

COAST GUARD-MANNED NAVAL VESSELS IN WORLD WAR II

BY Robert Erwin Johnson



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Front Cover: Displaying its *dazzle* paint scheme, the Coast Guard-manned patrol frigate *USS Allentown* steams near the Norfolk, Va., Navy Yard, Aug. 9, 1942. The *dazzle* paint scheme was used to confuse the enemy's perception of the ship's direction and size.

Inside Front Cover: Troops board landing craft at Bizerte, Tunisia, for the invasion of Sicily, July 6, 1943.

Back Cover: The Coast Guard remembers the 1940's attack on Pearl Harbor in one of its World War II-era recruiting posters.



COAST GUARDSMEN NAVY, MARINES, OF THE PACIFIC

Below left: An LCM makes fast alongside the USS LCI(L)-95, off Utah Beach, June 12, 1944.

Center: The Coast Guard crew of a three-inch, 50 cal. gun loads a wooden practice round during a drill aboard the USS PC-556, Oct. 8, 1942.

Section I of the act to create the Coast Guard, signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson Jan. 28, 1915, stated that: "The Coast Guard ... shall constitute a part of the military forces of the United States and ... operate as a part of the Navy, subject to the orders of the secretary of the Navy, in time of war or when the president shall so direct."

The act did not specify the smaller service's duties when a part of the Navy, but during World War I, its cutters became patrol and escort vessels, six of the larger ships escorting convoys in the war zone.

Cutters in home waters became training ships for naval personnel as well, and many of their erstwhile officers and men served in small naval vessels, armed yachts and the like.

From 1924 to 1926, 25 of the Navy's older destroyers were transferred to the Coast Guard for prohibition-enforcement duties, and when a number of the oldest were returned for disposal, the Coast Guard received six flush-deckers — the Navy's most modern at the time.

All had been sent back to the Navy by early 1934, but the Coast Guard's success in operating them seemingly made manning such ships in wartime a logical Coast Guard responsibility.

THE WAR NEARS U.S.

As the United States neared involvement in World War II, however, the number of old destroyers in reserve had diminished markedly.

Many of the flush-deckers had been recommissioned by the Navy for service on neutral-

ity patrol, and 50 steamed to Canadian ports for transfer to Britain under the destroyers-for-bases agreement of 1940.

Thus, the first Coast Guardsmen to serve aboard naval vessels were ordered to much larger ships. On June 3, 1941, almost five months before the Coast Guard was transferred to the Navy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order that permitted some 2,100 officers and men to crew four transports and to serve in 22 similar ships with naval crews.

Most of those assigned to the latter were surfmen from lifeboat stations who were to serve in the landing craft carried by the larger vessels and to instruct others in their use.



JOINED FORCES WITH ARMY IN BATTLES AND ATLANTIC

The four transports were manned principally by sailors from cutters, especially the 10 250-foot Lake-class vessels that had been transferred to the Royal Navy by Lend-Lease a few weeks earlier, and by some of the more than 6,700 men who entered the Coast Guard under *special temporary* three-year enlistments in 1939 and 1941.

CG-MANNED TRANSPORTS

The first three transports to be commissioned, the USSs *Leonard Wood*, *Joseph T. Dickman* and *Hunter Liggett*, were turbine-powered 535-footers of World War I design, while the *USS Wakefield*, commissioned on June 15, had been launched as the liner *Manhattan* in 1931. At 705-feet long, the *Wake-*

field was the largest ship ever manned by the Coast Guard and one of the fastest. Geared turbines drove it at 20 knots sustained speed.

All immediately began naval training. Active service for the *Wood*, *Dickman* and *Wakefield* came during the autumn of 1941 when, together with three Navy-manned transports, they embarked some 20,000 British troops at Halifax, Nova Scotia, for transportation to the Near East by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

Arriving at Cape Town on Dec. 8, they were diverted to Bombay and Singapore because of Japan's belligerence. The *Wakefield* had discharged its troops at Singapore and was refueling there on Jan. 30, 1942, when Japanese bombers attacked waterfront facilities.

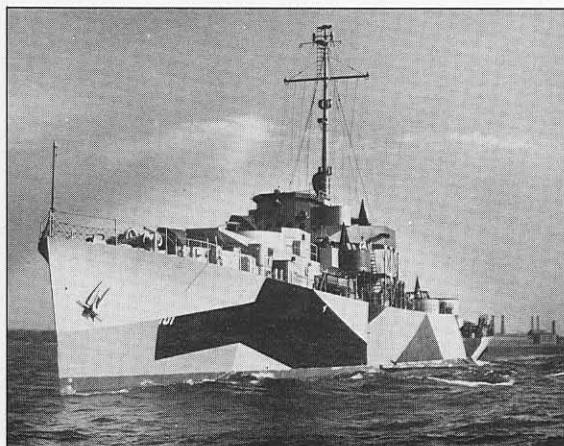
A bomb exploded in its sick bay, killing five men and wounding 15; nonetheless, the ship embarked approximately 500 women and children and took them to Bombay where the ship was repaired sufficiently to steam to New York. Upon their return to the United States, the *Wood* and the *Dickman* underwent further conversion to enable them to conduct assault landings.

The *Liggett* was similarly refitted, but the *Wakefield* seemed to have been thought unsuitable for this purpose, so it did not receive the extra davits for small landing craft that distinguished the vessels classified as attack transports (APA) in 1943.

ATTACK TRANSPORTS

Six more APAs of the Maritime Commission C-3 type, were manned by the Coast

Below right: The Coast Guard-manned PF *Greensboro*, a new type of fighting ship outfitted in dazzle paint during World War II, protects the Allied convoys carrying vital war supplies and men to foreign shores.





Above: Crews off-load supplies from a USS Leonard Wood LCVP during the Leyte Landings in October 1944.

Right: Crewmen from the Wood look for enemy planes during a D-Day air attack, July 10, 1943.



Guard upon commissioning in 1942 and 1943.

One or more of these vessels participated in every major amphibious operation carried out by the United States during World War II, unlike the transports (AP), which were limited to non-combat service, carrying personnel and cargoes between the ports of the United States and its allies.

1ST AMERICAN OFFENSIVE OF WWII

The Coast Guard was represented in the first American offensive of the war — the invasion of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on Aug. 7, 1942, by the *Liggett* and by landing craft crews in 18 of the 22 Navy-manned transports participating.

The landings were enlivened by Japanese bombers, one of which crashed into a nearby transport, causing a fire that resulted in its loss. As partial recompense, the *Liggett's* gunners claimed four aircraft shot down. On the morning of Aug. 9, the *Liggett* joined other vessels in picking up survivors from

the heavy cruisers — three American and one Australian — sunk in the Battle of Savo Island.

Meanwhile, a detachment of its men had been sent ashore to establish an operating base at Lunga Point, and on Sept. 27 one of them, Signalman 1/c Douglas A. Munro, was fatally wounded while his landing craft was aiding in the evacuation of trapped Marines. Munro became the Coast Guard's only Medal of Honor recipient.

The *Liggett* continued to support the advance in the Solomon Islands, ending its combat service with the Bougainville invasion in November 1943. The *Liggett* then ferried battle casualties to San Francisco and after overhaul spent the remainder of the war as an amphibious-training ship operating out of San Diego.

The *Wood* and the *Dickman* had longer combat careers. Both had important roles in Operation Torch — landing troops in the vicinity of Casablanca, Morocco — in November 1942 and in the Sicily invasion in July 1943.

Thereafter, their ways parted, the *Wood* headed west to participate in the amphibious operations associated with the naval thrust across the central Pacific — Makin, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Saipan, Palau, Leyte, Lingayen Gulf and Mindoro — while the *Dickman* disembarked troops at Salerno, Normandy and Southern France, before going to the Pacific to take part in the Okinawa invasion that practically ended the Allied advance in 1945.

The first of the smaller attack transports, the *Arthur Middleton*, seemed likely to have the shortest career, for while landing troops at Amchitka in the Aleutians on Jan. 12, 1943, it was forced aground by a williwaw.

Finally refloated almost three months later, the *Middleton* was towed back to the United States for repairs.

Thereafter, the ship redeemed itself by participating in seven amphibious operations: Tarawa, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Saipan, Leyte, Lingayen Gulf and Okinawa.

Its sister ship, the *Samuel Chase*, began with Operation Torch, putting troops ashore at Algiers, and followed with the Sicily,

Salerno, Normandy and Southern France invasions before going to the Pacific in 1945.

The four other Coast Guard-manned attack transports were ready for service early in 1944. One of them, the USS *Bayfield*, land-

ed its troops on Utah Beach, Normandy, on D-Day and spent 19 days there, sending supplies ashore and providing medical treatment for battle casualties.

It had similar functions at the invasion of southern

France and then went to the Pacific to take part in the conquest of Iwo Jima, Japan.

HEAVY LOSSES FOR THE USS CALLAWAY

The USS *Callaway* landed troops of the 4th Marine Division at Roi-Namur, Kwa-

The Coast Guard was represented in the first American offensive of the war, the invasion of Guadalcanal.

Below: Five LSTs and one LSM discharge cargo at the foot of Mount Suribachi during operations in Iwo Jima, Japan, Feb. 24, 1945.



jalein, and followed with the Emirau, Saipan, Palau and Leyte invasions. En route to Lingayen Gulf in January 1945, its task force came under repeated kamikaze attack, and one Japanese fighter crashed into the *Callaway's* superstructure just abaft the navigation bridge.

Twenty Coast Guard sailors and 11 Navy men, members of the transport division commander's staff, died or suffered fatal injury in the resulting blaze, which rendered four landing craft useless. Nonetheless, the *Callaway*

kept its place in the formation and landed troops on schedule.

The task force came under repeated kamikaze attack, and one Japanese fighter crashed into the Callaway's superstructure.

After repairs at Ulithi, the embarked troops were assigned to the floating reserve at Iwo Jima, the attack transport's last invasion.

The *USS Cambria* landed troops at Majuro in the Marshall Islands in January 1944, without opposition, and then at Eniwetok,

Saipan, Leyte, Lingayen Gulf and Okinawa.

It emerged from all unscathed — unlike its sister, the *USS Cavalier*, which began its

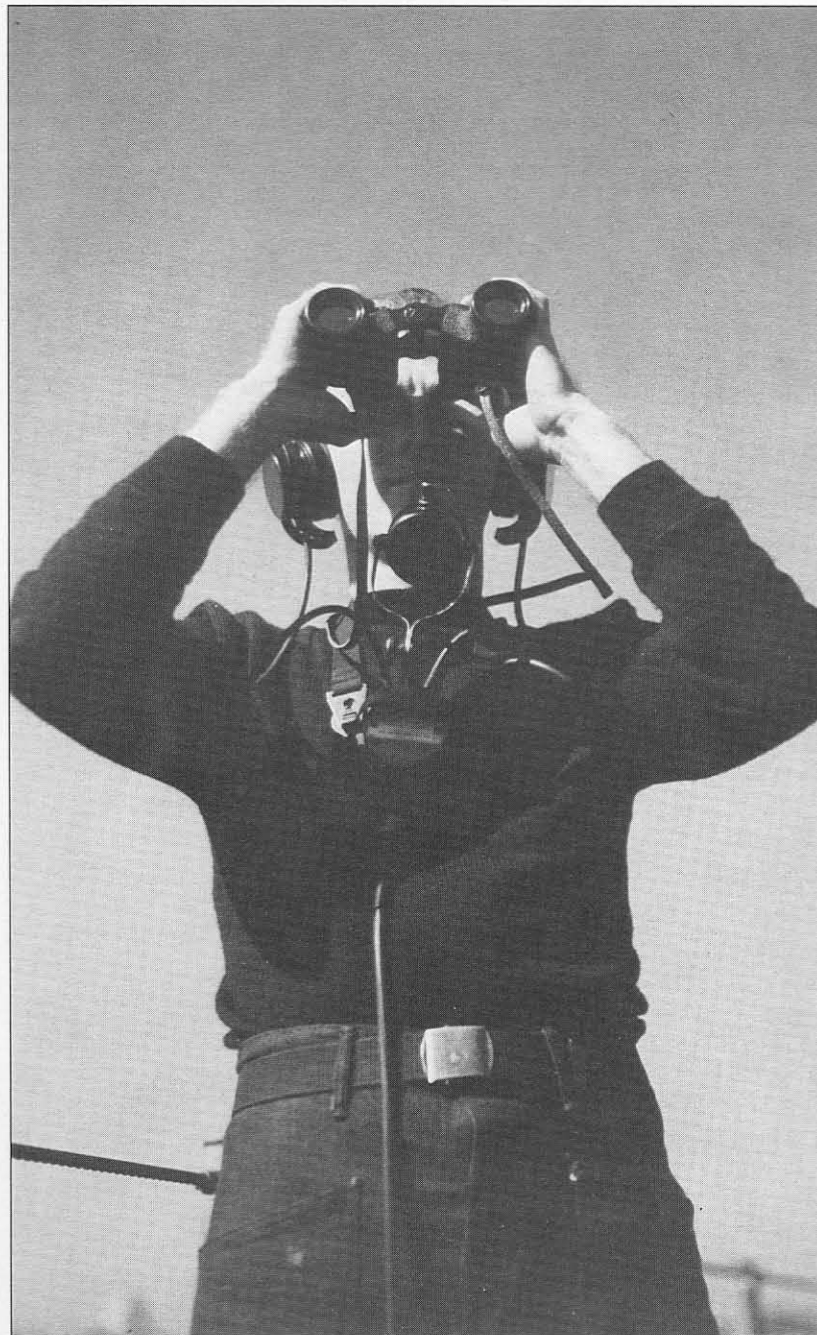
combat career at Saipan, took part in the Leyte invasion, and while landing troops at Lingayen Gulf, sustained casualties from shore fire.

The ship was supporting Army forces on Luzon when, on Jan. 30, 1945, a Japanese torpedo crippled it. The *Cavalier* was towed to Leyte and then to Pearl Harbor. Hostilities ended before the ship was ready for sea again.

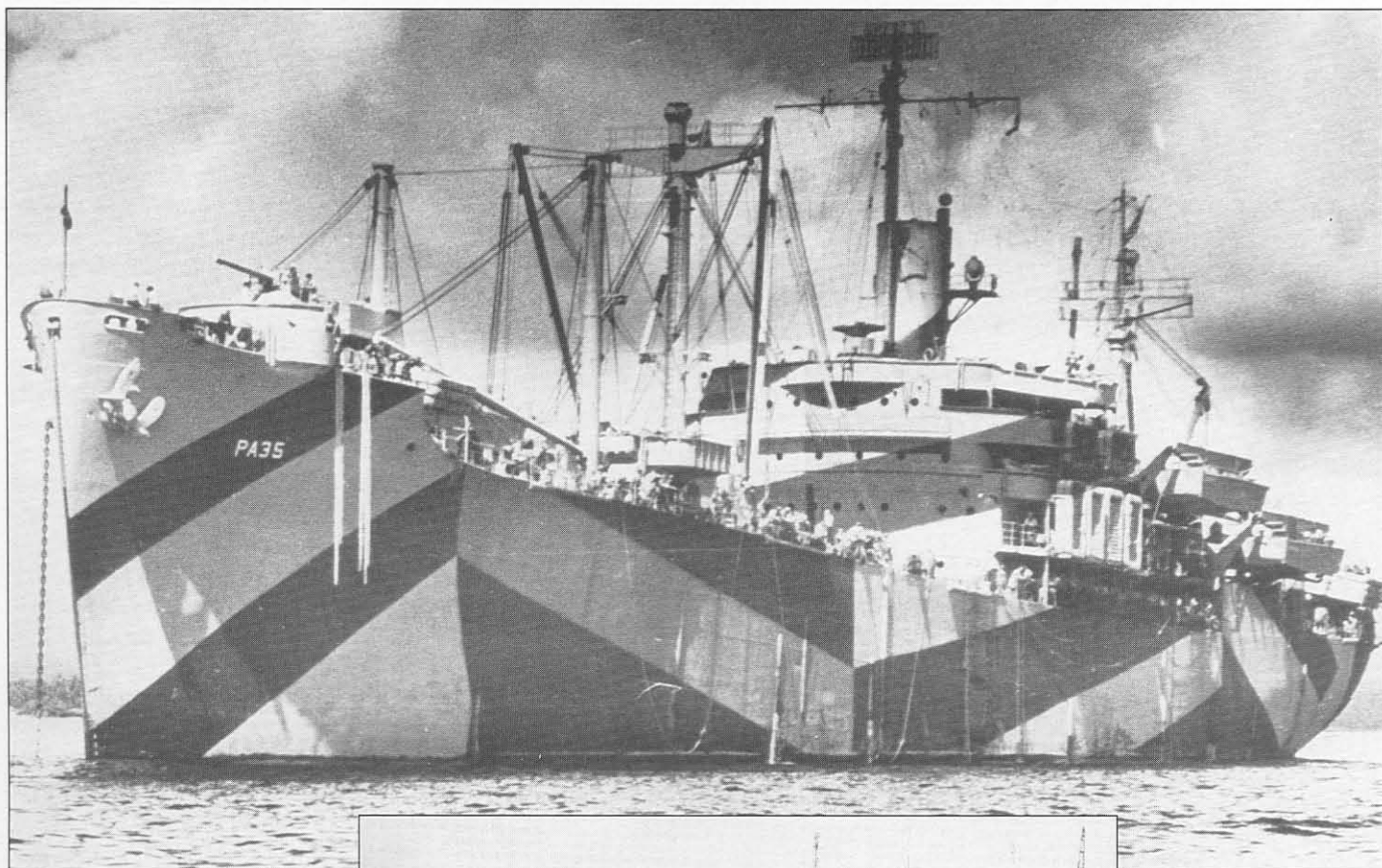
The attack transports were not the only Coast Guard-manned participants in most of these assault landings. Beginning in 1943, five of the somewhat smaller C-2 type vessels were commissioned as attack cargo ships (AKA) with Coast Guard crews.

Although these, too, transported soldiers and Marines, they devoted a greater portion of their cargo space to the supplies and gear necessary to support the troops engaged in various amphibious operations.

They spent more of their time between invasions shuttling sup-



Right: Equipped with telephone gear for communication with the bridge, an anti-aircraft lookout scans the horizon aboard the *USS PC-556*, Oct. 8, 1942.



plies among island bases in their capacity as cargo ships.

The first two, the *USSs Aquarius* and *Centaurus*, began together at Kwajalein; the latter then helped to seize Aitape in New Guinea, while the *Aquarius* transported garrison troops in the Southwest Pacific.

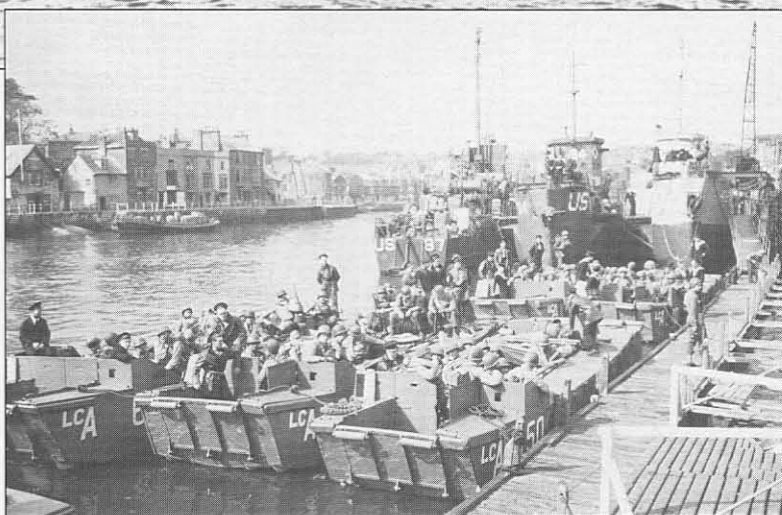
Both took part in the Saipan, Guam and Pelelieu invasions, and while the *Centaurus* returned to the United States for overhaul, the *Aquarius* went on to Leyte and Lingayen Gulf.

Both the *Aquarius* and the *Centaurus* were in the Okinawa assault force, as were their sisters: the *USS Cepheus* — a veteran of the Southern France invasion — and the *USSs Sheliak* and *Theenim*, for both of which Okinawa was the first combat operation.

LANDING CRAFT

While attack transports and attack cargo ships could carry troops to the invasion beaches, they had to debark them into small landing craft to be ferried ashore.

By early 1943, ocean-going vessels capa-



ble of beaching themselves and retracting after landing troops and equipment were leaving builders' yards in sufficient number that the Navy sought Coast Guard assistance in manning units of the two most important, and most numerous, types.

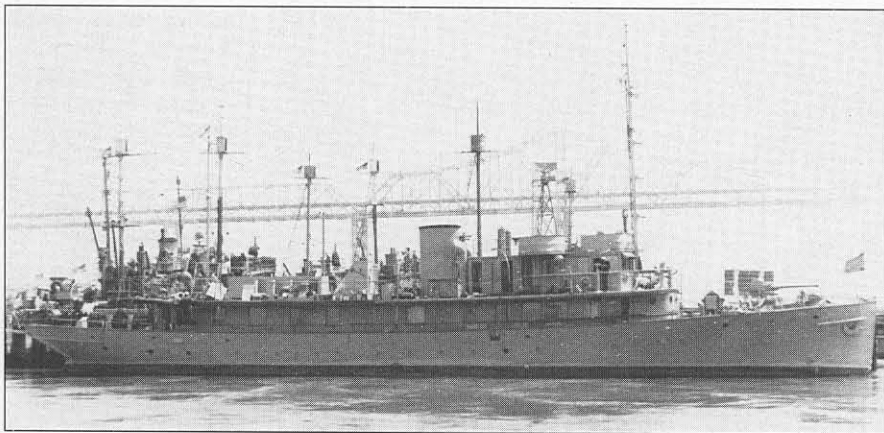
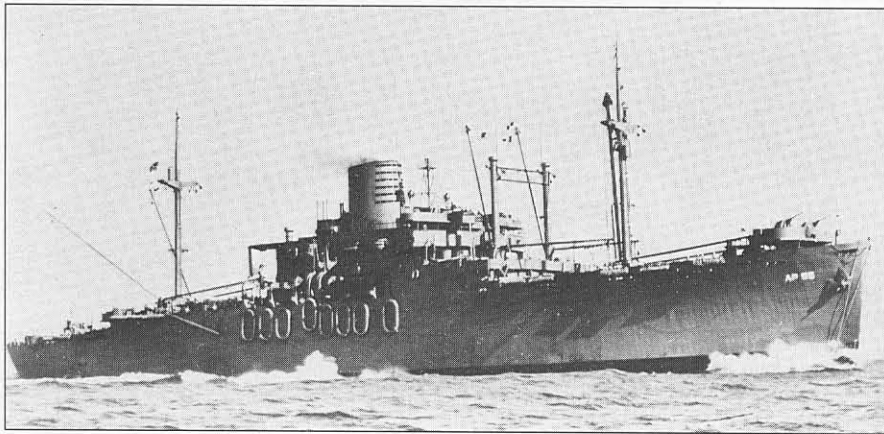
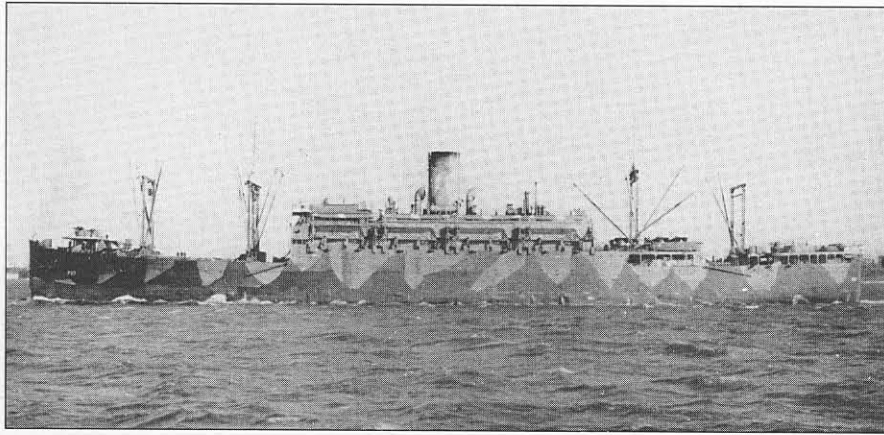
These were the LST — landing ship, tank — and the LCI(L) — landing craft, infantry, large.

Unlike the larger amphibious-force ships, these unglamorous vessels did not receive names, but their contribution to the Allied offensives in almost every theater of operations was invaluable.

And while the larger ships were exposed to enemy bomber and kamikaze attacks, oc-

Above: Twenty Coast Guardsmen and many others died in a blaze aboard the *USS Callaway* following repeated kamikaze attacks where one Japanese plane crashed into the ship.

Left: American troops crowd into landing craft awaiting transportation to larger ships during pre-invasion loading in an English port in 1944.



reduced the Coast Guard's responsibility to 37 of the early LSTs, 13 of which served with Navy flotillas in the European theater, while 24 went to the Pacific.

Beginning with the landings in Tunis in July 1943 and those at Fischhafen, New Guinea, two months later, one or more Coast Guard-manned LSTs participated in almost every amphibious operation involving American forces, and several landed British or Commonwealth troops, as at Taranto, Normandy and Borneo. Thirty-six more LSTs, composing the 29th Flotilla, were commissioned by Coast Guard crews in 1944 and took part in the Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Japan, landings in 1945, while three others completed their training too late for World War II service.

THE LANDINGS

LST participation in an invasion was rarely a simple beaching, landing of equipment and men, and retracting. Invasion convoys were often subjected to air attack while in passage, and after an LST's initial beaching, it was usually ordered to go alongside a larger vessel offshore to embark another cargo to be landed on the beach.

This sequence was often repeated a number of times in the course of a single amphibious operation. In fact, the Coast Guard-manned *LST 792* was said to have been beached 90 times during its 13-month World War II career.

Nor was beaching always a simple evolution — beach gradients sometimes did not permit a close approach before the LST grounded, necessitating the use of pontoon causeways, brought to the scene by the LST, between ship and

shore.

In addition, beaching on coral reefs in the Pacific was likely to be especially tricky, because the landing ship might find itself impaled on a coral head when it came time to retract. For example, the Coast Guard-manned *LST 203* had to be abandoned after broaching on a coral reef in the Ellice Islands Oct. 1, 1943.

Also, two other Coast Guard LSTs were lost: *LST 69* was one of six destroyed by explosion and fire while loading ammunition in Pearl Harbor May 21, 1944 — none of its crew died in the catastrophe, but 13 were seriously injured — and Japanese bombers damaged the *LST 167* irreparably during the

casually becoming targets for shore batteries, only their landing craft crews could expect to come under fire in the course of almost every invasion.

Entire companies of beaching craft, on the other hand, could claim the distinction of being in the forefront of the battle in every opposed landing.

Initially, the Coast Guard was to provide crews for 61 LSTs which were flat-bottomed ships, 328 feet long, fitted with ballast tanks that could be pumped out to reduce their draft by five feet when beaching, and with bow doors that opened so that vehicles could be driven off the tank deck.

Changes in production schedules

Above: *The USS Hunter Liggett was one of the first three transports commissioned in World War II.*

Center: *A smaller attack transport, the USS Arthur Middleton, carried out seven amphibious operations during its World War II service.*

Below: *Crewed by Coast Guardsmen, the USS Amethyst was a converted yacht.*

Vella Lavella invasion Sept. 25, 1943.

The latter's casualty list — seven men killed, 23 wounded, of whom three died of their wounds, and five men missing — was the largest suffered by a Coast Guard-manned landing ship or craft.

The LCI(L)s were 160-foot vessels with a ramp on each side of the bow that could be lowered to permit infantrymen to debark after beaching. Faster and more maneuverable than the LSTs, they were uncomfortable at sea with almost 200 soldiers aboard, and their small crews which included 24 officers and men, needed careful training to lower and raise the heavy ramps safely.

The Coast Guard-manned *bobtail* flotilla of 24 LCI(L)s received its baptism of fire in the Sicily invasion July 9, 1943, the first major operation for ships of this type.

They emerged unscathed from the Sicily landings and the subsequent Salerno invasion, but the Coast Guard flotilla lost the *LCI(L)s* 85, 91 and 92 to mines at Normandy June 6, 1944, and the *LCI(L)* 93 had to be abandoned after 10 direct hits by a German shore battery.

The *LCI(L)* 83 was also abandoned when it struck a mine almost two weeks later, but when the ebbing tide exposed the hole, its men were able to patch it well enough so that the ship could return to England for repair.

OTHER DUTIES IN THE PACIFIC

The 20 surviving Coast Guard LCI(L)s sailed to the United States in the autumn of 1944, and after overhaul and training with four replacement vessels, went to the Pacific, where 13 of them added the Okinawa campaign to their battle records.

Their beaching capability was not needed there, most of the troops having been landed before the Coast Guard-manned vessels joined the invasion force, so they were used in a variety of other duties, making smoke frequently to screen larger ships from Japanese air attack.

Eight of the *LCI(L)* 90's men were burned seriously, one fatally, when a

kamikaze crashed into the conning station June 13, 1945, but the ship survived, making off under its own power.

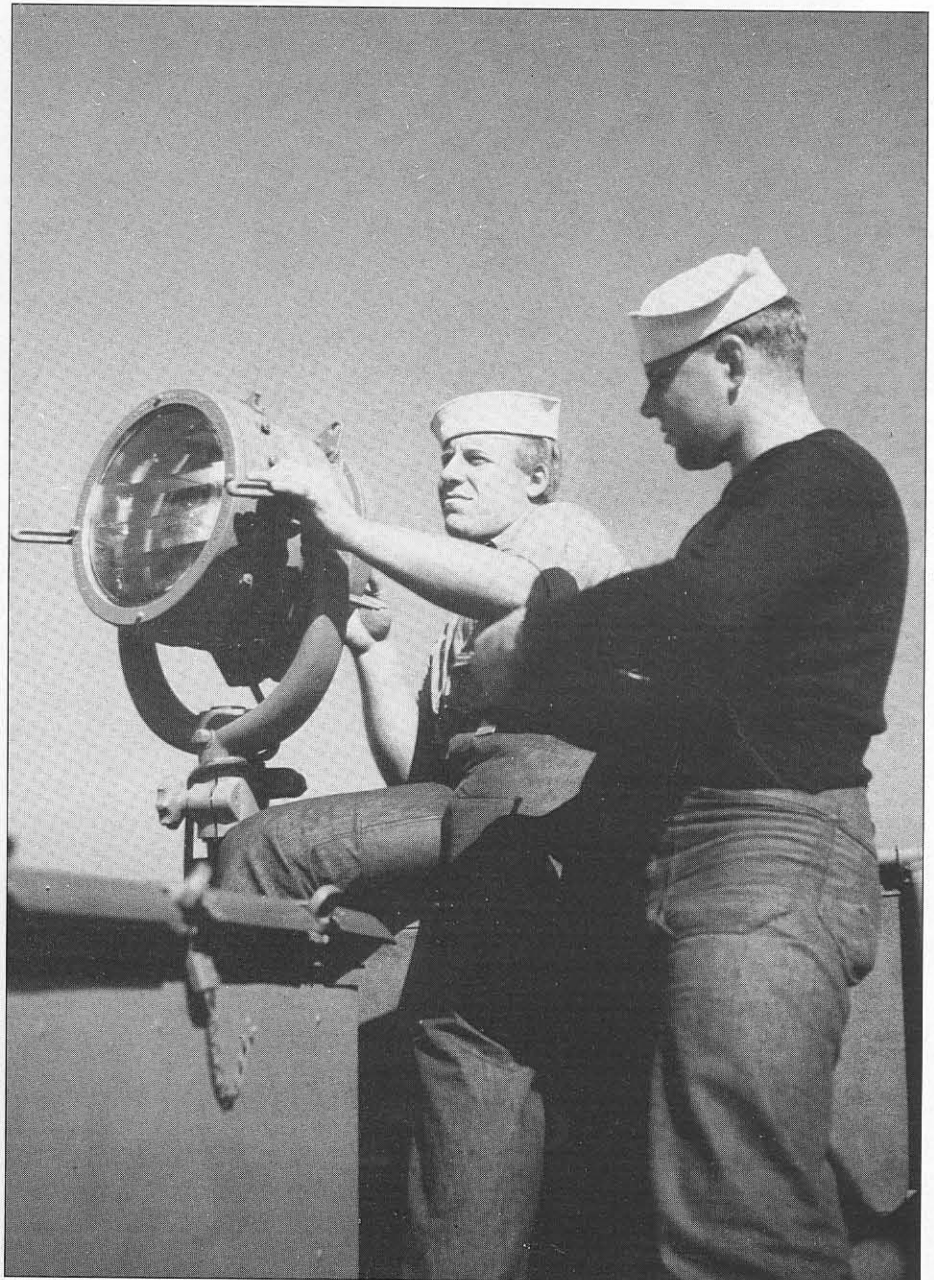
While the threat of U-boats and, to a lesser degree, German air attack posed the greatest danger, the sea itself could also be considered an enemy.

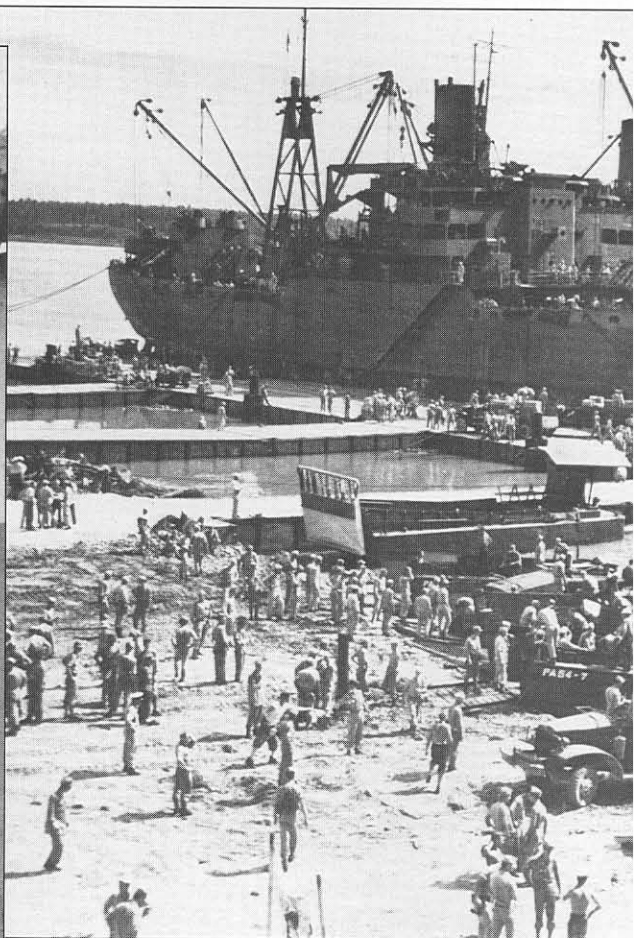
Since its cutters had been serving as convoy escorts almost from the beginning of the United States involvement in World War II, it was to be expected that the Coast Guard should provide crews for some of the myriad escort vessels built for the

Navy during the war.

First of these were eight corvettes, 208-foot vessels built in Canada and commissioned between November 1942 and August

Below: Signalman 3/c Theodore Cholewinski uses a blinker lamp to send a message to a nearby supply ship during operations off the East Coast, Oct. 8, 1942.





Following shakedown cruises and anti-submarine-warfare training, all were assigned to transatlantic-escort duty, taking convoys from the American East Coast to ports in the United Kingdom and to the Mediterranean.

While the threat of U-boats and, to a lesser degree, German air attack posed the greatest danger, the sea itself could also be considered an enemy.

Sea conditions in the North Atlantic during the winter were among the most severe encountered anywhere, and the DEs were notoriously lively in a seaway.

"I never questioned the seaworthiness of those ships (after the first winter storm)," said the *USS Pettit's* commanding officer. "I think everyone on board, however, wondered if they could hang in, or literally hold on, for the 14-day trips."

Hold on they did, while their ship escorted 24 convoys across the Atlantic.

One of the Coast Guard-manned DEs, the *USS Leopold*, was lost, sunk by an acoustic torpedo while it was attacking a submarine 400 miles south of Iceland during the night of March 9, 1944.

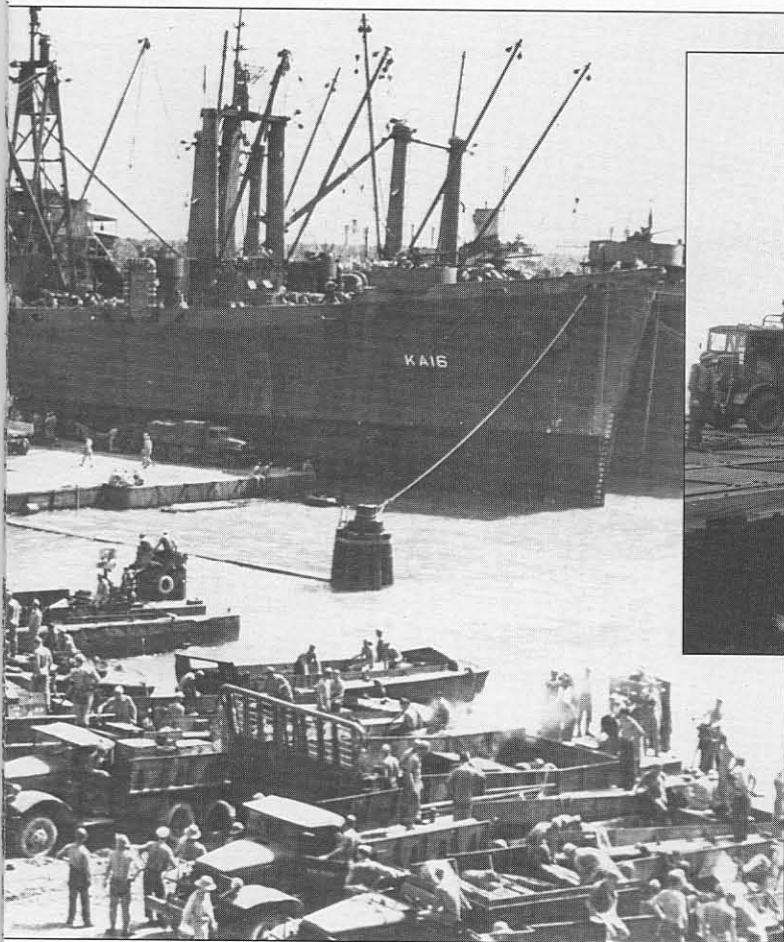
Despite heavy seas, the *USS Joyce* closed its stricken sister, but it had to turn away repeatedly to elude torpedoes. The *Joyce* fi-

Above: Crewmembers lower a jeep from a Coast Guard-manned transport into an LCM from the *USS Joseph T. Dickman* in June 1944.
Center: Marines from the 1st Division debark and off-load equipment from the *USS Aquarius* onto a floating dock at the Russell Islands in 1944.

1943. All were principally employed escorting coastal convoys between New York and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

It was rather monotonous duty enlivened by an occasional sonar contact and more frequently by rough weather, in which the little ships justified their reputation for seaworthiness — and for lack of sea kindness.

Meanwhile, the Navy had begun a major program of destroyer-escort building, which ultimately produced some 500 ships. Thirty of these DEs, all of the 306-foot-long, Fairbanks Morse-diesel type with reduction gears, were commissioned by Coast Guard crews during the autumn of 1943.



Above: The crew from LST-21 unloads British tanks and trucks onto a "rhino barge" during the Normandy Invasion in June 1944.

nally picked up 28 survivors; 171 men, including all of the *Leopold's* officers, died with their ship.

The *Leopold's* assailant escaped, but its division mates *Joyce* and *Peterson*, together with a Navy DE, avenged the *Leopold* a few weeks later. The first picked up 31 survivors from a blazing tanker April 16, and soon afterward its sonar-men detected a submerged submarine. The *Joyce's* depth charges forced the *U-550* to the surface; the three DEs opened fire and the Navy ship rammed the U-boat, whereupon it was scuttled by its own men.

WAR CASUALTY

The *USS Menges* became the next torpedo victim. It detected a submarine nearing its convoy May 3, 1944 and steered to attack, only to have its stern blown off by the *U-371's* acoustic torpedo.

Thirty-one of its men were killed and 25 wounded, but its commanding officer refused to order the ship abandoned. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard-manned *USS Pride* and other escort vessels tracked the *U-371* relentlessly. The submarine surfaced the next day and damaged a French DE with another acoustic torpedo before being scuttled by its crew.

Towed back to New York, the *Menges* had its stern replaced with that of another torpedo-damaged DE and returned to service in the autumn of 1944.

Together with its division mates *Moseley*, *Pride* and *Lowe*, the *Menges* spent two weeks during the spring of 1945 in search of

a U-boat reported to be operating off Newfoundland. The *Lowe* made the initial depth charge attack March 18, and the other ships followed with hedgehog and depth charge patterns.

Postwar analysis indicated that the *Lowe* had destroyed the *U-866*. Thereafter, the four DEs joined naval vessels in countering the final German U-boat offensive in the western Atlantic.

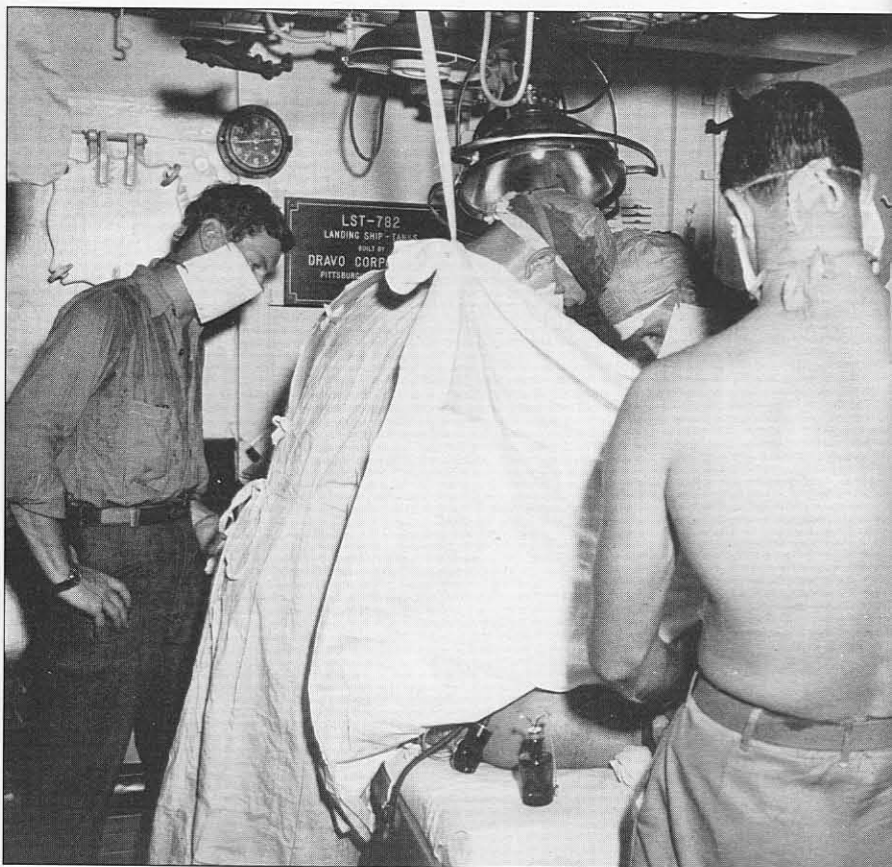
Most of the Coast Guard-manned DEs continued to escort convoys to and from Europe or Africa until the war ended in May 1945. Then, after overhaul and further training, 23 of the ships were ordered to the Pacific. Only the six sent to Adak in the Aleutians had any opportunity for active service before Japan's surrender, however; they escorted convoys in the North Pacific and served with the 9th Fleet in its campaign against the Kurile Islands.

The apparently insatiable demand for anti-submarine vessels in 1942 led the Navy to utilize merchant shipyards for their construction. These yards were not thought capable of building ships such as DEs to naval standards, so the British River-class frigate design, similar to the DEs, was modified for American construction techniques. Shipyards in California and on the Great Lakes



Above: Coast Guard Seaman 1/c Joseph Seppi died while manning a 40mm gun director aboard the USS Menges in 1944.

Above right: The wardroom aboard the USS LST-782 becomes a clinic for an emergency appendectomy in 1945.



received contracts for 69 of these ships in 1942; ultimately, 96 were built, 21 of which were transferred to the Royal Navy. They were laid down as gunboats (PG) and later redesignated frigates (PF) — the frequently used term *patrol frigate* is erroneous, based on the mistaken assumption that each letter in the

designation must stand for a word.

Actually, PF simply indicated that frigates were vessels of the patrol type, as opposed to the DEs, which, built to naval standards and most carrying torpedo tubes, were destroyer type ships. The frigate program was plagued by delays; only 12 had been completed before the end of 1943, by which time more than 200 DEs were in commission and the Allies were winning the Battle of the Atlantic. Thus, the Coast Guard was made re-

sponsible for manning 75 of the no longer essential frigates. Only two Canadian-built River-class vessels had Navy crews.

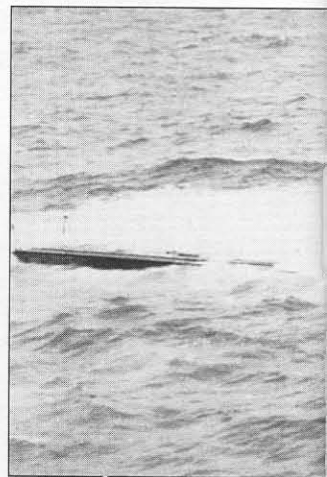
After the frigates were completed, their entry into service was often delayed by alignment problems with their triple-expansion reciprocating engines. Some had their main engines rebuilt after failing trials or during post-shakedown availability.

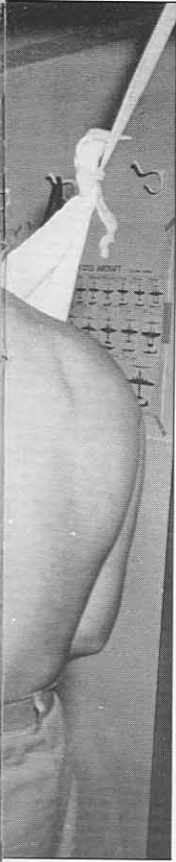
THE FIRST FRIGATES

The California-built frigates were ready first. Eighteen of them reported to the 7th Fleet in the Southwest Pacific in 1944, where they were joined by four of their Great Lakes sisters.

For the remainder of the year, they escorted convoys, made anti-submarine patrols, and occasionally provided fire support for American and Australian troops advancing westward along the northern coast of New Guinea and landing on islands offshore.

The USSs *Bisbee* and *Gallup* put rangers ashore on islands in





the approaches to Leyte Gulf at the beginning of the Philippines invasion, and eight of their sister ships were among the escorts that brought the first reinforcement convoys to Leyte.

The frigates were detached for duty elsewhere early in 1945 when faster steam-powered DEs with more effective armament joined the 7th Fleet. The remaining 12 California-built ships performed training and patrol duties in Alaskan waters and the eastern Pacific.

Most of the Great Lakes frigates served in the Atlantic, a number escorting convoys to and from the Mediterranean. Several operated temporarily with task groups investigating reported U-boat activity, and on one such mission the *USS Moberly* shared credit with a Navy DE for the destruction of the *U-853* off Nar-

ragansett Bay in May 1945. By that time, many of the frigates were being converted for weather-patrol duty, for which they were quite suitable because of their endurance and sea kindliness — they were much more comfortable in a seaway than DEs.

The conversion involved the replacement of the after three-inch gun by a small deck-house for inflating weather balloons. Forty-four of the ships were so fitted, manning weather stations in both the Atlantic and Pacific.

Those serving in the Atlantic after VE Day had their decks and bridge structures painted bright yellow to make them more readily visible to aircraft on transatlantic flights, a form of *reverse camouflage* that did little for the ships' appearance.

WORLD WAR II NEARS AN END

As the war in Europe neared its end, many of the escort vessels flying American colors were clearly superfluous. Twenty-eight of the frigates were made available for Lend-Lease transfer to the then Soviet Union in the spring of 1945.

During pre-transfer overhauls, these ships had their most sophisticated equipment replaced by more primitive gear, after which they steamed to Cold Bay, Alaska. There the Coast Guard crews spent several

weeks training their Russian replacements. The frigates hoisted their Soviet flags in July and August of 1945.

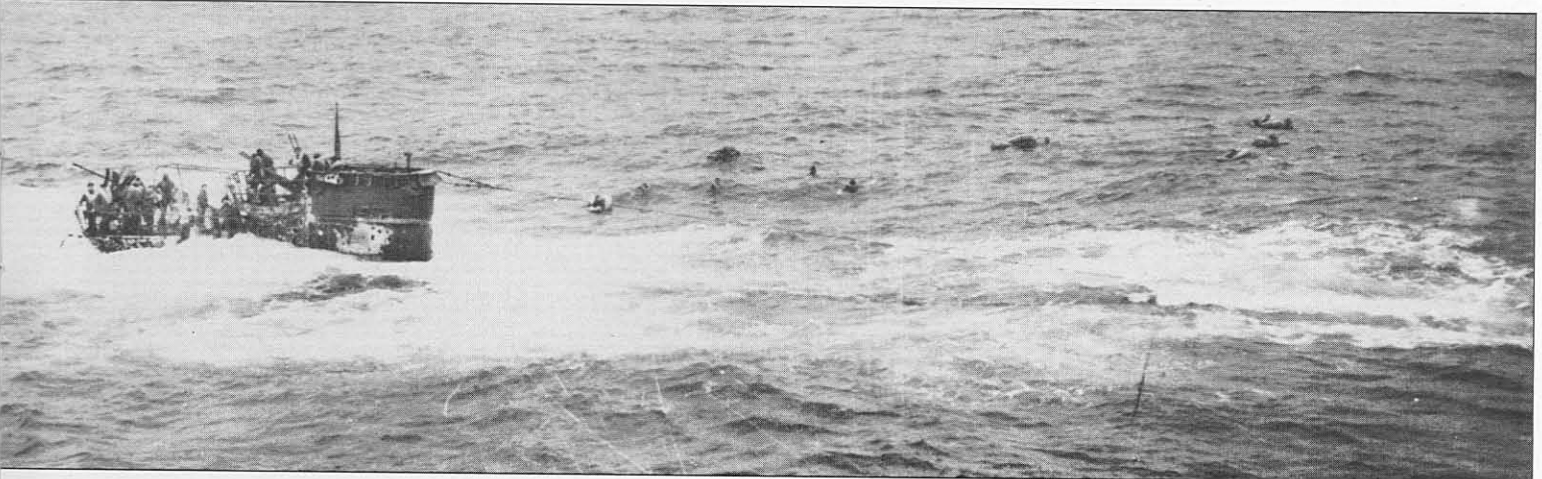
Smallest of the Navy's escort vessels manned by Coast Guardsmen were 10 submarine chasers — four of the 173-foot steel PCs and six of the 110-foot wooden SCs. Despite their size, several had more impressive

The General William Mitchell ... in some 20 months, this P-2 transport made 10 transoceanic voyages, traversing more than 165,000 miles and carrying 80,858 passengers.

records than many of the larger vessels. Thus, the *PC 469* engaged the *U-154* in a five-hour battle in the Caribbean Sea in November 1942, damaging the enemy and emerging unscathed.

It went on to serve as control vessel at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, sinking two suicide motor boats and driving off a third in May 1945 and shooting down two Japanese aircraft six weeks later.

Below: Crewmen of the German *U-550* abandon ship after being depth charged, rammed and shelled by Allied convoy ships. The *USS Joyce* rescued 13 of the *U-boat's* survivors.



The *PCs* 545 and 556 took part in the Sicily and Southern France invasions, and the first was at Anzio as well, sinking an enemy motor torpedo boat. The *SCs* all served with the Greenland Patrol.

COAST GUARD'S NON-COMBAT MISSIONS

Most of the foregoing ships could be considered combat vessels, although many of them never fired a shot in anger. Coast Guardsmen, however, manned numerous naval vessels that were not intended to engage in combat, performing instead

essential, if less spectacular, logistical services.

Twenty-two transports were the largest of these, of which the *Wakefield* has already been mentioned.

The ship was almost lost to fire in September 1942 while in a New York-bound convoy. Naval escorts removed its passengers and crew and placed a salvage detail aboard. Towed to Halifax, it was declared a constructive total loss, but it was completely rebuilt in Boston and recommissioned by a Coast Guard crew in February 1944.

The *Wakefield* spent the remainder of the war transporting troops in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters.

Eleven of the transports were of the P-2 type, more than 600-feet long, while nine were 523-foot C-4s. All commissioned in 1944 or 1945, most had busy careers, crossing the oceans repeatedly with thousands of troops embarked, often without escort because their speed — 20 knots for the P-2s and 17 knots for the C-4s — was thought to make it difficult for an enemy submarine to get a torpedo-firing solution.

The *General William Mitchell* may serve as an example of these ships' service: In some 20 months, this P-2 transport made 10 transoceanic voyages, traversing more than

Right: Crewmembers of the USS *Moberly* relax after sinking Germany's U-853.

Below: The *Moberly*, assisted by the USS *Atherton*, sank the U-853 off Block Island in May 1945.

Below right: Crews from the *Moberly* and the *Atherton* recover a liferaft and other wreckage from the U-853.





Left: A Coast Guardsman sets the detonating depth on a depth charge aboard the USS PC-556, Oct. 8, 1942.

165,000 miles and carrying more than 80,000 passengers.

The Coast Guard also provided crews for 16 of the Navy's cargo ships, all but one of which, the smaller *USS Enceladus*, were of the Liberty type built in large numbers during the war.

These 11-knot cargo carriers served in the Pacific.

The *USSs Alberio* and the *Eridanus* plied between San Francisco and the Southwest Pacific, while most of the others spent their entire wartime careers shuttling supplies and men among island bases.

Some took part in invasions despite their auxiliary designation.

The *USS Etamin* was part of the Aitape assault force in April 1944, and while anchored off the north coast of New Guinea on the night of April 27, it was struck by a Japanese aerial torpedo. Several men were burned in gasoline fires, and when the ship began to

settle, the cargo ship was abandoned, apparently without loss of life. Two bodies were found later in the hold that the torpedo had hit. Too badly damaged to justify repair, the *Etamin* was decommissioned to become a storage hulk at Cairns, Australia.

The USS Serpens disaster, which was not attributed to enemy action, resulted in the Coast Guard's greatest loss of life in World War II.

Its sister, the *USS Serpens*, veteran of 19 months of Southwest Pacific service, exploded and sank Jan. 29, 1945, while loading

ADDITIONAL READING

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depth charges in Lunga Roads off Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

There were only two survivors from the 198 men of the crew who were aboard at the time, and 57 members of an Army stevedore unit died in the explosion; the commanding officer and seven others were ashore when their ship sank.

The *Serpens* disaster, which was not attributed to enemy action, resulted in the Coast Guard's greatest loss of life in World War II.

The *USS Pontus*, a converted LST serving as a motor torpedo-boat tender, and 18 small gasoline tankers, most of which were commissioned in 1944, completed the roster of Coast Guard-manned naval auxiliaries. The latter — 10-knot, 220-foot ships — supplied gasoline and lube oil to combat vessels operating in the Pacific and to advanced bases.

Occasionally, they became combatants themselves, as when the *USS Calamus* shot a Japanese aircraft down at Okinawa. Its sister, the *USS Sheepscot*, was the only loss,

capsizing on June 6, 1945, after running aground in heavy weather off Iwo Jima.

The Coast Guard also provided crews for many smaller naval vessels, among them the converted yacht *USS Amethyst* and numerous district craft, including a number of the patrol boats better known as *yippees* from their YP designation. Most had been fishing boats originally; a few were 110-foot wooden submarine chasers built during World War I.

In all, the Coast Guard manned 351 naval vessels in the course of World War II, those so employed numbering 48,622 at the war's end. ADM Russell R. Waesche, the Coast Guard commandant, hoped that naval crews might replace his service's personnel aboard these ships when the Coast Guard was returned to Treasury Department control on Jan. 1, 1946.

The Navy, however, was facing its own demobilization problems, so the Coast Guardsmen ultimately decommissioned most of the vessels in which they were serving.

The last may have been the frigate *USS El Paso*, which had

been a weather ship off Leyte. According to the *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, its ensign and commission pennant were hauled down on July 18, 1946. Nineteen other frigates, also fitted as weather ships, were decommissioned several weeks later, but had been lent to the Coast Guard in 1946 and so were no longer naval vessels.

During the period between Japan's surrender and their pre-inactivation overhauls, most of these ships performed a variety of duties. Transports and cargo ships took part in Operation Magic Carpet, returning military personnel to the United States, while frigates continued to patrol weather stations in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Some LSTs and DEs were assigned duties associated with the occupation of Japan, as were several of the LCIs — sisters of the last shuttled personnel and cargoes among Pacific atolls.

DEs also searched Pacific islands for isolated Japanese garrisons or survivors of wartime airplane crashes, and a few had to make a weather patrol before returning

home, hardly a pleasant experience for the crews of those rough-riding ships.

COAST GUARD'S CONTRIBUTION

The Coast Guard-manned naval vessels made an important contribution to the Allied victory in World War II, their performance comparing favorably with that of their counterparts with naval crews. It must be noted, however, that they composed only a small proportion of the Navy's amphibious, escort and auxiliary forces.

Moreover, most of their men were reservists, whose experience with the Coast Guard was limited to a few weeks of recruit training; they probably would have served as effectively had their uniforms' right sleeves not borne the Coast Guard shield.

The Coast Guard's most significant influence leading to these ships' successes was perhaps that of the commanding officers who commissioned them. Transports, cargo ships, LSTs, destroyer escorts and frigates were all commanded initially by regular officers of command rank, and their ships' effectiveness depended to a considerable extent on their own ability.

Many of the smaller vessels' commanding officers had been warrant or petty officers until they were promoted temporarily to commissioned rank; their years of experience in the pre-war Coast Guard enabled

them to meet the challenges of command.

Finally, the surfmen assigned to vessels manned by the Navy, to serve in landing craft and as mentors for landing craft crews while the Navy was learning the techniques of amphibious warfare, must not be forgotten. Their contribution to victory was second to none, far out of proportion to their numbers. ●



Above: The USS LST-67 lands troops through the surf on a Cape Gloucester beach in December 1943.

Left: Marines pull a jeep ashore from an LST during the Cape Gloucester Invasion in December 1943.

QUICK ACTION



United States
COAST GUARD