

ATHENAEUM PAPER  
PRESENTED BY GEORGE STREET BOONE  
ON DECEMBER 3, 1998

## EYE WITNESS TO HISTORY

The interest this club has displayed in accounts of events in the Second World War has encouraged me to offer you an eye-witness report on a couple of those occasions in which I participated.

Having spent four years on active duty in the U.S. Navy in the Reserves, I observed several events now history, though these occasions have not been described in detail so far as I have seen.

History as lived experiences almost never conforms to the neat chronologies later imposed by historians and every historian must distill and select the essentials, but the irrelevant is often necessary to put events in perspective.

Serving in three theaters, I have elected to tell you about two of the invasions in which I participated. What I'll give you is something like a snapshot of the invasion of Sicily and then of Italy proper.

Born in the waning days of World War I, in Elkton, several members of my family had served in that conflict.

Graduating from Vanderbilt Law School in June, 1941, all young men of my generation were well aware of the European conflict, Hitler having come to power in 1933, and the British and French having declared war on Germany in 1939, after the dismemberment of Poland, their ally, by Hitler and Stalin.

The United States adopted the Selective Service Act in September, 1940, requiring all men between the ages of 18 and 35 to register for possible induction into the military service.

When I finished law school it was clear the United States would become engaged. Not wanting to serve in trenches, I volunteered for Naval service.

My call for physical examination under the Selective Service came in the summer of 1941, immediately after I finished law school.

Anyone volunteering and holding a college degree, of reasonably sound mind and body, was generally welcomed into the service of his choice. I chose the Naval service and entered the V-7 Program, designed to prepare one for service as a general line officer. The V-7 course provided 12 weeks of training, the first month as an Apprentice Seaman, then three months as a Naval Midshipman, and, at the end of that time, if one had satisfactorily completed the course, a Commission as an Ensign. My first month was spent at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, then as a Midshipman I was sent to complete my training to the PRARIE STATE, the ancient battleship Illinois which had been the Flagship of the Great White Fleet. It was then at anchor at the foot of 125th Street in the Hudson River in New York City.

After satisfactorily completing that course, I was commissioned as an Ensign and ordered to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, for 12 weeks additional training at the Post Graduate School. This was an intensive course in radio engineering, all forms of communication, cryptanalysis, coding and similar specialties. The course was designed to prepare line officers for duties in communications.

With this training behind me, in the Fall of 1942, I was ordered to the then-forming Amphibious Force which was based principally at Little Creek, Virginia, near Norfolk, on Chesapeake Bay.

Most of my fellow officers were also recent college graduates, though sprinkled among us were a few Chief Warrant Officers who had been granted Commissions. Few of us recent graduates had had any experience in ship handling.

The Regular Navy saw little future in the Amphibious Force and regular naval officers in the lower grades were usually assigned to larger sea-going craft such as destroyers, cruisers, battleships and carriers.

The U.S. had begun building several types of landing craft, the largest designated as Landing Ships Tanks, LSTs, which were about 300 feet in length, and perhaps 35 feet in width. These were ocean-going vessels.

The next largest craft were Landing Craft Tanks, LCTs, and I was assigned to serve as Executive Officer for a group of 12 of these craft. I was second in command, my immediate superior being a Lt.(J.G.) by the name of Robert Lee Smith, who was from Seattle.

These LCTs were 105 feet long and were basically steel tanks welded together, forming craft about 20 feet in width, flat bottomed with no keel, powered by three Gray marine diesel engines at the rear, with an uncovered deck which would hold five tanks.

At the bow of each of these LCTs was a ramp which could be dropped onto the beach, permitting the tanks to move off the LCT onto the shore. These craft were designed to draw only about two feet of water, the idea being the tanks would be discharged on the land or in such shallow water that they could proceed under their own power.

At the rear of the LCTs were quarters for a crew. On top of these quarters was a pilothouse from which the craft was controlled. A large heavy anchor attached to a long cable, not a chain, was placed at the stern of the craft. As the landing craft moved toward the shore, it would drop its heavy anchor and after the craft had beached, it discharged its tanks, then powered windlasses would drag the landing craft back off the beach and the craft would then proceed to perform other duties such as landing munitions, supplies, equipment, etc., from larger ships and craft standing off-shore.

These LCTs could operate in much shallower waters than the LSTs but the LCTs as designed were not supposed to provide permanent living quarters, but only temporary shelter and food during actual landings.

The complement of these LCTs commonly was two commissioned officers and about 15 men, all of whom would live in the 15 ft. x 20 ft. quarters at the rear of the craft, these quarters consisting of a single room. In this living area was a primitive bathroom, or head, a stove and a shelf along the forward bulkhead. From this shelf the crew and officers ate. There were no refrigerators, as best I recall.

The constraints of time upon this paper do not permit the description of life on the PRARIE STATE, at the Naval Academy, or the Amphibious Base at Little Creek where we were quartered in tar-paper CCC huts built a generation earlier in a swampy area and since that time pretty well abandoned.

We began the training as Flotilla A, the first of the type, and after that training was concluded, my assignment next was to serve as Executive Officer of a group of LCTs organized as one of three groups in Flotilla XI.

Flotilla XI shipped out of New York Harbor in the late winter of 1942, or early 1943, headed for North Africa where the British forces were then battling German forces under Gen. Rommel, well-known as the Desert Fox. Each LST in our large convoy had a single LCT lashed on its deck, and there were perhaps 150 ships in our group, many Liberty Ships, freighters and tankers as well as our landing ships and craft. We had elaborate plans prescribing courses for each ship with frequent changes in heading, apparently intended to reduce the effectiveness of the German Submarine wolf packs which were then harassing the sea lanes. This was near the time of the peak of U-boat activity and we had a very few destroyers giving what protection they could. These destroyers were supplemented by more numerous smaller craft, many loaded with depth charges. These vessels would roll the depth charges off the stern of these craft. The depth charges, which looked much like 55 gallon oil drums, were set to explode

at different depths. These craft also had simple devices which could lob depth charges some distance from the craft forming patterns to cover a small area.

These LSTs were slow and unwieldy and the Liberty ships which carried supplies, equipment and munitions were not much better. At night at sea we were required to observe total blackouts and we officers of LCTs on the LSTs also stood deck watches. As we left New York about early 1943, while we were headed for Africa, we were not told precisely where we were going.

Our convoy lost a great many ships in that passage, principally from torpedoes launched by those German U-boats. The surface escorts were sufficient to keep the U-boats trailing us submerged during daylight hours and consequently nearly all of the U-boat attacks were made in hours of darkness.

As I recall, it took our convoy about 30 days to negotiate the passage from New York across the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar to Oran in Algeria, a French colony. We moved ponderously slowly and with the frequent changes of course dictated by our plans. While this increased the time, perhaps it made us sitting ducks less vulnerable because the U-boats could not plan for our ships as their targets continuing on a course for too long a period. The U-boats would have to get close enough and launch their torpedoes for relatively short runs.

Literally dozens of ships from our convoy were lost in that single crossing and standing watch at night we would watch ships in our convoy burning around us, but we could not render help. Ours was one of the largest convoys up to that time.

As I recall, the LSTs were armed with a single 3-inch gun, but in this type of crossing the LST had virtually no opportunity to use even those guns, since the U-boat attacks were almost exclusively at night when a periscope would be almost impossible to detect and the 3-inch guns were aimed entirely by sighting.

LSTs were rarely hit by torpedoes because these landing ships, designed to function in shallow waters, were moving in water above the torpedoes' courses. To obtain accurate control of the torpedoes' courses those missiles had to be set to travel at a depth beneath the immediate effect of the surface waves. Freighters and tankers were the principal victims.

The Free French were functioning in Oran and we were beginning to establish an American military force on the ground in Algeria, while the British and German forces were battling several hundred miles to the East.

The Germans had effectively wrecked most of the harbor facilities in North Africa and our flotilla of LCTs, 36 in number, was based temporarily at Arzew, a small resort town East of Oran. This was in Algeria, then a French colony.

France proper had surrendered to the Germans by this time, but Oran had the presence of the Free French under Gen. Charles DeGaulle. Algeria itself, however, was not necessarily friendly country.

It was fundamentally an Islamic society and its natives felt considerable sympathy for the Germans. Along the coast the country was beautiful but the Sahara Desert was only 15 or 20 miles inland. Though the coastal area supported many vineyards, Islam prohibited alcohol in any form.

The climate was warm, the flowering vines such as bougainvillea amazed most of us because nearly all of our officers and crews were unfamiliar with such types of vegetation. Liberty for our crews ashore in these Islamic areas presented serious problems because in those days not even coca cola had penetrated and we were in cities and villages with no concept of our ways of life. In the towns and villages the narrow streets and alleys had dark scruffy bars which were often overwhelmed by these monied service people such as the U.S. Naval forces.

Local wines were available, but little beer and no soft drinks. We discovered that even seasoned drinkers who took two or three local drinks in the dark and cool bars and then stepped out into brilliant sun and great heat would pass out. On liberty days we found that we had to patrol our vicinity with our single weapons carrier, sort of a small truck, to pick up service personnel who were sometimes lying in the gutters or against a wall, collapsing where the heat and light hit them. This was long before there was any thought of USO and I don't know if they ever developed along that coast as they later did in London and most of the south coast of England as well as in France.

Our flotilla of LCTs moved on east from Arzew under their own power to the town of Bizerte in Tunisia, near the site of ancient Carthage. From our base there we engaged in joint training exercises for landings we were preparing to make on hostile shores.

On our move east our LCTs proceeded under their own power at night a few miles off shore. On that move to the east we encountered some very heavy seas. The LCT I was on was heading into wind and pitching severely. Each time it would pitch you could see a shudder run down the deck and on one particularly heavy pitch our craft broke in the middle. While it did not sink, both fore and aft were under water and we were forced to abandon ship in nearly total darkness. One of our other craft came alongside and we climbed aboard it, but we lost most of our gear.

#### FIRST LANDING

Having completed our practice operations, on July 10, 1943, our LCTs carried Gen. George Patton's tanks of the 7th Army from Bizerte in North Africa to the Southwest coast of Sicily. The LCT on which I was served as Headquarter Command for our group and was assigned to land at Red Beach Licata, near the Western end of the Island of Sicily. This whole operation was given the name



Overlord and Gen. Dwight Eisenhower was in command. U.S. Admiral Hewitt was in charge of the naval forces. Samuel Eliot Morrison, the Naval Historian, described this operation as the biggest amphibious assault in the entire war. In that operation our LCTs formed in a line facing the beach a few miles offshore, then advanced simultaneously as a group toward the beach. This line extended several miles in length and the landing was scheduled to take place at daybreak.

Lord Montgomery with the British forces was simultaneously landing at the Southeastern end of Sicily.

The South coast of Sicily had no real defenses and the German and Italian forces were apparently surprised by our assault. By this time the Italians were well-fed-up with Hitler, who had not tried to conceal his contempt for Mussolini.

While we had been previously bombed a few times in North Africa by the German airforce, this landing was the first invasion of the continent of Europe and it was our first experience of being under direct fire and air assault.

We did not know what to expect. Our landing craft had no armor and no armorment except a single 20 mm anti-aircraft gun located aft. The tanks on the craft could not elevate their guns to fire at strafing aircraft.

On the day of that first landing the weather was bad, the sea was rough. The sea passage was probably less than 200 miles from Lake Bizerte but the army tank crews on board our craft were suffering severely from sea sickness.

The beach on which we landed at Licata was a narrow one, perhaps 40 to 50 feet wide in most places with cliffs of some 100 to 200 feet high, running parallel to the waterline with few spots where the tanks would be able to get off the beach and into open country.

Our plans included detailed maps, not perfectly accurate, but definite areas were assigned to our group.

Frogmen swam in first before first light to check for beach obstructions, etc., and these frogmen would set up markers on the beach and then our LCTs would follow, hitting the shore and discharging our tanks as rapidly as possible, and then our craft would withdraw. In this operation our winches or windlasses to pull our craft off the beaches did not function ideally, since Sicily is a largely volcanic island and does not have the usual continental shelf surrounding it. This meant the sea even close to shore could be hundreds or even thousands of feet deep and in this operation our anchors only rarely found proper lodgment to pull our craft off.

LCTs had no small craft but other smaller units composed of LCM and LCVP, small single engine craft to handle a vehicle or so and a few men were on larger ships off shore.

While these beaches were not fortified, the German air force was quite active and as our landing craft beached on these narrow stretches of sand, German Stuka fighter-bombers, employing loud screaming devices as well as armorment would whip over the cliffs, race down our beach, every gun blazing. These aircraft also carried small bombs and had 20 mm cannon with which they raked us over pretty thoroughly. We had virtually no air protection and our single 20 mm anti-aircraft guns would hardly get into position to fire before a strafing plane had come along the beach and then disappeared over the cliffs.

My particular craft LCT(5)209, I believe it was, took quite a number of hits from the machine guns with exploding charges, but amazingly no one of our crew was injured, although small explosive shells played havoc in our food cabinet, blowing up several gallon cans of apples and cherries which we had obtained with considerable difficulty.

This loss of canned fruit was serious damage because our naval forces were living almost on the barter system and our particular group had come to

depend on an Army supply base for its supplies. The Army gave us supplies grudgingly.

As luck would have it, one of our enlisted men was the son of an Italian baker in New York and he was able to bake splendid pies with those cherries and apples. Our group's single weapons carrier would take our gifted baker, equipped with several cherry or apple pies, and, at night, he and the weapons carrier driver would go to the Army food storage area and would bring back almost anything the Army had in exchange for those pies. Since canned fruit was scarce, we never ate it. This fruit was particularly prized because of its trading potential.

When our amphibious forces were sent to Africa it was planned that they would stay only briefly and no provision was made for small stores, such as socks, underwear, razor blades, soap or toothpaste and we had to scrounge these from the Army supply bases. At this point we in the amphibious forces were desperately in need of essentials and the cherry pies were our prime trade goods. Larger ships would have ship stores for their personnel but we small craft had no such resources.

We had not known what to expect when we sailed from the United States and months of living in harsh conditions had played havoc with clothing. At this juncture it was not uncommon to see men working in navy blue wool shorts made from their dress uniforms. We looked quite scruffy indeed and there was little we could do about it. We had to wash in salt water and with salt-water soap which made no lather.

But, back to the operation which was first landing of allied forces in Europe. This was on July 10, 1943.

We had loaded our tanks in Lake Bizerte and their crews early in July. From previous training exercises we had learned sea sickness for the troops

would be a serious problem. Our craft's crews were strictly enjoined to provide the Army personnel with no fluids, especially no coffee, or even water, since these fluids would aggravate the nausea from sea sickness. With the five tanks which were our capacity there were perhaps two dozen tank personnel. Actual sailing time would be two to three days as we moved very slowly and only as large complex formations. Add the loading time to our snail-like speed, they would be on our craft for several days perhaps a week.

The weather was rough and the tank crews were permitted to move about on our open lower deck of some 35 x 60 feet. For obvious reasons, Army personnel was forbidden to enter the tightly restricted area in which the Navy personnel had to operate. Almost to a man they frequently were hanging over the gunnels heaving. Nor did we have any sanitary facilities which we could share with them. Unfortunately, the seas in that passage were consistently so rough that those soldiers literally welcomed landing in the face of the German forces, to land on a beach, to stand on firm ground, and to escape the conditions which they had been enduring on our heaving, rolling decks.

As you can imagine, the tension was excruciating and we were fearful.

After a long day of landing tanks and then ferrying supplies ashore from Liberty ships standing a few miles out that first day we had been pushed to our limits as darkness fell.

Some of our LCTs were off-shore and some still on the beach, all under a total blackout. The season had been chosen to be in the dark of the moon to secure the area under cover of darkness.

Then in the middle of that first night after the landing we heard the sound of many planes approaching and every anti-aircraft gun we had, tiny as they were, was manned. Scores of dark planes with no visible identification came over only 800 to 1,000 feet above our beachhead.

Shooting those 20 mm guns with tracers was like using a hose and we did our best, we used every bit of ammunition we had shooting at those unlighted planes. So far as I know, we didn't see any of them fall, but they must have received quite a few hits.

Only days later, we learned those planes were American, carrying paratroopers to drop behind some of the German Troops under Rommel's command. We learned those planes were about 20 miles off their prescribed course and our detailed operation plans for our limited area had not informed us that such planes were even being used in the operation.

I've never seen or heard of any report about this, our only source of information in those days was the Army newspaper which, of course, never would have given us an inkling of such a disaster. We had no radios.

Another surprise we encountered after we had been there for a few days, as Gen. Patton and his tanks drove North toward Palermo, the principal city, was what to do with prisoners of war. A number of Italian service personnel, nearly all of whom claimed to have relatives in New York, especially Brooklyn, sought to surrender to our craft. We were wary and suspicious as some of them even presented themselves carrying small handbags containing their personal effects. A deserter would come to one of our craft, present himself to surrender and we had no way to handle him and no instructions. Many spoke a bit of English and coming aboard our craft would undertake to make themselves very useful, taking over dirty jobs from the crew, a few even undertook the cooking. This was usually a considerable improvement over the cooking of some so-called "able" seaman.

These surrendering Italians would do their best to ingratiate themselves and American crew members often simply assimilated them. In fact, trying to get them off the craft later when we returned to North Africa sometimes pre-

sented a problem because the crew members came to accept them and with our own crew members largely without adequate uniforms and hard to distinguish from the surrendering Italians.

Our food was quite bad. No fresh food and no refrigeration and Spam came in gallon tins and was dreadful. We sometimes could get canned beef stew and coffee was available, but vegetables consisted largely of dehydrated potatoes or canned green beans and canned beets. We also had small packages of rations known as "C" Rations which the Army said would sustain life, but one feeling was that the C Rations made life hardly bearable. The C Ration packages were wrapped and sealed in heavy waxed paper and about the size of a Cracker Jack package and would sometimes have a small tin of Vienna sausage, a bit of cheddar cheese, not aged but often very stale, a packet of lemon powder to make lemonade, two hard-tack crackers and a small cardboard box with two cigarettes, usually, as I recall, Winstons.

All through this, the contacts with the enemy were anticipated, even feared, but the periods in between were unbelievably boring, monotonous, unrelieved. There was no entertainment, no radios, there were no visiting artists. In these situations friendships developed rapidly and sometimes deeply. As someone has said, the threat of death really concentrates the mind, and fortunately there were among us certain bright and interesting people.

One of my Skippers, Joe Hasenfus, who commanded one of our LCTs, was Finnish. A sculler who had represented the U.S. in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, I believe. A marvelous seaman and person, whose craft was a delight to see. The difference between crafts was sometimes startling. Some would be well-ordered, clean and shipshape, while others would look like garbage scows. Much depended on the Skipper.

Thos. Stritch, another of my Skippers, was a tiny little man who had to stand on tip toes to be tall enough to qualify for the naval service. He said he had a soul of a poet in the body of a gnome. Tom had served as secretary to his uncle, Cardinal Stritch, in Chicago, and we had at last begun to get a few Armed Forces paper-back books, classic works, and our reading and discussions made previous college courses seem superficial. Well do I remember the marvelous Evelyn Waugh books such as DECLINE & FALL, VILE BODIES, and many others.

Tom Stritch, after the war, became head of the School of Communications at Notre Dame and we kept in touch for many years, though in the past three or four I have not heard from him.

On our trip from the U.S. on the LST our Skipper was a great fellow, James Higgins, and we kept in touch over the years. He was a Groton-Harvard graduate and lived in Pittsburgh. After the war he became head of the Mellon Bank in Pittsburg. He died this past August and I have only recently heard from his daughter.

On that LST crossing from New York were two officers for the single LCT it was carrying. The Captain of that LCT was Russell Long, an Ensign, and the other officer was named Horace Layne. They had just graduated together from LSU Law School and they were far less than satisfactory. Russell was the son of Huey Long, the Kingfish, who was dead by that time. He was extremely bright, spoiled, egotistical, a forceful personality, but he could not be depended upon. His relations with his own crew was a source of considerable worry. He eventually became Senator from Louisiana, but I do not cherish memories of association with Russell, although we were compelled to be closely associated for a considerable period.

The allied plan was to overrun Sicily, the island that sits at the toe of the Italian boot, cross the Strait of Messina which is at the East end of

the island. Then the Army planned to work up the Italian Peninsula. This Strait was less than two miles in width and was guarded by Mt. Aetna, an active volcano.

About 250,000 British and American troops landed simultaneously on Sicily and Gen. Patton with his army headed for Palermo, the principal city on the Northern coast near the West end of the island.

There was a sharp conflict with a German armored division at Gela, some 10 miles East of our landing on the South coast at Red Beach, Licata. Following that landing several LCTs from our flotilla were directed to move West along the South coast of Sicily and then turn North and East, along the North coast toward Palermo to drop tanks behind the German lines. We were careful to stay at least five to six miles off shore, because we had learned to have considerable respect for German 88s.

Encountering no opposition at sea, we reached Palermo and sailed into the harbor with no incident. A beautiful harbor with fine stone werves and virtually undamaged.

The town and harbor was strangely quiet when we entered and we could see no evidence of life in the whole of that spacious harbor. We tied our craft up at a pier and Bob Reith, the Skipper of the LCT I was on, and I, went ashore.

It was eerie, no sign of life or people, and Bob and I, armed only with our 45 automatics, proceeded warily a couple of miles along the cobble-stone streets bordering the werves, looking unsuccessfully for any sign of life or people. There were numerous warehouses with heavy steel roller-doors tightly closed and locked. Absolutely no vehicles moving, no sounds.

We were uncertain about what we should do and decided we should return to the comparative safety of our craft, and we only later learned the Germans,



having become aware of our approach, had precipitously withdrawn just before our arrival, to avoid our tanks being dropped behind their lines.

As we neared our craft a Sicilian good-humor man appeared on the street, pushing an ice cream cart. Having seen a commercial opportunity, he had ventured forth and you can imagine our happiness at being greeted not by German tanks but by an enterprising purveyor of ice cream.

Gen. Patton made a triumphal entry into Palermo on July 22nd, just ten days after our initial landings on the island, and he set up his headquarters there in the city of Palermo. The allied occupation of the island was completed by August 17th.

Another small story on this First D-Day operation I well remember involved Gen. Patton, who was a larger than life figure, not loved by his troops but strongly respected, feared, even awed.

Among the support craft off the Sicilian coast was a well-equipped hospital ship but it was not prepared for amphibious operations. The small landing craft such as LCTs, LCMs and LCRs would ferry the wounded from the beaches to the side of the hospital ship.

The deck of the hospital ship standing a safe distance from shore was some 15 to 20 feet above the waterline and our craft decks were at about water level or even a little below and we had no basket stretchers. How do we get the wounded up that 15 to 20 feet without equipment? It was a serious problem and the top leaders met in conference about it aboard the flagship, Patton among them.

Observing that the equipment was simply not available, Gen. Patton asked the medical representatives how was their supply of morphine. He was told that it was in good supply. He announced that the solution was then obvious--fill the wounded with morphine, stick hooks in them and pull them aboard by the davits

for the lifeboats. This was not done, so far as I know, but it was widely relayed among us in the assault forces -- as was a story of a Patton visit to a group of soldiers in the hospital. According to this tale, Gen. Patton saw an infantry man not displaying any visible wound, but suffering from battle fatigue. According to reports, which I believe made the papers, Gen. Patton soundly cursed the soldier, denounced him as a coward and slapped him soundly. With his pearl-handled pistols and his immaculately-pressed uniforms, he made a flamboyant and extremely effective leader.

#### SECOND LANDING

At this juncture, our LCTs received orders to return to Bizerte to refuel and prepare for the landings on the mainland of Italy. These landings were to be on the beaches South of Salerno, some 40 to 50 miles South of Naples.

Having refueled and resupplied ourselves as best we could from Army depots, most of our LCT group carried Gen. Mark Clark's tanks onto these beaches South of Salerno and ferried equipment and supplies ashore, which was at the Northern end of a very good beach on the mainland of Italy. There our craft could land properly.

At this landing in early September, our group was among the craft taking the Allied Fifth Army, under G. Mark Clark, to the mainland of Italy.

Our LCT flotilla staff had meanwhile transferred to an LCI, a landing craft infantry, a long narrow craft designed to carry infantry ashore. It was some 12 feet wide and 40 to 50 feet in length, a far more maneuverable craft than the LCTs.

Our LCT flotilla Commander was a Lt.(Sr. Grade), by the name of Gordon Raymond. He was known infamously in the amphibious forces as "The Mad Tiger of the Chesapeake" for his notoriously wild and unruly conduct in the early days around Norfolk and Little Creek when the amphibious force was forming.

In civilian life he had been a yacht salesman and he was loud-mouthed, profane, a hell-raiser, a dreadful bully, but a remarkable shiphandler. Undependable, unpredictable, and incorrigible brown-noser, he nevertheless could do things with small craft that one else among us could.

Our forces landed on the beach near Paestum, famous early Roman ruins, readily visible from our beachhead and we soon had scores of ships standing off the beach to be unloaded, a task which fell our lot after our assault landing.

Unfortunately, we landed at a spot near where the Germans were conducting maneuvers. For several days after the landing at Salerno it was uncertain whether we could maintain ourselves on the shore. We were beyond the effective range of most of our fighters and only the P-38's could stay over our anchorage more than a few minutes, while the German aircraft had a base on the Plains of Salerno just a few miles from the coast. We were under almost incessant air raids. I believe we had something like 175 the first day. Fortunately for us their bombers were more interested in the ships and larger craft than with our smaller units and we had a few anchored balloons on ships and craft, these keeping the planes from strafing effectively.

There were, however, quite a number of floating mines. One of our LCTs ran over one which exploded under the crew compartment killing all on board. The Skipper, a delightful young man from North Carolina, and a good friend, was among those lost.

The situation was so touchy at first our group kept one LCT on the beach constantly, its engines running, for several days, ready to withdraw Gen. Clark and his headquarters staff if the German forces were successful in driving to the beach. Fortunately, Gen. Clark did not have to withdraw and his forces finally broke out of the beachhead. Nevertheless, after he was secure ashore we

were left with a tremendous unloading job because the landforces depended on our craft delivering their supplies, since there were no harbor facilities and no landing fields available.

Our LCT group had a medical officer, a young Italian-American gynecologist from the wrong side of the tracks in Jersey City, and he was on an LCT loaded with wounded when the bombing and shelling in that quarter was quite heavy. The crew decided they'd rather dig into the sand on the beach individually, rather than staying on board the LCT during the raids, since the LCTs served as sitting targets. The crew started to leave the craft loaded with wounded and our medical man pulled his 45 automatic, stationed himself at the bow, and told the crew he'd shoot the first man who left those wounded men to save their own hides. He managed to impose his will on those seamen and they brought the casualties off the beach.

Ships and tankers were piling up there in the Gulf of Salerno and one night we had a sudden and violent storm with winds driving directly at the beach. The wind gauge on our command ship blew away after it had registered 88 miles per hour and that night proved to be unforgettable.

Lightning was flashing every 15 to 20 seconds and even ships at anchor were being dragged along with their anchors toward the beach. Those ships and craft at anchor put out all the chain or cable they had and our landing ships and craft were particularly vulnerable to the wind because they had so much freeboard.

In this storm the LCI serving as our HQ ship was being driven toward the beach and its Skipper could not bring her around into the wind. Our "Mad Tiger" shoved the Skipper aside and took charge. He headed for the beach at flank speed and weaving in among those craft with our engines reinforced by the terrific wind, he gave our LCI full right rudder and reversed the engines on the

right side spinning our LCI around, and he brought the craft around through that crowd of ships being driven toward the shore and he headed our LCI toward the open sea at full speed into the wind. We barely held our position and he returned the controls to the Captain.

When morning light came, we could see literally dozens of ships and craft driven onto the beach.

The naval officer in charge, a regular Navy Captain named Meriwether Lewis, had early recognized Gordon Raymond's expertise and our staff was put in charge of the salvage operations as the battlelines ashore moved North toward Naples.

During most of this time we had been out of touch with our administrative groups for weeks and had had no mail or pay for three or four months. Other ships and craft could unload and return to North Africa, but we on the staff had had to remain continuously in action.

Among his other talents, Raymond was a superb poker player and after the immediate fighting passed on a floating poker game occupied his evenings when it was too dark to continue unloading cargo. To finance Mr. Raymond's poker, we staffers, some dozen people, took up collections to provide Mr. Raymond a pot to enter the games. He invariably rewarded us several fold.

Eventually, the City of Naples was captured from the land side and we finished our salvage operations and moved up the coast from Salerno to the city. Enroute we were passing the Isle of Capri, which lies on the South side of the Bay of Naples, just opposite the volcano, Vesuvius. We had been told that the entire island of Capri had been requisitioned as a site for rehabilitation and recreation of the Air Force and no other military forces were permitted to go there. Since Roman Times this island has been a favored vacation spot and as we came along the rugged coast Mr. Raymond ordered our LCI to go into the harbor on

Capri He reported that we had engine trouble and had to go into the nearest harbor in order to make repairs. I never determined what, if anything, was wrong with the engines, but several of us officers, with Raymond in charge, went ashore and went up to one of the magnificent resort hotels which only days before had been hosting German officers. None of our Air Force had yet arrived.

We had a very good dinner, incredibly better than we were accustomed to, and we American naval officers were the only patrons in the dining room except for a young Italian civilian with a strikingly beautiful young companion.

There was no entertainment but there was a handsome piano in the room and Mr. Raymond directed me to go to the piano and play waltzes. This I did, playing, I believe, Villa from the Merry Widow and some Strauss waltzes and he, with his gray mustache bristling, approached the civilian couple and induced the young lady to dance with him.

The next morning, our engines repaired or recovered, we proceeded into the Bay of Naples and tied up in that beautiful harbor. We stayed there for several days, perhaps a couple of weeks, the Germans bombing us quite regularly, and a flanking movement by some of our craft was sent North to Anzio which stands near the mouth of the Tiber River. Those craft were pinned down at Anzio and never were able to break out. Meanwhile the Army encountered problems at Cassina, a monastery in the mountains where the Germans had become deeply entrenched.

At this juncture I was sent back to North Africa and I was anticipating the pleasure of a reunion with old friends from our craft, prepared to share stories of our adventures. I discovered the members of our group there at Bizerte were shocked to see me, and somewhat resentful, because they thought I had been lost in those weeks. They had had a memorial service for me and here I'd been resurrected!

It turned out that they had been told I was to go to the United Kingdom and they had understood this meant I had been killed -- but the United Kingdom they then found meant England and I had BUPERS orders waiting for me, directing me to proceed to England.

Our LCT flotilla was dissolved there in Bizerte, some of the craft and their crews were sent to India and some to England. I was the first to receive orders and I was off to Plymouth after a memorable reunion party at a winery near Bizerte. Reconciled to my survival and since I was now first to get new orders, the group decided the flag which had flown on our flagship at our landing on Sicily, tattered as it was, should be given to me, and then I was off to the United Kingdom; but my time is spent and that is another story.

The flag, incidentally, still hangs in our music room, stained and dingy, but a proper relic of those Mediterranean campaigns.