



"A Silence Long Unbroken"

Edward Reilly

BM2c V6 USNR

April 14, 1943 - June 14, 1945

A LCVP Driver's Story
About His D-Day Landing On
"Dog Red" Omaha Beach,
H-Hour +60, And Serving In The
Navy During World War II



"I do remember well those of our crew who manned the LCVP's. They were indeed courageous. They had a lot of guts and a lot of courage....they were terrific."

October 1, 2000

Lt. James W. Knox, LST 491

November 23, 1943 - January 12, 1946

"A Silence Long Unbroken"

Introduction

"I've Been in Waves Like That"

Section One

Enlistment

"I Was Going to be a Twenty Year Man"

Section Two

Boot Camp

"I Caught Hell Like Everyone Else"

Section Three

Little Creek, Va.

"You Didn't Choose Anything.
They Chose."

Section Four

Ft. Pieice, Fl.

"The Higgins: A Pretty Little Boat"

Section Five

Panama City & LST 134

"X-mas? It was Wartime."

Section Six

LST 134 & Atlantic Crossing

"I Never Went to the Fo'c'sle Again!"

Section Seven Appledore, England
"Where I Got Good on the Higgins"

Section Eight The Thomas Jefferson
"We Were Line-ahead"

Section Nine June 6th D-Day
"H-Hour Plus 60:
The Beach Was Closed!"

Section Ten Scotland
"I Didn't See the Sun for Thirty Days"

Section Eleven LST 491 & So. France
"I Shit My Pants!"

Section Twelve LST 491 & The Med
"We Became a Ferry Boat"

Section Thirteen The Trip Home
"I'd Had Enough"

"I was a kid. I didn't really know what was coming. We all didn't. I guess I'm like a lot of guys who have never really talked about it. Gosh, it's been 56 years. It was really something."

*Edward Reilly
June 6, 2000*

I was crossing the North Atlantic. It was in February. Had an opportunity to go out to the forcsile and I only went one time. Out there the LST went down in a trough and I looked up and saw this wall of water towering above me. I left and never went back out there again!

It took 32 days to cross the North Atlantic in a convoy. During the crossing we had a couple of sub scares. One time I thought I saw a torpedo wake coming at the ship but it turned out to be the white crest of a wave.

I was a kid. I really didn't know what was coming. We all were kids. We all did not know what was coming.

There were 160 army troops with trucks and equipment on the LST going over. Their captain was a real nice guy. One Sunday night he cooked spaghetti and the smell filled the whole ship. Boy was it good. Best I ever tasted.

We were headed for England. We drank a lot of coffee to stay warm as we did 4 hours on duty and 4 hours off duty.

Got scared a couple of times when a ship in front of us broke down in our path and we almost hit it. We were in a convoy and had to maintain speed and course to stay with the convoy.

Note: The first conversation with Dad took place for about three hours one night from about midnight until 3 a.m. in the morning. It had been June 5th and we were watching a documentary on “The Perfect Storm.” After watching the huge seas on the TV screen Dad said: “I’ve been waves like that!” He talked for the next three hours. It was now June 6th. I kept quiet as I listened. I felt that this was a sacred time. I was hearing something long held silent. I was hearing “A Silence Long Unbroken.”

The initial interviews took place on June 6th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th.

- ✓ **At Normandy I was in the wave one hour after H-Hour. It was a real mess. The beach was closed. I landed my troops on the beach and I got out of there. There were 50 men with a captain. They had full packs and 50 lbs of explosives each.**

- ✓ **There were four sailors on the LCVP. I drove the craft.**

✓ I was on the Thomas Jefferson for the landing. We were 10 miles off shore.
Saw three French cruisers. They were like gazelles.

I remember but it's been 55 years. It all kind of blurs together.

✓ As we were coming in on the beach for landing we came up on a pole with a mine on it. The pole had a blue top to it. If I had hit it I would not be here today.

✓ Lost a lot of good men. Knew some of them from being on the ship with them.
(His face looked as if he were seeing their faces once again)

The second landing was in Southern France. I was more scared then than I was at Normandy. I shit myself. I knew what was happening this time...

I swam in the Bershanti Bay, Algiers.

The LST in the Mediterranean became a ferry for troops, equipment and supplies for North Africa.

It never leaves you. (He talked as if he could still see it all in his mind's eye. He would talk for a while and then he would stop and there would be silence. Then, as if seeing it all again he would tell some more. This was the first time he had ever talked to me about Normandy)

It's been 55 years. That's something. It was something! We really had no idea what we were getting into. We really did something. Yeah, we did. But it was something we had to do.

In France I played craps for the first time. I lost \$40 dollars in 40 minutes. I learned never to play craps and I never played craps again.

I guess I am like a lot of guys who have never really talked about it. Gosh it has been 55 years!

In England I was a Coxswain's Mate. I was chosen by the LST Captain to ferry him around on the LCVP. I was very proud of that. I could drive that boat better than anyone else.

I had small boat training at Ft. Pierce, Florida.

I visited Tottnes, England for small boat training. (There is a postcard of this town)

✓ **At Normandy we had orders that everyone had to get off. Orders to shoot them if they did not get off. Some hesitated and started to refuse but we told “Hey, pal, you’re getting off of I’ll have to shoot you.” When the men got off I got the hell out of there.**

Enlisted in April of 1943. Crossed the Atlantic in February, 1944 on the way to Normandy, June, 1944.

I did Basic training in Samson, New York. Lake Geneva. I was underage at 17 when I enlisted. They didn’t care. They just wanted you. (Note: There is a Geneva, New York, on a large lake, called Seneca Lake with a Samson State Park on the lake. He remembers a “Camp Wood.”)

I could not spell. That was the only thing that held me back.

The Navy was fun! I saw a lot of different places.

Just before my discharge they sent me to a hospital. They said “battle fatigue” was the reason for the hospital. That was a bunch of bullshit, but I went along with it.

I enlisted in the Navy on April 19, 1943, at the Recruit Station in Philadelphia, Pa. Left that day for Samson, New York, where Boot Camp was located. Boot Camp was not all that bad. I caught hell the same as everyone else. Boot Camp lasted eight weeks.

I had four ratings while in the navy:

- (1) Recruit**
- (2) Seaman 2C at the end of Boot Camp**
- (3) Coxswain at the end of training at Little Creek, VA**
- (4) Boatswain Mate 2C while on LST 491. I didn't much like**

being a Boatswain Mate. Too much responsibility.

NTS—Naval Training Station—Boot Camp

I took Amphibious Training at the ATB at Little Creek, VA It was on the Delaware Bay. There I learned about landing craft. I learned how to drive the 36 foot landing craft called “The Higgins.” They were pretty good to drive. They were gentle but they did not let you make too many mistakes. I got really good at driving the Higgins when I was in England.

I was on the USS LST 134 going over to England just before the Normandy Invasion. There were big waves going over! If I remember anything I remember that! (The Perfect Storm on TV) It took 34 days to cross. We crossed in convoys. There were always sub scares. On the LST 134 there were 125 sailors and 50 soldiers with there equipment and trucks.

I had Advanced Amphibious Training on the landing craft at Appledore, England, at the AATB—the Advanced Amphibious Training Base there. We practiced landings and formations and I got good at it! I was at Appledore for a month or two.

After Appledore I went to the AAB—the Advanced Amphibious Base at Portsmouth for more training and waiting for the ship that would take us to Normandy. I spent time at Weymouth on the East Coast of England—the

Channel side. We were just waiting to be picked up by the USS Thomas Jefferson. We did not have any duties to speak of; just spent the days waiting and playing around.

✓ The USS Thomas Jefferson was a troop transport ship and we went to Normandy on it. There were lots ships, ships and ships, over 5000 of them. The channel over was really crowded. The ships followed each other. We were what was called "line ahead." We crossed in the morning just after midnight. The landing was to take place when the tide was just coming in. We arrived on station and just waited. Heard planes overhead all night long. It was a "go" come hell or high water situation. The landing craft were lowered and circled the ship until we were called to come along side and pick up 50 soldiers. We loaded at first light. We were about 10 miles off shore or so we were told.

✓ Normandy

The beach was closed but we went in anyway. We were already committed. The officer said: go and we went! It was one hour after H-hour. Everything was so jumbles up when we arrived and even though the beach was closed we were too close in and we had to go in.

✓ I was driving and at one point the officer tried to grab the wheel. I told him to leave it alone! The waves were too big to go straight on with the square blunt bow of the LCVP. I think the big waves and rough sea that bothered the officer. We went in “quartering the waves” which means we were going at the waves at an angle; the waves almost hitting us on the side. Only a “quarter” of the bow was hitting the front of the LCVP. We would ride up one wave and fall down the other side.

✓ There was a lot on debris on the beach. There were beached craft, empty and broached craft. Everything was in the water. We landed right in front of a big blue mine on a pole. It looked huge!

At the Southern France Invasion we were in a “V” formation as we went in. This meant we followed the lead craft into the beach.

I didn't do anything special. I wasn't anyone special. I was like a thousand other guys. I did what I was trained to do.

✓ On the way out, as I pulled back from the beach, we got hit by a bigger craft. We were holed below the water line. As we went out the pumps could not

- ✓ **keep the water out. The LCVP was too damaged and we decided to sink it so it would not be a floating derelict and a danger to someone else. We got picked up by another boat from the Thomas Jefferson. I let the ramp down and the LCVP sank.**

- ✓ **That was my day. I only made one run to the beach. We went to Scotland that night on the Thomas Jefferson.**

- ✓ **As we landed on the beach the only thing I was thinking about was getting the hell off of it so I wouldn't get killed. There wee lots of shelling and small arms fire. When the ramp went down the first three got killed right off. They just dropped off the ramp. All the rest got off, the ramp went up and we got out.**

That day I had no navy friends or people he knew to get killed.

2nd Battalion 116th Division on the Thomas Jefferson.

After Normandy the USS Thomas Jefferson left that night for Scotland. I spent 30 days in Scotland and never saw the sun. It was cloudy all the time. It was there that I was assigned the USS LST 491. It was on the 491 that I

participated in the Invasion of Southern France and then spent 2-3 months in the Mediterranean. It was on the 491 that I came home on.

When I returned from the Mediterranean it was at Newport and then I shipped to Chelsea, Mass. to a hospital there. I spent a month in the hospital there.

After the Southern France Invasion the LST 491 was like a ferry boat. We were a ferry boat.

I spent 4-6 weeks at Boston, Mass when I returned.

At Newport I was assigned to a torpedo station. All we did all day was chase torpedoes. It was boring.

From Scotland we went to Italy near Naples. We got ashore at San Raffaele. We walked around. The weather was glorious. We trained in Italy for the Southern France Invasion. After that we became a ferry boat. We visited North Africa all along the coast. We went to all those famous places of famous battles all along the sea coast. (Rommel, Patton, Montgomery)

I was already out when VE Day occurred.

- ✓ **The Ensign on the LCVP was a “90 wonder” and was really nervous. I knew the boat and told him to leave it alone. I got it.**

- ✓ **The beachhead had a lot of smoke. I really remember a lot of noise. There was a lot of wreckage along the beach. There were lots of explosions and exploding shells. Shells were exploding nearby. It was every boat for themselves. At the time the whole world was my boat! When the ramp went down I was just hurrying them up. Shouting: Got off! Off! Get off!**

I do not remember getting wet on the way in.

There is a 3.85 on my discharge papers instead of a 4.0 rating. I got fined once when I was at Boston, Mass. I took a pass without permission and went home for the weekend. I went by train. The officer in charge would not give me the pass so I took it. It was hanging on a hook. When I got back he told me: “you’re on report!” It did not matter much to me. I was a combat veteran. I was pretty mouthy at the time.

I remember thinking at the time: What the hell. I was a combat vet.” So I took the pass and went home. Hey, I was a vet and pretty cocky.

I got out of the navy at age 19. That was in 1945. I got married in 1946 at age 20. We had just turned 20 and got married on March 16th the day before St. Patrick’s Day.

I was a pretty saucy fellow back then. I was young and full of it.

When I got to Scotland I was stationed ashore. The Thomas Jefferson just dropped us off there. It would be the LST 491 that would pick us up there and take us to the Mediterranean. We were at a place called Gourock, a small coast town on a bay.

I remember Portolongone, Italy and Naples, Italy.

✓ Normandy

When we arrived at Normandy we were about 10 miles off shore. We were at General Quarters the whole night. We were not that busy because everything was already done and set.

✓ I had 30 troops with full assault packs on my LCVP. They were with a Major. Each had 30 pounds of explosives. The Major pointed out things going in to the beach. He said: "Watch that house!" and then it disappeared in an explosion. The house had been bracketed with fire and then it disappeared. That's how he knew it would happen.

✓ There was no conversation on the way in. Each guy was within himself.

✓ There was bombarding going on all the time. It was very accurate! The Cruisers were picking out spots to target. There were three French Cruisers. They were accurate as hell. It was quite a sight to see!

✓ We were briefed three days before the invasion. We were told what beach we were to go in on, the objective, and the times we were to be where and times we were to do what.

- ✓ I had no real expectations going in. We were going in a “V” formation. The Ensign was in charge of the boat and giving the orders. The beach was closed as we arrived. The Ensign said we were not going to go back to the ship...not with a full boat of troops...so we went in.
- ✓ I remember seeing the first three ^{of} the boat get killed.
- ✓ The beach was crowded. I remember seeing two brown lines on the beach on the way in. Note: He was in the third wave so the “two brown lines” were the two waves that went in before him. The line closest to the waterline were the dead and the line closed to the beach were those still alive.)
- ✓ I remember a lot of noise. There was a lot of smoke. There was a lot of small arms fire. The beach was really jumbled up. It was a real mess. There were boats empty up against poles. And there were lots of mines on top of those poles. There were boats that were “broached” or sideways in the water and dead in the water.
- ✓ I asked someone what was on top of those poles and the Ensign told me.

- ✓ **When I arrived at the beach I just picked a hole where to put the LCVP. There was lots of equipment everywhere.**

- ✓ **As I was backing out we got hit by a LCT as it wheeled off the beach. We were hit below the armor plating and “holed” and began taking on water. I got the LCVP about a mile off shore. We were floundering. Another LCVP came along and picked us up. The last thing I did was opened up the ramp so it would sink. The LCVP that picked us up took us back to the USS Thomas Jefferson.**

- ✓ **The LCT was retracting and turning around when it hit us. When we lost the LCVP it ended my day at Normandy. When we got back to the USS Thomas Jefferson we were told that “when you landed the beach was closed.” All I said was “Oh, that’s nice.” Back on the Thomas Jefferson could not see too much of what was happening on the beach because we were too far out. That night the Thomas Jefferson and a whole flotilla left the area. All the troop transports left.**