

ACROSS THE CHANNEL

day 12

Monday, March 5, proved once again to be a very long day. Reveille sounded so early in the morning it could barely be considered the next day. Certainly too early to be served any type of breakfast.

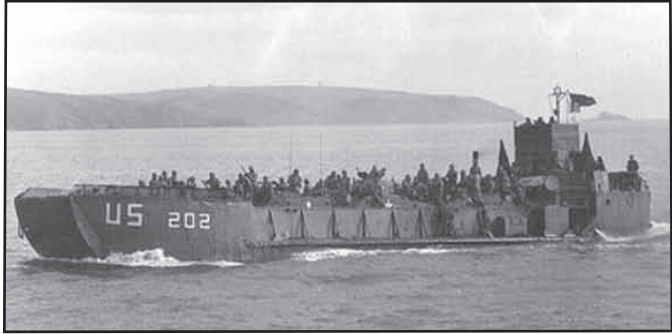
As instructed on the previous day when they arrived in Southampton, elements of the group were assembled and placed onto open trucks that were immediately driven to the long steel and wood piers a short distance away. The beginning of this day was very similar to the morning that they had departed Camp Shanks a mere week and a half before. A cold drizzle fell through the thick fog rolling in from the Channel.

They were told to climb down a rusty steel gang-way into a waiting steel grey LCT (Landing Craft Tank). The LCT was dwarfed by the length and height of the pier and by all of the much larger navy vessels and transport ships tied up alongside the row of piers and other ships anchored out in the harbor. The drizzle continued to pelt their helmets and drip from the slightly turned rim. The morning was bitterly cold. Many of the men were surprised that the rivulets of rain and the slow drips weren't forming strands of ice from their

helmets.

LCT's resembling large square floating bathtubs had been designed by British engineers in 1940. Since then they had been produced by both the United States and Great Brit-

ain. The 965 LCT's built in U.S. shipyards during World War II had no armor and were



LCT (Landing Craft Tank)

only lightly armed with two 20mm guns. They were never given names as ships traditionally are, but had only numbers painted on each side and the back. At a length of 117 feet and a beam width of 32 feet, the draft was an amazingly shallow 34 inches on the front



For perspective a group of veterans aboard a LCT (Landing Craft Tank)

end and 50 inches in the back where the engine housing was placed. Typically, they were engineered to transport a variety of vehicle configurations and quan-

tities to a beach-head. But normally they carried four medium tanks and could sustain a speed of 8 knots pushed forward by three 225 HP diesel engines and heavy triple screws. The front of the LCT was hinged at the bottom, and when lowered, formed a ramp which men and vehicles could use to disembark through the water. With any luck at all, it would be shallow water if the craft had enough force to drive itself in close. But many times they were forced to lower their ramps too far away from land, which would send vehicles and men laden with heavy gear directly to the bottom.

The one-hundred mile Channel crossing took nearly ten hours to complete. Only soldiers from the United States made the trip across the Channel to Le Harve, France. No Sherman tanks were aboard this time. The former few months of bloody battles, notably the Bulge, created an excess of armored vehicles. What was needed at this point were additional soldiers to operate the many tanks, artillery, and half-tracks necessary to mobilize an army.

As the cold drizzle fell and the air became even more dank, the soldiers aboard were exposed to the open air. Even as the nighttime turned into dawn during the long transport, it never turned brighter than a typical twilight at home. The troops were tucked away deep down in the vessels. The sides of the LCT offered little protection from the rain. Even if the sun had appeared, it would never have been high enough to warm the men who were standing, sitting, or lying down.

Some of the soldiers tried to sleep the hours away. Some stood with the collars of their green wool overcoats pulled high to their necks and their wool caps pulled as low as possible in an attempt to fend off the cold damp wind. Some soldiers wrote their first letter home from this new far away place. Sadly, others would be writing their *last* letters home from this far away place. The one thing they all had in common was the extreme anxiety they felt about the coming days and months.