

LST 534 Newsletter

July/August/September 2002

Volume 5 , Issue 3

**This cover story is Part I 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

In January 1943, during WWII, I graduated from the University of Wisconsin, with a BS degree in Mechanical Engineering. The accelerated graduation was based on accepting a critical wartime occupation. I chose to go with North American Aviation Company in California. I had several interesting design assignments for the P-51 and the B-25 aircraft during my employment. In 1944 it was clear that more manpower was needed in the Navy for the final push on Japan so I applied for a commission in the U.S. Navy. I was initially turned down due to being overweight and the lack of a release from North America. As I was determined to get a commission, I reduced my weight from 220 pounds to 175 during the spring of 1944 and was able to obtain the needed release from North America. I left California and returned home to Manitowoc, Wisconsin before boarding a train for the Navy Officer Indoctrination School in Tucson, Arizona. This

school was designed to turn out "60 day wonders," by shaping up fairly soft kids, giving them all the medical shots needed, teaching them a little bit about the Navy and how to behave as officers. It was an exhausting experience for this soft kid! Following that grueling stint, I was then sent to anti-submarine school in Miami for two months, and then at amphibious school at Camp Bradford in Virginia.

Although amphibious duty was considered to be the least glamorous duty in the Navy, it in many ways was the best since it provided the greatest freedom and the fewest rigid rules. I arrived at Bradford in January 1945. The classes there were not nearly as professional as Miami but the one week cruise on an LST was outstanding and provided the best way of becoming acquainted with standing watch and how to live aboard this kind of gloating barge. After spending about two months in classes, I began to realize that I probably would never see action since they kept putting me in every course. I obviously would have to take

steps personally to get an overseas order. I finally figured out that the way to get action was to get to know the Chief Yeoman at the base. He quickly obtained an assignment for me on an LST that was going to the Pacific, but at the last minute I was not considered essential so they put me back in school. At this point I was desperate since I felt that the war would end as I repeated all of the courses. So I went back to the Chief for help and it wasn't long that he cut me orders to an LST that was being refurbished in the Newark shipyard after returning from Normandy. So I packed my bags and got on my way for service with the LST534!

In two days I arrived in New York City. That night I found it was impossible to find a hotel room in New York City so I ended up sleeping in a Turkish bath right off of Times Square. The next morning I got a room at the Commodore Hotel and after checking in I found out where the shipyard in Newark was located. I had a day or two before I had to report so I decided to see as much of New

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York as I could. After two days of sight seeing I checked out and took a cab to Newark and the shipyard in Hoboken. As I recall, the 534 was in dry dock when I arrived.

I met the Exec and the Captain. They were in need of a second officer in the deck department and that was where I was assigned. Mr. Green was a Lt. jg in charge of the deck department. He was an easy-going lawyer that allowed me great liberties in directing the activities of the 60 seamen and chiefs. But hell, they didn't need me with the well-qualified Chief that we had aboard. This was the first time that I had been given supervisory responsibilities in the Navy and the need to demonstrate leadership. I loved it and knew that I made the correct decision to get this duty assignment. As the greenest officer I also was assigned assistant gunnery officer, educational officer and chaplain!

Because I had spent several summers working in the Manitowoc shipyard helping build submarines, I felt somewhat at home in the Hoboken yard. Although the yard organization had the responsibility to modify the ship, the crew had the responsibility to order and store the necessary equipment for operating at sea. We had to inventory, supplement and order what we needed. It was a big job for me and allowed me to get to know the crew and officers before we

went to sea and before we would see action. We also reviewed the changes being made to the ship since we would soon be handling her.

Mr. French was the Captain. He obviously was not the most qualified captain in the Navy. He tried to cover up his deficiencies by raising hell with the officers. I soon decided that I would avoid direct contact with him at all costs. As I read many sea stories after the war, it was common to experience a dislike for a Captain as a means of maintaining a united team with the rest of the officers. The Exec was Mr. Wright and I felt that without him between us and Captain French, we would have been continually miserable. All of us would have happily followed and carried out any orders Wright would have given us. He took the time to teach me how to properly stand watch on the bridge and take charge of the ship when we were at sea. Two of the officers that I considered very close friends were Jim Sarres the Communication Officer, and Mr. Fielder the Engineering Officer.

Within about a month we were all out-fitted. We took the 534 out into the Atlantic for a demonstrated cruise for several days and then back to Hoboken to pick up the final provisions before setting out for the Panama Canal with a stop at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, then to Colon where Fielder, Sarres and I went out to see the town.

What a night we had! The canal was an interesting experience and about April 1 we landed in San Francisco. We shortly sailed for Pearl Harbor and while there, I was able to spend several days with my close friends from Manitowoc who were stationed in Pearl. We even had a change to play golf together at the Owahoe Country Club. What a beautiful spot.

After we left the West Coast we had only a few drills with the crew in gunnery practice. These drills clearly demonstrated that the crew was very green but we were unable to convince Captain French to hold more drills. We never got a reason, but suspected that he felt someone might get hurt! Little did we know at the time that many of us would soon get hurt by the enemy and by friendly fire because other LST's had inadequate gunnery training as well.

We soon were underway again to Guam, a very dull spot in the Pacific, where we waited for a large number of LST's to assemble for convoy to Okinawa. We had an LCI on our top deck and a large number of CB's with the construction equipment in our tank deck. We knew they were to arrive at Okinawa to repair the airstrips and expand the field for B-29's for the final assault on Japan. Every four hours we would stand watch while every other one of us would be on the con directing the entire ship. We played bridge and chess when not on

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duty. I never really got to play my favorite card game, Sheephead, which requires a third player since only Sarres and I played. Many people in Wisconsin play Sheephead.

I remember one night in convoy when I had the con and our steering gear failed and I had to get an emergency crew down in the steering room to manually handle the rudder. The Captain's cabin was directly below the bridge so I called him through the voice tube. He was sound asleep and foolishly turned on his cabin lights instead of his red night light. As a result when he came to the bridge he was completely blind. First thing he did was raise hell since I had turned on our emergency running lights to alert the other LST's that we were in trouble. I told him that I was merely complying with the convoy orders. Normally, in convoy, all lights were off and no radio contact was permitted. Communication was by signal light and during the day with flags. After he took over it was soon clear to me before I was to leave the bridge that he was as blind as a bat as he had our ship heading directly toward another LST on a collision course. I pointed this out to him and he was embarrassed, asked me to relieve him and went back to his cabin. I guess after that incident, I never did relate to others aboard ship, he and I had a more cordial relationship.

(To Be Continued)

NEWS

Reported by Mike Whicker

Jim Dolbow, military advisor to Congressman John Hostettler, contacted me from Washington. Jim is a noted military historian. He would like to be contacted by men who served aboard LST's. His plans are to compile a memoir which will be presented to the US Naval War College and the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD.

Jim will send you a list of questions which you may answer and send back at your leisure. Jim's email is Jim.Dolbow@mail.house.gov.

God Bless all of the heroes who served their country aboard LST's.

Mike Whicker
Evansville LST Committee
Evansville, Indiana
"World Champion LST Builder"

Reunion in St. Louis

The reunion in St. Louis promises to be one of our best. We will again have game night, with our usual dinner and ice cream sundaes. During the day, we will be playing videos, some from our trip to Normandy.

So book your reservation and come on over to St. Louis, Missouri August 28th to September 2nd!

BIRTHDAYS

July 13

Jim Sarres
1010 North Westfield St.
#510
Oshkosh, WI 54902-8771

July 16

Lawrence Killian
RR 4
Dallas, PA 18612-9804

July 18

Harold Makinster
1132 19th Avenue
Longview, WA 98632-2215

August 11

Larry Gray
101 Forrest Hill Drive
Taylors, SC 29687

August 12

Robert Goldsmith
95 Shepherd Drive
Wakefield, RI 02879-5730

August 16

Luther Curtis Lyles
2407 Reynolds Road
Wauchula, FL 33873-9802

Joseph Blackburn

4206 Deer Run Drive
Knoxville, TN 37912

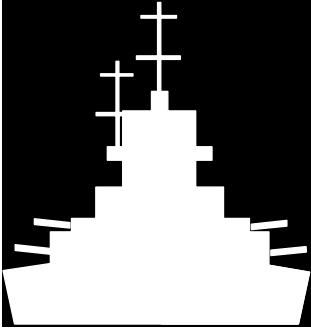
August 23

Sammie Porter
5813 Seminole Ct.
Oklahoma City, OK 73132

September 16

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

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Suite 401
New York, New York 10019



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JUST for FUN

Contributed this issue by my cousin, Rita Sullivan

Ever notice how a 4 year old's voice is louder than 200 adult voices?

Years ago, I returned home from a trip when a severe storm hit. I found my two children in bed with my wife, apparently scared by the loud storm. The next day I explained to the children that it was OK to sleep with Mom when the storm was bad, but not when I was expected home.

After my next trip several weeks later, Karey and the children picked me up at the airport. Since the plane was late, they came into the terminal along with hundreds of other folks. As I entered the waiting area, my son came running, shouting, "Hi Dad! I've got good news!" Waving back, I said loudly, "What's the good news?"

"Nobody slept with Mommy while you were away this time!" Alex shouted.

NAUTICAL TERMS

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

Time in Bells:

Time sounded in Bells—always in groups of two. Navy day begins at 2400 hours—midnight. On board ship, the ship's bell gives the time.

Editor and Comments:
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