

# Michael Jennings

## Landing Craft Tank (Mark 4) 795 on D Day

### Serving USA Forces on Utah

#### Background

This is the story of HM LCT (4) 795 from early crew training to D-Day and beyond, seen through the eyes of the craft's electrician, Royal Navy Wireman, Michael Jennings D/MX574620. The crew faced hazards together off the Normandy beaches and shared many experiences, but an unexpected event dispersed them without warning. The author never met any of them again.



Sister craft LCT (4) 828 under power. © IWM (FL 7101)

On the morning of D-Day, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, under the command of 21 year old Sub Lt Lyon, LCT 795 of the 52nd LCT Flotilla of the G LCT Squadron was on Utah beach in support of the US 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Loading orders for the craft, in Michael's group, record that 795 was carrying men of the USA's 531 Engineer Shore Regiment and landing tables show that 795 was due on Tare Green sector of Utah beach at H-Hour + 320 minutes; just before mid-day.

#### Initial Training



The author, Wireman,  
Michael Jennings  
D/MX574620

I joined the Royal Navy as a volunteer on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1943, and reported to *HMS Royal Arthur* at Skegness in Lincolnshire on the east coast of England. This shore establishment was formerly a Billy Butlin's holiday camp requisitioned by the Navy as a central reception depot for new naval recruits.

Following initial training, I was drafted to *HMS Vernon* (Portsmouth), as a Junior Provisional Electrical Mechanic (JPEM) and then to *HMS Shrapnel* (Southampton) from where I travelled every day to Totton to continue my JPEM course. After a few weeks, several of us were taken off the course and drafted to *HMS Drake* at Devonport for onward draft to the Royal Navy Training Unit at Letchworth in Hertfordshire, where we were placed on their Landing Craft Wireman course.



Sub Lt LYON (left) with his second in command, or 'Jimmy the One'

Instruction in seamanship at Troon in Scotland followed, where I joined 795 in the Gare Loch around the early weeks of 1944. From there, we undertook sea trials between Oban on the west coast of Scotland and Lamlash on the Isle of Arran in the Clyde estuary.

The daily routine was broken from time to time by the exuberance of youth. Our Petty Officer motor mechanic and me were ashore and missed the last liberty boat back to our landing craft. There was an exercise the following day, so



for a while but diverted into Portland because bad weather had delayed the planned landings for June 5<sup>th</sup> by 24 hours. The following morning, to the distant horizon, the sea was full of landing ships and craft of all shapes and sizes. The enormity of the spectacle made a lifelong impression on me. I was only 18 years of age and recall saying to my shipmates... "We are about to become part of history!"

The crossing to Normandy was very rough and sea sickness amongst the American soldiers was rife. They could not wait to get off our 'God damned boat.' There was no escape from the smell of vomit, it was everywhere. I slept in the Oerlikon gun pit where the air was fresher. We arrived off the Normandy beaches during the pre-dawn hours and stood off as we watched Allied planes going over during the first light of dawn. Our run to the beach was planned for approximately 1000 hours as part of the fourth assault wave. Every man was given a tot of rum, even underage me. It tasted really good.

The image shows a page from the Admiralty's 'Green List', which is a detailed log of landing craft assignments. It is organized into columns for different landing craft types and their respective positions or assignments. The text is dense and appears to be a technical document from the war.

*Extract from the Admiralty's 'Green List' showing the disposition of LCT 795 just before D-Day*

My action station was to operate the cable brake drum when the Kedge anchor was lowered, as we approached the beach. On the beach itself there were explosions, which I thought was evidence of demolition work by our own engineers. However, an American soldier was sure they were 88mm

shells from German defenders taking their bearings on the Barrage Balloon flying above our craft.



*The two beached craft waiting for the next tide - taken by Mick Jennings*

Having disembarked our cargo of men and trucks on to the beach, 795 was left stranded as the tide receded. Alongside us, also part of 52<sup>nd</sup> Flotilla, was one of our sister craft HM LCT 996.

Since we were easy targets for German gunners, we ran up the beach to seek shelter and saw shells landing between the craft, which punctured holes in the side of 795. The damage was not serious and, considering some of the trucks we had earlier disembarked were carrying high explosives for demolition purposes, we considered ourselves lucky. Had one of them been hit, 795 and all onboard would have been lost. As the shelling continued, I jumped into a foxhole already occupied by an American soldier, who shared his K Ration chocolate with me. He asked if I was a Commando. I replied, 'no fear!' and explained my intention to return to England on the next tide. Other members of 795's crew took refuge in a blockhouse, where they found the dead body of a German soldier. They took his helmet, Very pistol and a hand grenade as souvenirs. The combination of youth and wartime made people very callous, but now, all these years later, I wonder about him, his family, who he was and where he came from.



*LCT 795 on Utah beach, presumably taken from LCT 996 which was stranded alongside her between tides*

We rejoined 795, retracted from the beach and anchored off-shore until the following morning. We spent the night watching tracer bullets beyond the beaches and feeling grateful to be out of harms way.

Back in England, 795 was repaired at Milford Haven, including damage to her bottom caused by an underwater object. Thereafter, we became a military cross channel ferry. We operated out of Portland, carrying troops and tanks to the [Mulberry Harbour](#) and other areas until the harbour at Le Havre was liberated in September 1944. We could go ashore there but the town itself was in a terrible state following allied bombing and shelling.

We continued working between England and Le Havre until the early part of 1945, suffering only minor bumps and scrapes while remaining operational throughout.

### **Unexpected End to My Naval Career**

HM LCT 795's luck ran out on February 15th, 1945. It might have been early morning or evening, I can't recall. Anyway, we were returning from Le Havre during the hours of darkness in convoy, sailing in line astern.

From the mess deck I heard an almighty crash and the stern bulkhead buckled. It soon transpired that we had run on to rocks and the craft immediately astern had run into us. 795 lost power as water entered the fuel tanks and the generator shorted, causing sparks to fly out of the funnel. We lashed 795 to another craft and obtained power for lighting from her generator. We limped back to Portland Harbour where 795 was formally written off thirteen days later. Her crew, including myself, were paid off and individually drafted to new posts. Suddenly, I had lost all contact with my shipmates and sadly never saw any of them again.

The craft that ran into us that night was HM LCT 1127. She too was a veteran of the Normandy landings as part of the Royal Navy's 59<sup>th</sup> LCT Flotilla of Q LCT Squadron which formed part of Force B Follow-Up. On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, 1127 was under the command of Sub. Lieutenant Fred Clements RNVR.

I joined the Mk3 'Star' HM LCT 7124, which was being 'tropicalised' for service in the Far East. However, I missed her sailing since I was in Mearskirk Hospital at the time.

Later, albeit briefly, I joined the crew of Landing Craft Gun (Large), LCG (L) 811 at *HMS Vansittart* in Bristol. Her type were described by the BBC as 'mini battleships' and her heavy guns were manned by Royal Marines. After 811, I attended *HMS Turtle*, at Poole in Dorset, for training on rocket firing LCTs. While there, news about the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was received, which brought the war to an end.



*Author on gun barrel of LCG (L) 811*

My time in the Royal Navy was coming to an end. I was drafted to Plymouth as part of a 'Care and Maintenance Party' for empty landing craft that were surplus to requirements then, finally, to the Demobilisation Centre in Scotland for release in Class A on June 11<sup>th</sup> 1946.

I have always been pro-American and have an affinity with the country for family reasons. My uncle emigrated there and became a naturalised citizen, later fighting with the US Army during World War One. I felt sorry for the American lads I met. They were all so far from home with all its comforts and security. They told us about their country and their families. So many of them never returned to their homeland.

*Written by Mick Jennings for the Landing Craft Association Mike Jennings still lives in Emsworth.*