bought a book How to Be the Boss in your Own Home - but my wife won't let me read it.

At my age, flowers make me nervous.

Nautical Terms

By James Richard Drew

Fogey Bait: candy, preferably with a wrapper

Sheep Shank: a knot used to shorten a line.

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