

# LST534 Newsletter

May/June, 1999

Volume II, Issue 3

## Thanks for watching...

“Onto Rugged Shores: Voyage of LST534” aired on The History Channel on June 6, 1999 at 7 PM eastern time. It repeated at 11 AM eastern time on June 12<sup>th</sup>. The ratings were good. “Onto Rugged Shores” scored a 25% higher rate than the average for that time slot. Also, it rated the highest for that time slot for the second quarter of this year. Of course, even at this writing the second quarter is not over so we may not keep that designation.

The response to the show has been overwhelming. I hired a public relations firm to help get the word out. It helped. I was interviewed by 26 newspapers across the country. I was on two live radio programs, one taped one, and I appeared on two live television programs including the National Fox News Live. That was nerve wrecking. I'd much rather put you guys in front of the camera.

In the next issue I want to publish some of the more eloquent news paragraphs as written by very professional journalists. Some of their stories brought tears to my eyes. I'll also give you details of where stories appeared.

As D-Day approached (Documentary Day), me and my friends and family took advantage of every possible way to promote the show. On Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, I took a stack of postcards down to the Pier in New York City. It was “Fleet Week”. I thought to myself, what a captive audience. As I approached the pier, I saw a line of people (about 400) waiting to go on board the USS WASP. I asked the security guard if I could pass out my postcards about this ship in World War II. “Sure.” So I went up and down the line telling everyone about the documentary and handing out postcards. Many of those people watched it, I'm sure.

On Sunday morning, June 6<sup>th</sup>, me and a group of friends went to Rockefeller Center and tried our best to get on “The Today Show”. We actually talked to Jack Ford and Jodie Applegate, but that morning “The Today Show” was pre-empted by the French Open. So instead of seeing us, we saw Andre Agassi playing tennis. That was a little disappointing but we all had a great time.

What did I do during the airing?

I had a BIG party. This was the first, and possibly the last, time I would ever be able to claim that “I” produced a television show. So, I had a producer's party. It went like this: rent a favorite restaurant (Caffé Cielo), decorate it in nautical décor, have a live three piece ensemble strumming 1940's music, invite your closest friends and family, get all dolled up and celebrate. Celebrate we did. Cocktails at 6:00, the show at 7:00, my thanks and comments from 8-8:30 and dinner at 8:30. All of the shipmates that were interviewed were invited to the producer's party. Andy Cumella, his wife Rose, and two of their three children came. All of my guests were honored and thrilled to talk with Andy. We partied till midnight. When I went home and went to bed the last thing I said as I looked upward to Heaven was, “Goodnight Dad, I hope I made you proud.”

We had an intern working with us at my office this summer, Mr. Casey Shure. Casey called all of the shipmates and families who appeared on the program to find out how they celebrated the airing.

Here is his report:

# LST534 Newsletter

Could "Onto Rugged Shores" have been any better? Most people don't think so. After interviewing many of the crew members of the LST534, all of whom feel the show was a great success, the conclusion is no, it could not have been any better. The only complaint that was lodged was by Mr. Luther Lyles of Wauchula, Florida who thought the show was so good it should "have been on for two hours instead of just one." Mr. Lyles doesn't receive the History Channel in his home so he and his family rented a motel room that receives it in order to watch the show.

How did everyone feel about host Howard K. Smith? There was a resounding response of "he was great" coming from the sailors. Mr. Ed Overstake of Clearwater, Florida summed it up nicely, "Howard was marvelous," and "he is just a pro!" Mr. Overstake had many of his neighbors over to watch the show and then enjoy a little celebration. Mr. Overstake couldn't believe that the little known story of the LST534, was on national TV, he said "it was a miracle for us to get such recognition." Mr. Duncan Robey of Yakima, Washington who taped the show and then watched it with his relatives reiterated Overstake's comments, "Howard K. Smith did a beautiful job, I was impressed by the professionalism." And so was everyone else. The show's professionalism should be credited to the hard work and long hours put in by the staff here in New York especially Michael Wilson co-producer and head of the video department here.

When asked how it felt to be on television, the crew all said the

feeling was just amazing. Mr. Alex Fielder from Fairfield, Ohio responded by saying, "I never expected this to happen, it was very emotional to see the faces of old friends who had passed away. I give this production an A++."

This was Linda's purpose to make a tribute to her father and his fellow crew members that would last forever. Mr. Frank Frame of Jal, New Mexico expressed his joy at being in the spotlight in just a few words, "I enjoyed it thoroughly!" Mr. Larry Gray of Taylors, South Carolina was, "proud to represent LST crews all over the country." And was also happy with the fact that it, "let the country know about the importance of the LST's."

The most enthusiastic of all the crewmembers that were talked to was Mr. Willie Gunn of Swainsboro, Georgia. Some of his comments were, "I absolutely loved it!" and it was an exceptionally done program, professional in every respect." He also stated "Howard K. Smith made a very good program exceptional, getting him as the host was a stroke of genius. He is the epitome of the word professional!" Mr. Gunn's excitement for the show is certainly representative of everyone else.

In St. Petersburg, Florida, Mr. Oscar Cress had a "house full of friends and family over to watch the show and have a fish fry." Oscar and his friends felt, "Onto Rugged Shores couldn't have been any better." All the other crew members seemed to agree.

Spencer James of Poughkeepsie, New York and his family were very happy with the results. "We loved

it and everyone we know loved it!" Mr. James was happiest with the fact that "this will always be there for everyone to remember." Another attribute the James' were interested by was the fact that this show was "different than that of most History Channel shows." It focused on just the one ship rather than on the whole war or a certain campaign during the war, it stayed with the stories of the LST534 the whole time. They only wished that there hadn't been any commercials so the show could have been longer. Mr. Andy Cumella of Toms River, New Jersey watched the show with his family here in New York at the party. He had never told them the story of the LST534 and his family said, "we learned more tonight in one hour than we did living with you all those years."

Two of the men interviewed for the show, Joe Szymanski and Johnny Wilson have since passed away. The two proudest viewers were their wives Jean Szymanski of Easthampton, Massachusetts and Betty Wilson of Morgantown, West Virginia. Mrs. Szymanski described the feeling of seeing her husband as "very touching" while Mrs. Wilson described her husband John as, "a hero in my eyes." Mrs. Wilson also stated that "Onto Rugged Shores means so much to me and my family, I'm so grateful."

Many members of the crew also said they had been receiving phone calls from all over the country from ecstatic friends. Mr. Robey said he has been getting calls from all sorts of places, "some from Florida, California and New York to name a few".

## IN MEMORY

Again, this issue, I have to tell you about two more of our dear friends who have gone to be with my Dad.

### James Richard Drew, S2c

The first person I ever talked to about the LST534 was James Richard Drew. I was visiting Atlanta, Georgia on business and called Mr. Drew to ask him if he would talk to me about the LST534. He and his wife, Lynette, invited me to their house in Demorest, Georgia.

I don't know why I was so nervous. When I arrived, I was greeted by the most elegant southern belle, Mrs. Drew, and a man pulling an oxygen tank in the name of Dick Drew.

I spent a little over two hours with Dick and Lynette and learned so much about the research I needed to do. That was July 2, 1997. That day I did not know I was doing a documentary. In fact, the essence of this man, Dick Drew, inspired me to continue on, to dig deep, to reach out, to create a family.

From that day forward, Mr. Drew became an integral part of this project. I told him everything I was doing. He gave me advice. We shared sea stories. He sent me books. He was totally involved.

Mr. Drew was the cook on board in the Pacific and he told me about sneaking food to the guys in the brig.

He was sick the whole two years I knew him, yet he continued to call and discuss progress of the LST534 documentary. More than anything, he wanted be with you guys. During our reunion in September 1998, he followed our activities hour by hour. He contributed to the column in this newsletter on nautical terminology.

He died on May 27, 1999 about 9:30 PM. It was like a piece of this project died when Dick Drew passed away.

He is survived by his wife, Lynette, their two daughters, Debi and Beth and their families.

We will miss Dick Drew every day of our lives.

### Roman J. Ritzert

Roman J. Ritzert was the Chief Hull Inspector at the Evansville Shipyard from 1942-1945. He is the person who gave the OK for the LST534 to sail down the river and off to war. Roman was 95 when he died on June 14, 1999. Roman appears in the documentary in the segment on the Evansville Shipyard. He also was so proud of the documentary.

He was the foremost authority on the activities of the Evansville Shipyard.

Roman contributed several items to the LST534 time capsule.

Right before he was hospitalized, Roman told me he was planning to buy a laptop computer. Believe it or not, he was planning to write a book on the Shipyard. At 95, I do know that Roman had a full life and one to be grateful for.

I will miss his stories, his devotion and his energy. May he rest in peace.

## Reunion

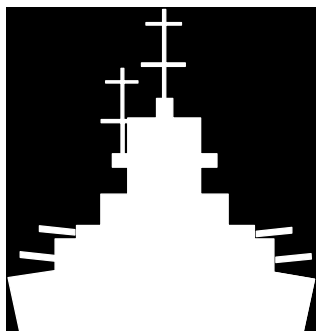
The US LST Association Convention is going to be in San Diego, California from August 28 to September 2, 1999.

The LST534 Reunion will be held at the same time. You all need to sign up for the US LST Association Convention as soon as possible. If enough of us sign up, we will get a hospitality room free. This is very important to help keep the costs down.

This year there will be a lot of excitement around the LST534. Every LST sailor is proud of what the LST534 did to get the word out about the LST's. People will gather to see articles, to watch interviews and to talk to you guys who appeared in the show. Please plan to attend.

Call the US LST Association at 1-800-228-5870 to sign up.

**LST534 Newsletter**  
62 W 62nd Street  
Apt. 26B  
New York, New York 10023



**LST534**

## **LST534 Newsletter**

### Jokes By Jim

**Q.** If you're American and you're outside of the bathroom, what are you on the inside?

**A.** European!

**Q.** Where is the best place for raising kids?

**A.** In an elevator!

### Get Well Wishes

If you need to be on the get well list, please call Linda at 1-800-237-1224.

Alfred Ellis, F1c  
28910 Ann Arbor Trail  
Westland, MI 48185-1829

Please send him encouraging words when you have a minute to do so. It means a lot.

### Nautical Terms

Nautical Terms will not be published this issue out of respect for Mr. Drew. We will resume the column next issue.

### Birthdays

July 11

Bill McAndrew  
Box 781546  
Wichita, KS 67278-1546

July 13

Jim Sarres, Lt(sg)  
3650 Shangri La Road  
Oshkosh, WI 54904-7023

July 16

Lawrence Killian, S1c  
RR 4  
Dallas, PA 18612-9804

July 17

Spencer James, R/M3c  
40 Fulton Avenue  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603-2316

Send all newsletter correspondence to:  
Linda Alvers  
62 W 62nd Street, Apt. 26B  
New York, NY 10023  
1-800-237-1224