

November 2015



# Elsie Item

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE  
USS LANDING CRAFT, INFANTRY, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

• Established May 14-18, 1991, Norfolk, VA •



**ANOTHER  
UNFORGETTABLE  
REUNION!**



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## "THE ELSIE ITEM"

**NUMBER 92, November 2015**

Official publication of the USS LCI National Association, a non-profit veteran's organization. Membership in the USS LCI National Association is open to any U.S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard veteran who served aboard a Landing Craft Infantry, to anyone related to an LCI veteran, or to anyone just interested in the history of LCIs. Published quarterly by the USS LCI National Association. Zach S. Morris, Editor (*John P. Cummer, Editor Emeritus*). Any material for possible publication should be sent to the Editor, preferably by email ([morrisza23@gmail.com](mailto:morrisza23@gmail.com)).

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## **"ELSIE ITEM" DEADLINES**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • <b>FEBRUARY ISSUE</b><br>Deadline: January 10 | • <b>AUGUST ISSUE</b><br>Deadline: July 10      |
| • <b>MAY ISSUE</b><br>Deadline: April 10        | • <b>NOVEMBER ISSUE</b><br>Deadline: October 20 |



## **CHECK OUT THESE WEB SITES:**

[www.usslci.com](http://www.usslci.com) Our own website

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**"Remembering the LCI Vets"**

## **CORRECTIONS FROM LAST ISSUE (AUGUST 2015):**

**Inside Front Cover:** The name of photographer of the cover image was misspelled. VanDuser is correct last name.

# A WORD FROM THE OLD MAN



A time of great fellowship, encouragement and challenge.

That's how I would summarize our recent reunion in Charleston. Ken Breivik and the staff of Nehemiah Communications did a great job with all of the logistics and we owe them our thanks for the smoothness with which everything came off. President Mike Gatton's cheerful and competent leadership was very evident and for that also we are grateful. To all of them we send a hearty "bravo zulu"!

We've always enjoyed great *fellowship* at our reunions but this year it took on an additional dimension as the first meeting of the LCIers and LSTers. From our first "welcome aboard" session until the closing notes of our banquet it was as if we had known each other for the last 70 years. That was to be expected since we shared so much in WWII experiences, but it was still one of the most important elements in the encouragement we all felt for our future together.

*Encouragement* was also felt in the way the boards of the two associations handled the planning for future joint reunions. The desire of the LCI board to proceed with planning for a future merging of the two associations was transmitted to the LST board where it was met with hearty enthusiasm. As you will learn in other places in this edition the plan is to form a special commission to work out plans for how this merger can happen. There was also a definite commitment to meet together again next year for another joint reunion and to do a search for other amphibious associations who might be interested in forming an overall organization while, at the same time, allowing each group to maintain its own special identity.

The *challenge* in this is obvious. Our dwindling numbers of WWII vets and accompanying financial concerns is obvious. That is why the joint planning will proceed deliberately and carefully. As President Mike said, "We're at the courting stage, not marriage now."

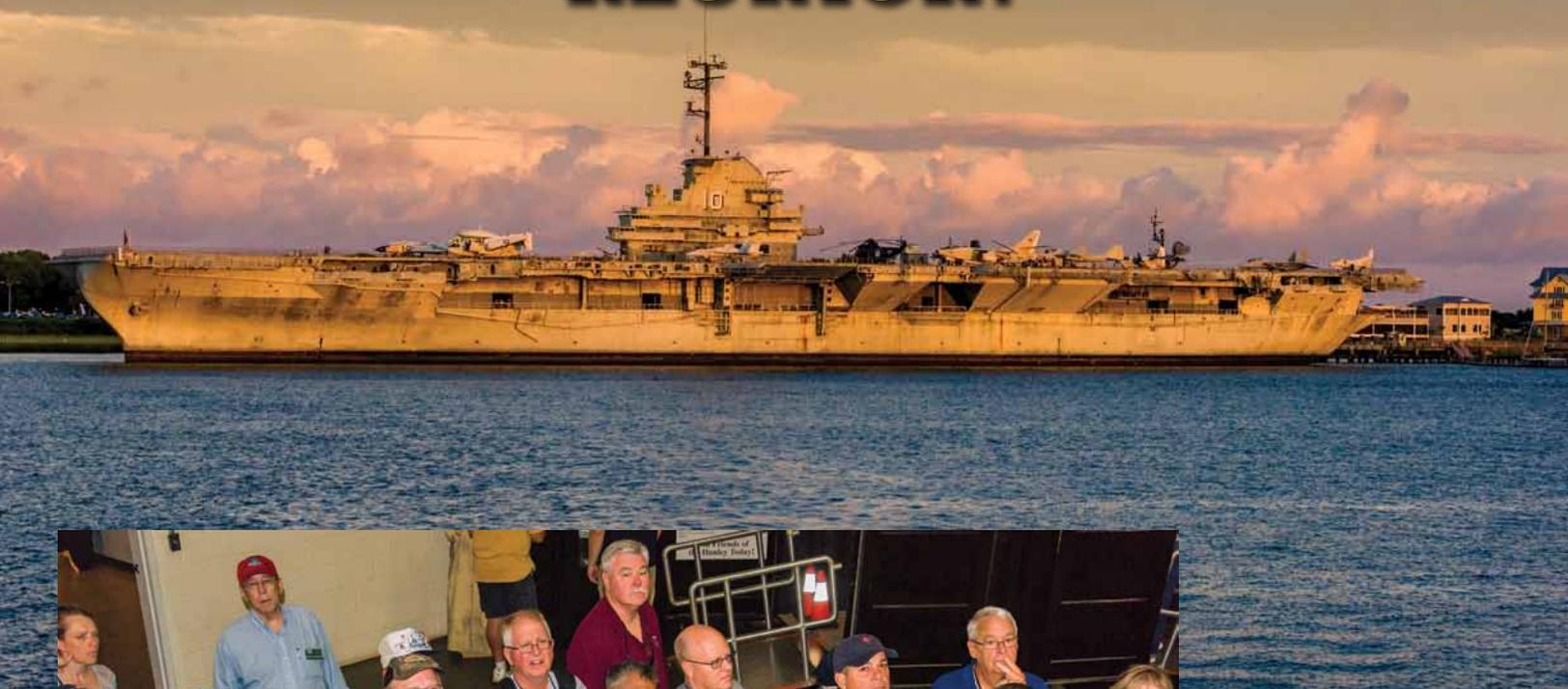
This joint planning commission has already met once via telephone conference call and assignments have been handed out for preliminary position papers to be presented to the entire commission for further discussion/action.

Any suggestions, comments or questions you may have concerning this planning should be directed to President Mike Gatton [mgatton@bellsouth.net; (502) 762-0613] or to Ken Breivik [ken@nehemiahcommunications.com; (803) 865-5665] who will also be a member of this planning commission.

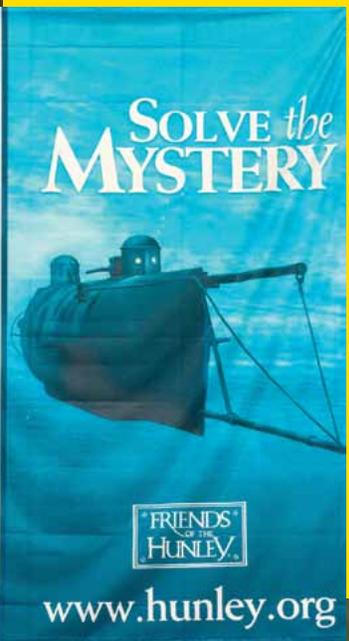
Best wishes!

*John Cummer*

# ANOTHER UNFORGETTABLE REUNION!



HUNLEY



# IN MEMORIAM

*“Almighty and eternal God, from whose love we cannot be parted, either by death or life;  
hear our prayers and thanksgiving for those whom we here remember.  
Grant unto sorrowing family and shipmates the blessing of your peace that passes understanding.”*

LCI 25  
James J. Aydelotte

LCI 443  
Lewis S. Evans

LCI 492  
Thomas B. Mayes

LCI 606  
William Lewis

LCI 34  
Lawrence “Glen” Yeater

LCI 449  
Leo Bedell (Silver Star)

LCI 495  
Joseph Blazer

LCI 612  
Lewis Lees

LCI 35  
Earl William Eichorn

LCI 452  
Glee E. Bridges

LCI 514  
Albert Technow

LCI 654  
Miles G. Olson

LCI 67  
Jack Vernon Higgins

LCI 471  
Lawrence Hermes

LCI 519  
Joseph E. Weisel

LCI 712  
Henry J. Alberico

LCI 76 and 588  
Paul Freeman

LCI 472  
Barnett J. Axelrod

LCI 545  
Bernard A. Clark

LCI 726  
John J. Castanza

LCI 237  
William T. Patton

LCI 472  
Robert E. Coburn

LCI 596  
Henri L. Deltieure

LCI 804 and 1098  
LeRoy Foley

LCI 337  
Vernon J. Dreibelbis

LCI 487  
Vernon Haslup

LCI 596  
Robert “Sunshine”  
Fairfield

LCI 805  
John Chambers

LCI 345  
George Rush

LCI 812  
Hal Bleyhl

LCI 349  
Lawrence J. Campbell

LCI 814  
Lee Toms

LCI 373  
Albert D. DiVincenzo

LCI 814  
Robert Short

LCI 407  
Manuel Lebovitz

LCI 1015  
George Y. Harry

LCI 417  
Francis Fleming

LCI 1032  
Harold Petke

LCI 437  
Andrew M. Rauen

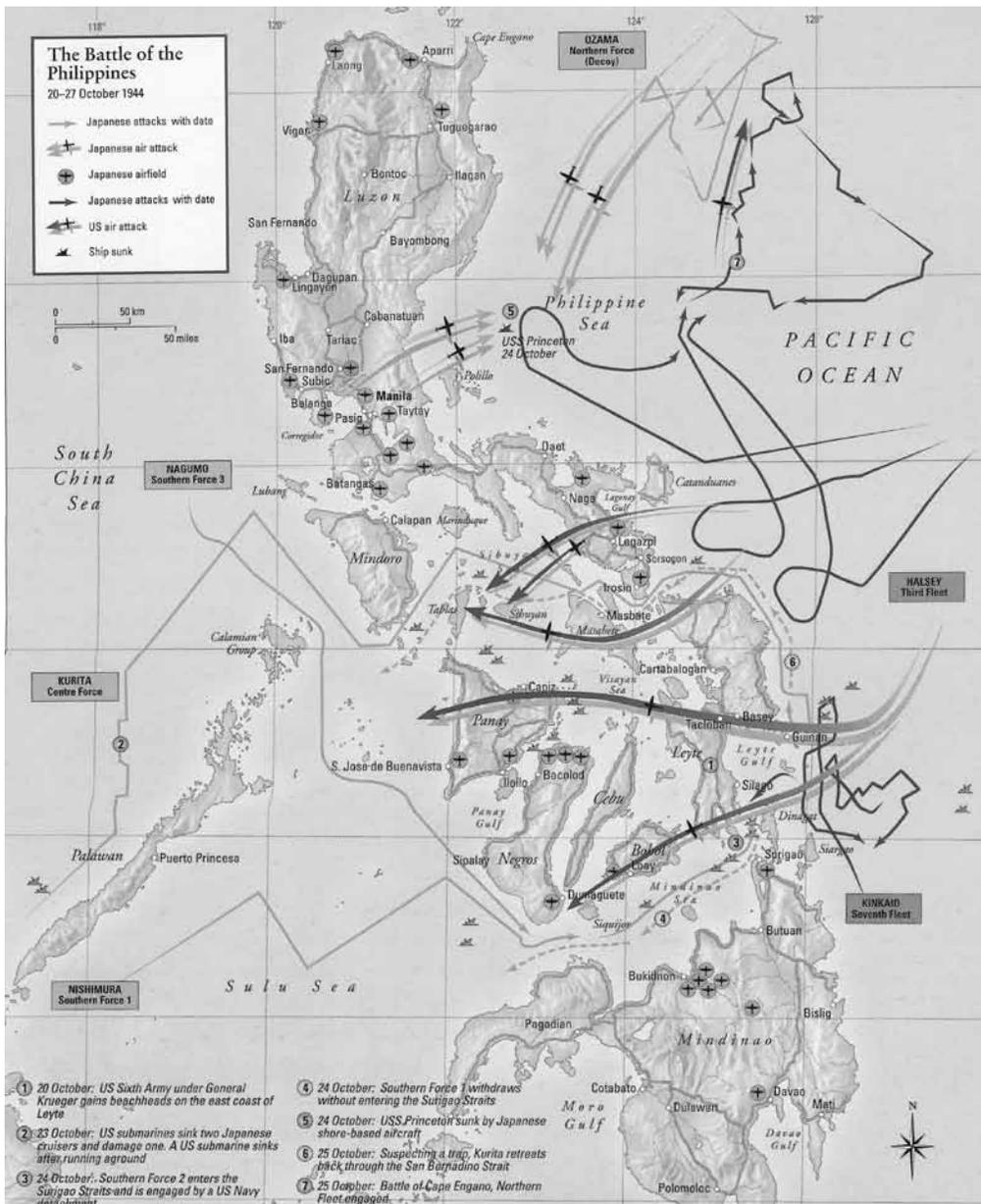
LCI 1077  
Ross Fragale



*We Commemorate...*

# The LCIs in THE BATTLE FOR THE PHILIPPINES

**LEYTE ✪ MINDORO ✪ LUZON ✪ NASUGBU  
PALAWAN ✪ ZAMBOANGA ✪ PANAY ✪ NEGROS  
CEBU ✪ BOHOL ✪ MINDANAO**



*"The Historical Atlas of World War II," by Alexander & Malcolm Swanston (p. 355)*

The LCI(R)-338 at Leyte, Philippines in 1944.  
(Navsource.org)



**BATTLEFIELD:  
LEYTE GULF  
OPERATION KING TWO  
October–December 1944**

**THE LARGEST NAVAL  
BATTLE IN HISTORY**

**THE RETURN OF GEN.  
DOUGLAS MACARTHUR**

**AND THE BIRTH OF THE  
JAPANESE KAMIKAZE PLANE**

*"Every day the air-raid siren would blare, sending us into the 'graveyard in the sky.' It was only a matter of time before all of us were killed."*

—Toshimitsu Imaizumi,  
Japanese Petty Officer 2nd Class  
*The Last Zero Fighter: Firsthand Accounts  
from WWII Japanese Naval Pilots,*  
by Dan King (p. 224)



## **THE FOUR ENGAGEMENTS:**

- 1. Battle of the Sibuyan Sea**  
*Halsey's 3rd Fleet carrier-based air attack on the Japanese Center Force*
- 2. Battle of Surigao Strait**  
*Oldendorff's and Kincaid's night action – "crossing the T"*
- 3. Battle of Cape Engaño**  
*Halsey's attack on the Japanese carrier fleet off Luzon*
- 4. Battle off Samar**  
*"Taffy 3" fights for survival*

*"The Tacloban airfield was along the beach just to the right of our landing area. There was a channel all around it so we could move along either side and lay a smoke screen during air raids. When the kamikaze planes came in they were trying to aim at the airstrip and larger ships, but we did have nine hit in our anchorage area. One time, when we were trying to get underway, we had a Jap plane fouled in our anchor. The pilot was still in it. The only thing we could do was to pry the plane loose and let it drop."*

—(Ret.) Cdr. William E. Keeler, LCI 448,  
*Report of LCI Duty from 1944 to 1947 (p. 7)*



*USS LCI 559 (Courtesy navsource.org)*





**Signalman Russell Worden Hartwell, aged 20, home from the war. (Courtesy "Amphibious Assault Landing Craft - USS LCI(L) 711" by Russell Worden Hartwell; p. 160)**

*"At times, as fast as you could look around at different places in the convoy, you could see Jap suicide planes crashing into American ships or into the sea. Many men died and too many ships went to the bottom or were destroyed in this convoy. [...] We gave up the idea of hitting the sack after awhile as the attacks came too often and too fast. We tried going to bed at first, but as soon as we would get into our bunks, general quarter's alarm would sound and we would have to rush back to our battle stations."*

—Russell W. Hartwell, *Amphibious Assault Landing Craft - USS LCI(L) 711* (p. 55)



**USS LCI(L)-711 conning tower, date and location unknown. (navsource.org)**

**Some crewmembers of the LCI 70 in Fredericksburg, TX in March 2013. (L to R) Royal Wetzels, Leo Wilcox, Gil Ortiz, and John Reulet.**



*"In the invasion of Luzon, George Pressley, SC2c.—having been transferred as a loader on the bow 37 mm gun—was killed when our ship was struck by a Kamikaze plane. I had been transferred to a twin 50-caliber machine gun on the port side just aft of the conning tower. The plane clipped off our mast about 10 feet above my head before crashing on the bow."*

—Leo Wilcox, LCI 70



**Leo Nowicki, 1944.  
(Courtesy Leo Nowicki)**

*"While all ships were firing at the Japanese planes [...] they were so low you could see the pilots in the cockpits when a kamikaze dove into a destroyer (USS Reid), sinking them. There were survivors scattered in the water and our ship and another LCI stopped and left the convoy to pick up the survivors. All hands went to the faintail, the lowest part of the ship, to pick up the survivors. We continued picking up survivors when one survivor had his hand held up and when they reached down to pick him up he was already dead with his back partially gone.*

*The brotherhood came when we were throwing life rings out to the men [...] we had one survivor near us and he started to swim to the other ship, we yelled for him to come back and he turned and said, 'My friend is on the other ship.' That is how bonded you become with your shipmates and new family."*

—Leo Nowicki, LCI 661



**Leo Nowicki, 2015.  
(Courtesy Leo Nowicki)**

# 2015 CHARLESTON REUNION REPORT

By President & Chaplain Mike Gatton

Writer Pat Conroy in his novel *South of Broad* speaks of the city of Charleston with these words: "It was my father who called the city the Mansion on the River. He was talking about Charleston, South Carolina, and he was a native son, peacock proud of a town so pretty it makes your eyes ache with pleasure just to walk down its spellbinding, narrow streets. Charleston was my father's ministry, his hobbyhorse, his quiet obsession, and the great love of his life. His bloodstream lit up my own with a passion for the city that I've never lost nor ever will. I'm Charleston-born, and bred. The city's two rivers, the Ashley and the Cooper, have flooded and shaped all the days of my life on this storied peninsula."

Charleston hosted this year's first LCI/LST combined reunion and the experience was indeed "spellbinding." Like the two rivers which embrace the city, hugging the land into a peninsula, the men, families, and friends of two amphibious associations came together to form the beginning of something that will "shape and flood" future days.

Nehemiah Communications acted as reunion planner and provided a friendly welcome and easy registration process. The choice of tours assured a selection that would appeal to both those who were seeing Charleston for the first time and those who were familiar with the South Carolina Low Country. A trip to Patriot's Point to walk the decks of the WW2 carrier USS Lexington reminded everyone of the legacy entrusted to all who are called to remember. The city tour of Charleston with its narrow streets and bustling market provided opportunity to take in the local color and sample the foods that make the area unique. A dinner cruise provided a chance for old friends to reminisce and new acquaintances to learn more about each other, while enjoying river views of the city and a delicious meal. On Saturday, a trip to watch the continuing reclamation process of the Civil War CSA Hunley, the first submarine to ever sink another warship in battle, was fascinating. The sacrifice of her crew reminded all of the debt we owe to those who headed out to sea, but never returned. And the peaceful walk and ride through the Magnolia Plantation and Gardens was a beautiful way to spend a fall morning.

Led by the Chaplains David Sparks and Mike Gatton, this year's Memorial Service included traditions from both associations and centered in a Low Country tradition, the sweet grass basket. Ms. Lynette Youson, whose work has been recognized by the Smithsonian, crafted a basket during the ceremony. The service also featured traditional Gullah music, the reading of ships lost and the tolling of the bell for deceased shipmates.

Emceed by John Cummer with remarks from Walt Wittholz, Saturday night's banquet included a presentation of colors by the Citadel Color Guard, traditional toasts and accompanying music, and a keynote speech by Dennis Ray Blocker, Jr., historian of the LCI Association—Pacific. Fourteen years in the making, Mr. Blocker read moving excerpts from his newly published book, *The Heart of Hell*, the human stories of the crew members of LCI (G) #449 at Iwo Jima. Dennis' grandfather was a member of that crew. The book is available through Barnes and Noble.

Though few of the attendees of this year's reunion can claim to be "Charleston-born and bred," all who were there can say our lives have been "flooded and shaped" by the three days we spent on South Carolina's "storied Peninsula."

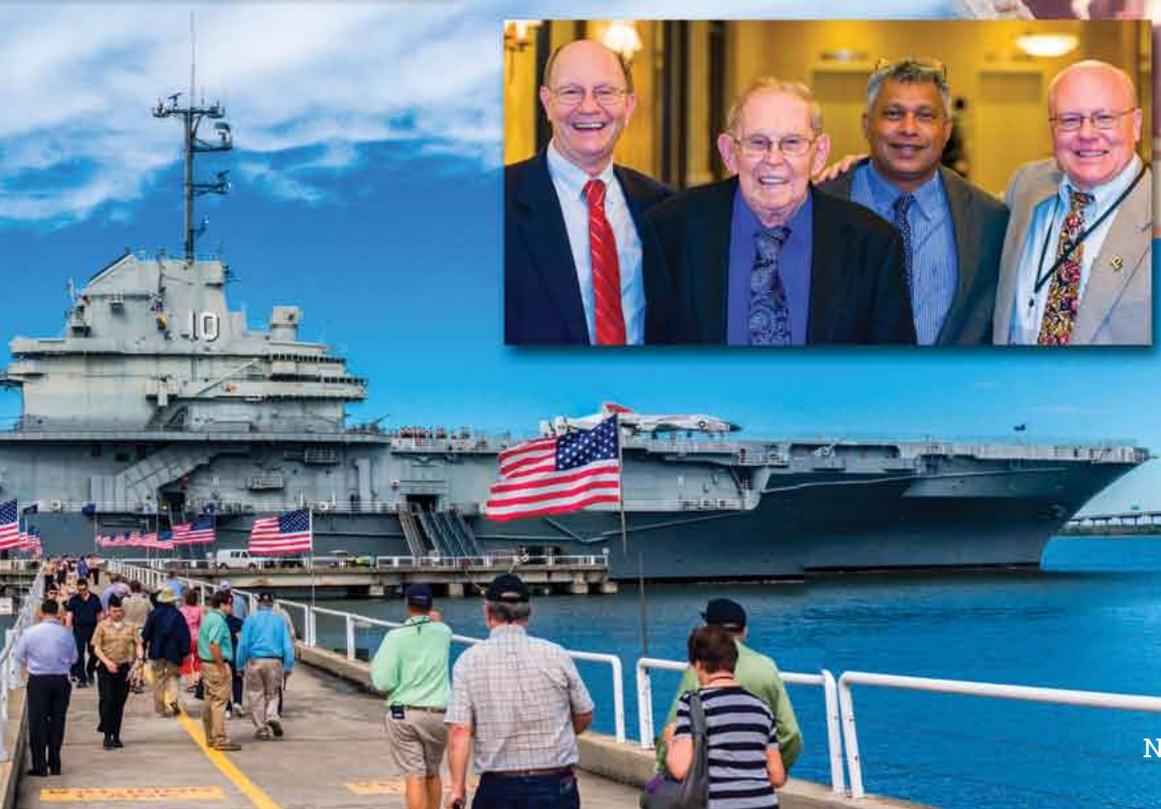


**LCI President Mike Gatton (left) and LST President Walt Wittholz.**



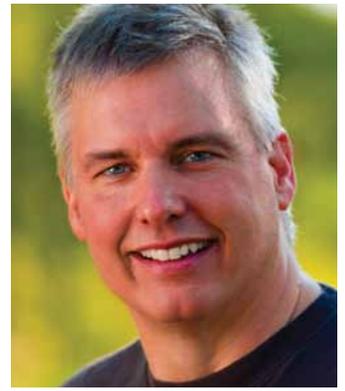
**the  
2015 LCI/LST  
JOINT REUNION  
in Charleston, SC**





# MAINTAINING A LEGACY

By  
**Ken Breivik**



I know many of you know who I am, but for those of you who may not, I am the administrator for both the LST and LCI Associations, as well as President of Nehemiah Communications. Nehemiah is responsible for the administrative duties and for producing and designing the *Elsie Item* and the *Scuttlebutt* newsletters. Additionally, in September we had the honor of organizing the joint reunion between the LST and LCI Associations.

The biggest issue that was discussed was the future of both associations and the future legacy of the World War II Navy and Coast Guard forces that served in Amphibious Forces units. What I think many of us have envisioned is a comprehensive amphibious forces organization to include those involved from World War II to present including Korea and Vietnam. To sustain this legacy we need to recognize all amphibious forces veterans. A great portion of this legacy will be lost unless there is a conscious effort in planning how it will be maintained. With that being said, I was glad to see both associations vote in favor of another joint reunion as well as the passage of the resolution for the joint commission to study this future legacy. For those of you who were unable to attend the reunion, here are some major details about the commission.

The commission is looking at the creation of a long-term sustainable amphibious forces group, starting with LCI and LST then expanding to include like-minded organizations in the future. The commission would be charged with, but not limited to: creating a new legal structure and governance, development of a long-term plan to maintain the legacy of amphibious forces veterans and creating a timeline for activities that would reduce operating costs.

The commission will diligently work on these tasks between now and June 30th, the hope is that by our fall 2016 reunion we will be able to communicate their plans to those who are present. Leadership in both LST and LCI as well as office staff at Nehemiah have heard many express interest in visiting Louisville, Kentucky for the next reunion. The commission has agreed to this location and the plan moving forward is to look at Louisville as the probable site for the 2016 reunion.

On behalf of Nehemiah, and myself we are very honored to serve all of you and look forward to the reunion next year.

If you have any suggestions, please contact one of the commission representatives from your organization listed below.

- Admiral Walt Wittholz, LST
- Nick Leonoudakis, LST
- Mike Gatton, LCI
- John Cummer, LCI
- Ken Breivik, Ex-officio
- Zach Morris, Ex-officio



# BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF

**"HE WAS HEADED  
RIGHT FOR ME"**

***Fred Engelken on the Kamikaze  
Attack That Sunk His Ship,  
USS LCI (L) 684, in Leyte Gulf  
on November 12, 1944***

By  
**Zach Morris**

*Author's Note: I had the pleasure of interviewing Fred Engelken over the phone on January 14, 2014. Fred was the Executive Officer aboard the LCI (L) 684 during the Leyte Operation in October/November 1944. Leyte Gulf, located in the central Philippines, is famous for being the location of the biggest naval battle in history that occurred on October 23–26, 1944. Three weeks after the initial Allied invasion of Leyte Island, the LCI 684 was hit by a Japanese kamikaze on November 12, 1944—known to many World War II veterans as "Bloody Sunday"—a particularly horrific day for the US Navy. Many American sailors died that day in a massive Japanese kamikaze attack that rained down on the ships in Leyte Gulf. Fred was kind enough to recall this story to me in further detail. A history teacher and avid New York Yankees fan, he shared many entertaining and fascinating stories that occurred before, during, and after World War II.*



FRED ENGELKEN'S EYES STARED PIERCINGLY AT THE SKY. They gazed upon an object soaring through the air above. It was the early 1930s and young Freddy was witnessing something very special. The object was an unlucky baseball that had just been whacked into the stands. It was Freddy's first New York Yankees game, and he watched with wonder as "Lou" Gehrig had just hit a home run. He never forgot that day inside the original Yankee Stadium, a game that featured Babe Ruth play and topped off with the famous showdown of opposing pitcher Robert Moses "Lefty" Grove vs. Yankees' pitcher Vernon Louie "Lefty" Gomez. Fred reflected, "No night games in those days [no stadium lights], so after the game was over the evenings were free. And so wherever the 'Babe' walked in at night, boy, that lit up

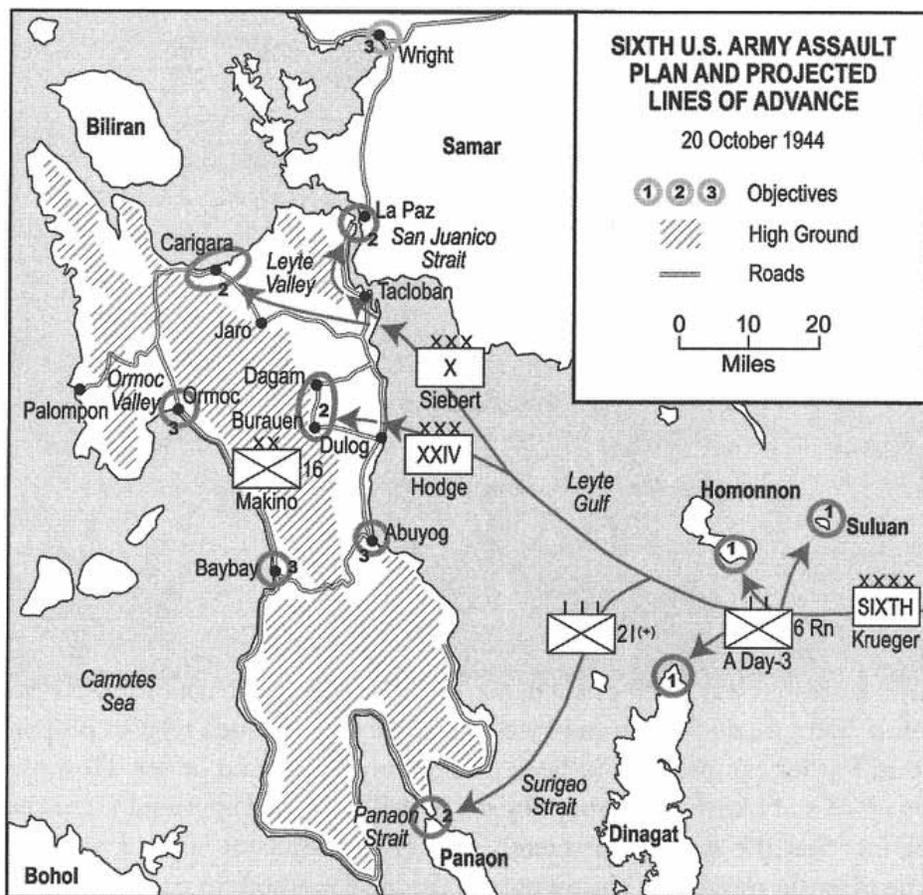
the place." Laughing he added, "I don't think he ever bought a drink, although he did imbibe on more than one."

Twelve years later, Fred would once again find himself staring intensely at the sky. Only this time he'd be over 8,600 miles away from "The Big Ballpark in The Bronx." And the object he faced on the other side of the world would be headed in his direction.

\* \* \*

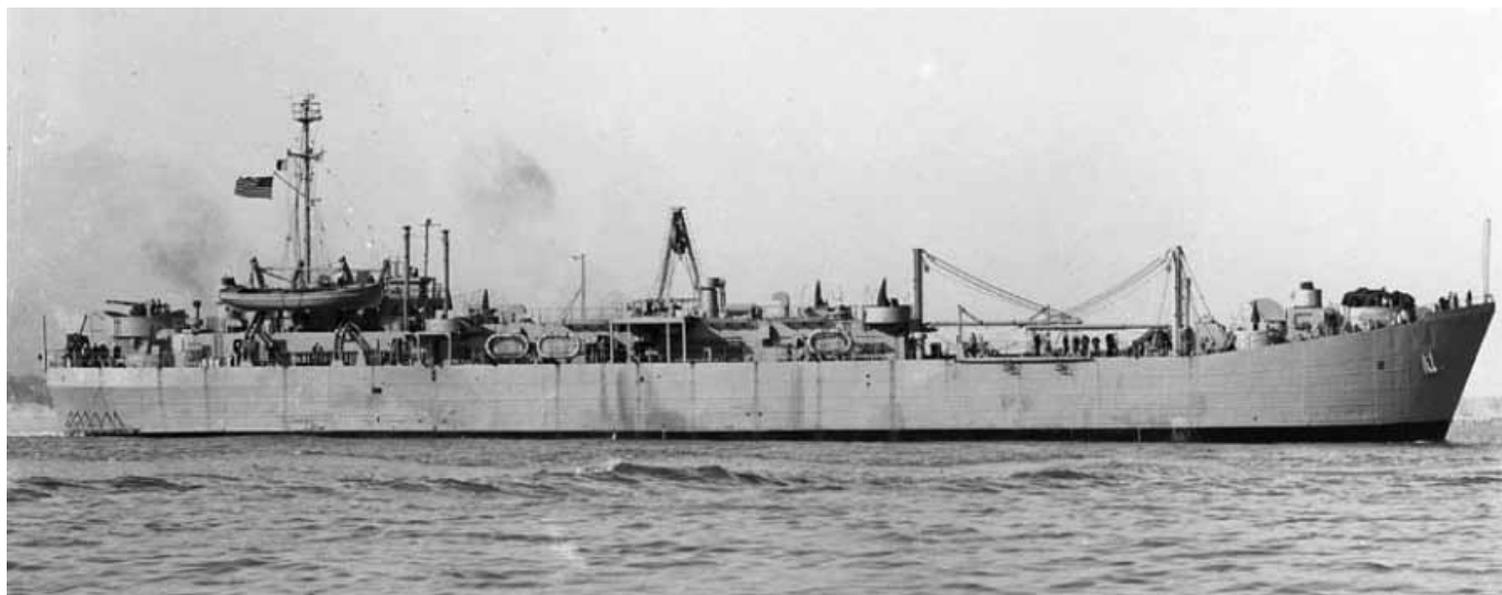
"Here he comes!"

It was on a Sunday afternoon in the waters off Tacloban Airfield, Leyte, Philippines, when Executive Officer of the USS LCI (L) 684, Fred Engelken, suddenly heard those words being yelled. He sat among fellow officers gathered in the ward-room. Earlier that morning a new group of LCIs had just arrived in the Philippines from New Guinea. The skipper of one of those LCIs had come over to the LCI 684 in a small boat to visit Lt. (jg) T. Donaghue, the skipper of Fred's ship. According to Fred, "They both went to college together."



**Mary Craddock Hoffman. (Prefer, "Leyte 1944: The Soldiers' Battle," p. 36)**

The LCI 684 was tied up alongside the USS *Egeria* (ARL-8), a newly converted landing craft repair ship, formerly named the LST 136. Fred explained, "We were tied up to this LST, because we had been hit in the rear end, by another LCI."



**USS *Egeria*, ARL-8 (LST 136), underway near Baltimore, MD in April 1944, after completing conversion into landing craft repair ship. (National Archives Photo #19-N-63509)**

We had received a great-big hole in our fantail when the ship behind us plowed into us the night before."

Fred explained that the LST 136 had its entire inside redone so that it could be filled with machines used for repairing all kinds of Allied wartime instruments. He went on, "So we were towed over to this LST repair ship [...] and tied up to her. And on that Sunday morning—that's when that kamikaze came along and plowed into our stern."

When Fred heard the shouting, he was right by the staircase in the wardroom.

"I ran up the ladder and ran out the door, and I looked, and I saw this plane coming. He was heading right for me! If he hadn't been hit by one of the guys on the ship, I'd have been in about a million pieces. He was going for the LST, and we were in the way. He was coming over the water maybe 20 feet high, skimming right on top of the water, and coming right for that LST, and we were right there in the way. And that fella on our ship, his name was Louie [...] he threw a magazine onto a 20 MM all by himself, and started to fire [...] Louie hit him because the pilot swerved and instead of hitting right in the middle of the ship, he turned to the right and went down low, and hit the waterline."

Fred recalled with clarity, "When he turned, I could see the pilot, I could see his face. [...] He blew out the end of the ship and put a great big hole in the bottom. We were sinking almost immediately."

According to the official Action Report from the LCI 684:

*Japanese "Val" made run on the [USS Egeria, ARL-8] from port beam. At 500 yards, gun #2 and 4 opened fire, and tracers were seen to pass through mid-section of enemy aircraft. At 2:32 PM, said plane crash-dived into our ship striking 2 feet below the waterline on port quarter, and bomb exploded under stern. [...] Our Chief Boat-swain Mate and 2 workmen from the ARL 8 were wounded and immediately removed to sick bay of ARL 8. No serious injury to any other member of crew.*

—Lt. (jg) T. Donaghue



**A photo of the damaged LCI 684, circa 1944. (Courtesy Fred Engelken)**



**Tacloban airstrip, located on Cataisan Point, in late October 1944. This photo shows Tacloban airstrip from the north looking south. (National Archives photo #80G 102183)**

Soon thereafter, USS LCI 977 and 978 came over and towed the sinking LCI 684 to safety at nearby Tacloban airstrip. According to Fred, "They would officially declare [in 1945] that the LCI 684 was out of commission [...] so the rest of us were assigned to different ships. Some of the guys I never saw again, and some went with me."



***USS LST-455 on March 7, 1943. She was eventually converted to a landing craft repair ship, being renamed USS Achilles. Her casualties totaled 19 killed, 28 wounded, and 18 missing on November 12, 1944. (US National Archive photo # 19-N-42328)***

Then, Fred added, "We weren't the only ship hit that day."

\* \* \*

Around the same time, another LST-turned-landing craft repair ship, USS *Achilles* (formerly LST 455), also succumbed to the fury of a kamikaze. *Achilles* was 1,000 yards away from the *Egeria* and tied up alongside the LCIs 65, 1056, and 432.

All of a sudden, at exactly 2:16 PM, men aboard *Achilles* spotted three Japanese "Zeke" fighter planes that quickly appeared out of the low-lying clouds to their north. The center plane broke off from formation and went into a hell dive headed straight for the *Achilles*, firing his guns furiously as he dove. It only took 15 seconds for the kamikaze armed with a small anti-personnel bomb to crash into the forward deckhouse. A massive explosion followed the crash, consuming the carpenter shop in a bloodthirsty inferno. All hands performed in a commendable manner fighting fires, but it was a General Motors technician named Ray Dunwoody who would stand

out the most that Sunday afternoon. Showing complete disregard for his life, Ray grabbed a fire hose, and fearlessly sprinted up to the top of the deckhouse—amid exploding 20 MM ammunition—to rescue men from the flames. He somehow managed to remove several seriously wounded men all while keeping his hose in action against the fire the entire time. The Official Action Report of the *Achilles* detailed Dunwoody's bravery by stating:

*His actions and leadership were an inspiration to everyone. It is recommended that his action receive special recognition.*

It went on to commend a brave wounded Shipfitter from the *Achilles*.

*In doing this, [Dunwoody] was assisted by Wayne H. BASS, SF3c., although badly burned about the hands.*

Alongside the *Achilles*, LCI 432 helped fight the fire and assisted with the wounded. At around 3:00 PM, LCIs 72, 73, and 338 came alongside with fire hoses to also lend assistance.

In stark contrast to the assistance lent by others, the LCI 65, one of the LCIs tied up alongside *Achilles*, was unable to help the burning ship, because the captain allegedly refused. Stephen Ganzberger, a Quartermaster aboard the LCI 65, recalled this incident from within the 65's conning tower, in an interview on May 18, 2011.

"We was right alongside [*Achilles*]. The plane smacked right into that LST. And you could see all them kids out there getting nailed. So I asked the skipper, 'You want some of our guys to go over there and give them a hand?' He says, 'No we're getting the hell out of here!'" Stephen painfully recalled this moment almost sixty-seven years later, and never forgot the boys he witnessed perish in the water. He wished he could have helped save them, but all he could do was watch them get smaller and smaller into the distance until they disappeared from view.

Six other freighters that were hit by kamikazes that day, but ultimately returned to the west coast of the U.S. under their own power:

- USS *Leonidas Merritt* (3 KIA)
- USS *Thomas Nelson* (133 troops KIA; 3 Armed Guard men KIA; 88 WIA)
- USS *Jeremiah M. Daily* (100 troops KIA; 2 Armed Guard men KIA; 4 merchant crewmen KIA; 43 WIA; 50 troops jump overboard to escape the flames, but are later rescued by nearby boats and craft)
- USS *William A. Coulter* (no casualties)
- USS *Morrison R. Waite* (21 troops KIA; 41 WIA; 2 Armed Guard WIA)
- USS *Alexander Majors* (2 merchant crewmen KIA; 16 WIA)

\* \* \*

On March 9, 1945, W. V. Deutermann, the Commander of LCI(L) Flotilla Fifteen, sent a second endorsement of the LCI 684's Action Report to the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet, saying in short, "This Board has recommended that this ship be stricken from the List of Naval Vessels."

Chuckling as he reflected, Fred wondered what ever happened to his shipwrecked LCI.

"She sat there [on Tacloban airstrip] when we left... and I don't know if she's still sitting there or not."

\* \* \*

After the war, Fred became a history teacher for forty years. When asked why he chose to be a history teacher, Fred replied that he was influenced by his grandfather. When he was just a little boy he would run up to him, and say, "Grandpa, tell me about history." Fred's grandpa would put down his pen from grading papers and say, "OK Freddy, I'll tell you about history." Fred remembered fondly, "He would tell me about the Civil War and I sat there with my ears flapping."

Fred concluded by saying, "History has always been to me, the greatest thing in the world." ■

#### **Author's Note:**

- Fred Engelken currently lives in Hillsdale, NJ. He and his wife Ruth celebrated their 71st Wedding Anniversary on April 20, 2015. The USS LCI National Association would like to extend a heartfelt "Happy Anniversary" to Fred and Ruth.
- Stephen Ganzberger passed away on May 20, 2011, two days after he shared his story with me. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

#### **SOURCES:**

- Author's Interview with Fred Engelken, January 14, 2014.
- Author's Interview with Stephen Ganzberger, May 18, 2011.
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# The River of Life



MUCH OF OUR RELIGIOUS IMAGERY uses the river as a symbol of death. Our hymns are laced with words like those of Isaac Watts: “Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away,” and I might add, most of its daughters as well. The picture is one of the river carrying someone to death. In other songs, the river becomes death itself: “River Jordon is chilly and cold; chills the body, but not the soul.” We sing about finding “rest beyond the river” and “when my life becomes a burden, and I’m nearing chilly Jordan, O thou lily of the valley, stand by me.” Then, there’s “looking over Jordan and what do I see—a band of angels coming after me, coming to carry me home.” Or, “Deep river, I’m goin’ over Jordan, deep river, I want to cross over into campground.” Even our more modern songs about rivers seem to equate streams with death: “And then one day, I’ll cross the river, I’ll fight life’s final war with pain.” We could spend pages reflecting upon the rich symbolism of rivers and religion, but in the Book of Revelation, the river means life not death: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God...” (Revelation 22:1, NRSV). In this issue of the *Elsie Item*, as we bask in the glow of a lively reunion in Charleston where the Ashley and Cooper Rivers come together, how appropriate it is for us to change our thinking about rivers.

Author Norman MacLean wrote: “Eventually all things merge into one and a river runs through it.” I take that to mean that the river is the thread that not only connects life, but carries life. The river reminds us that life’s movement is not random, but directional—life’s current not so much undercutting as it is uplifting.

While canoeing or whitewater rafting, the river taught me so many life lessons. The river knows where to go and how to get there. Follow the current of the stream—all it takes is a deft paddle

stroke here or a light touch in the water there to negotiate the journey. Go with the flow. The river will operate in your best interest if given a chance—the river is for us, not against us. Sure, there are rocks, branches, and brambles—shallows, rapids, and dangerous depths—moments of being hung up and moments when the rage of the waters create life-threatening floods. Sometimes we need to dig deep and hard and at other times there’s nothing left to do, but clean up. However, through it all, the river sends us clues and sees us through—it’s been there before. It has carried others and it will carry us.

What if we could come to believe down deep that the flow of our lives is not so much against us as for us? What if we could believe that the Spirit of God is in the flux and movement of our journey? What if we could trust God in the rapids of change as well as in the calm of continuity? And, what if we could begin to ride, rather than buck, the tides of tomorrow? Perhaps, then, we could understand the flowing river as a way of better understanding God’s Spirit.

An old Afro-American pastor friend of mine once remarked, “The time has come for me to cross the Jordan.” I asked him if he was afraid. He responded, “No way, I’m afraid!” And I asked again, “Why not?” His words will forever encourage and comfort me, “I am not afraid, because I believe that my Father owns the land on *both* sides of the river.”

Go with the flow, my friends. Use a light touch. And trust that the God of the waters is also the God of the shores—an appropriate lesson for those whose ships were made to operate in both places.

Agape,  
*Mike*

**WE REMEMBER...**

# **James J. Aydelotte, LCI 25**

**OCTOBER 7, 1923—OCTOBER 6, 2015**

## *Fair Winds and Following Seas...*

James J Aydelotte, of Apache Junction, AZ passed away on Oct. 6, 2015. He was born Oct. 7, 1923 in Indianapolis, IN, to James and Gretchen Aydelotte. Jim retired from Sears. He was also the owner of the Treehouse Restaurant and Tavern in Dayton, OH. He moved to Arizona after selling the Treehouse. Jim was a member of the Landing Craft Infantry Association, American Legion, and the VFW. He enjoyed playing cards, golf, and all sports. Jim is survived by his children James (Linda) Aydelotte and Joanne (Bob) Dalcin; grandchildren Scott Aydelotte, Emily Aydelotte, Stephanie Gray, Philip Dalcin and Brent White, Lori White; and many great grandchildren.

Please make a memorial contribution in Jim's memory to the American Diabetes Association at [diabetes.org](http://diabetes.org). The Visitation was held on Friday, October 16, 2015 at Tobias Funeral Home, Belmont Chapel, Kettering, OH.



*(L to R) Zach Morris (Editor), James Aydelotte (LCI 25), and his son James at the 2014 Portland Reunion.*

# USS LCI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

CUT HERE

Our membership is open to anyone who served in Landing Craft, Infantry, during WWII or anyone else interested in our small ships and the men who served aboard them.

Please complete this form and mail it to the address indicated below with your first year's dues.

DUES ARE \$35.00 PER YEAR, June 1 through May 31.

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Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

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Alternate/Relative's E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*(This is so we have a family member or friend we can contact if we cannot reach you)*

Name of Alternate Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation or Former Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

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Are you related to someone who served on an LCI?  Yes  No

If so, what is the relationship? *(i.e. father, grandfather, uncle, etc.)* \_\_\_\_\_

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Want to tell your story?*

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**Christmas aboard the LCI 414 December 1944**  
*Photo contributed by George Alex, for his father who served aboard LCI 414.*