New Vanguard

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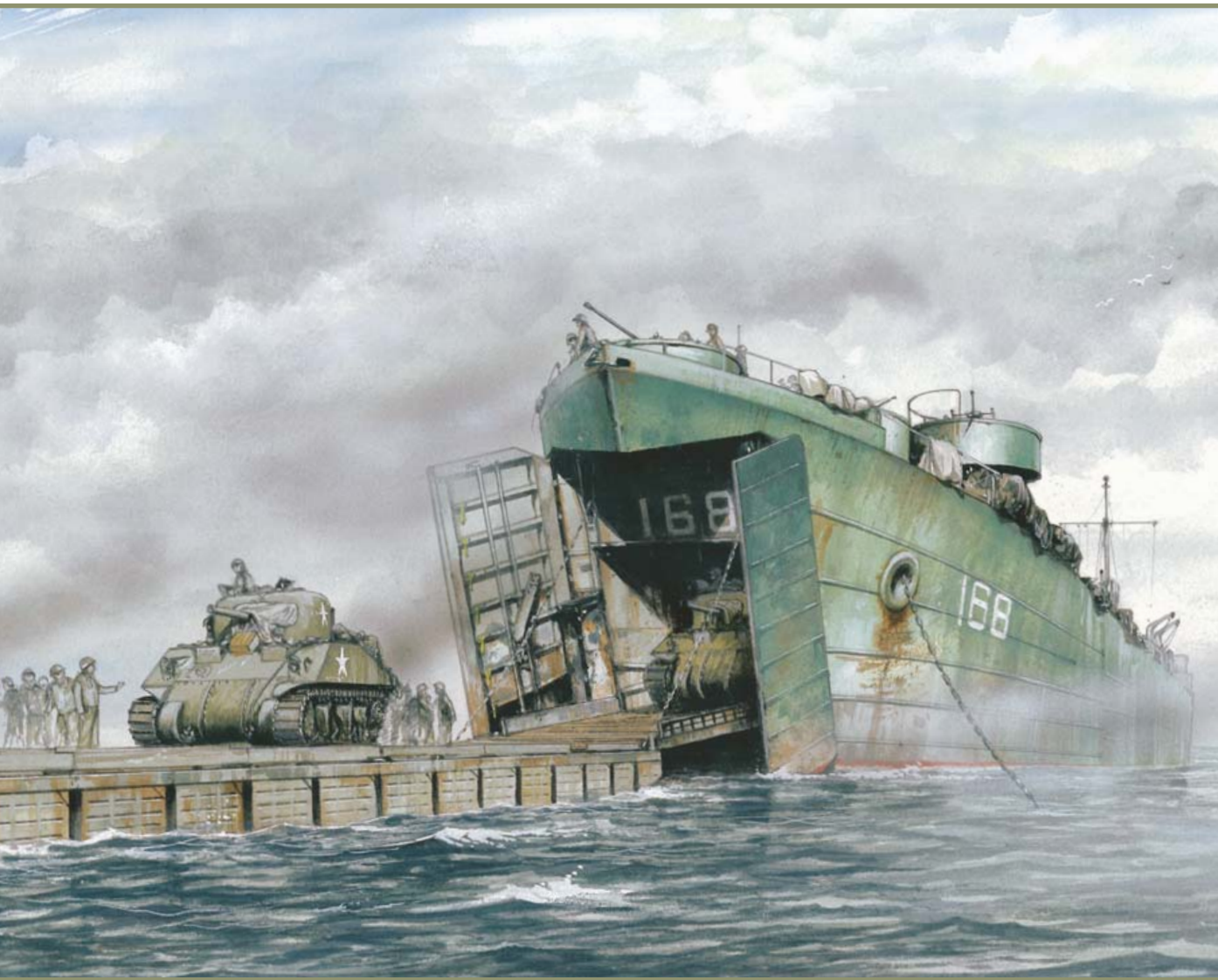
Landing Ship, Tank (LST) 1942–2002



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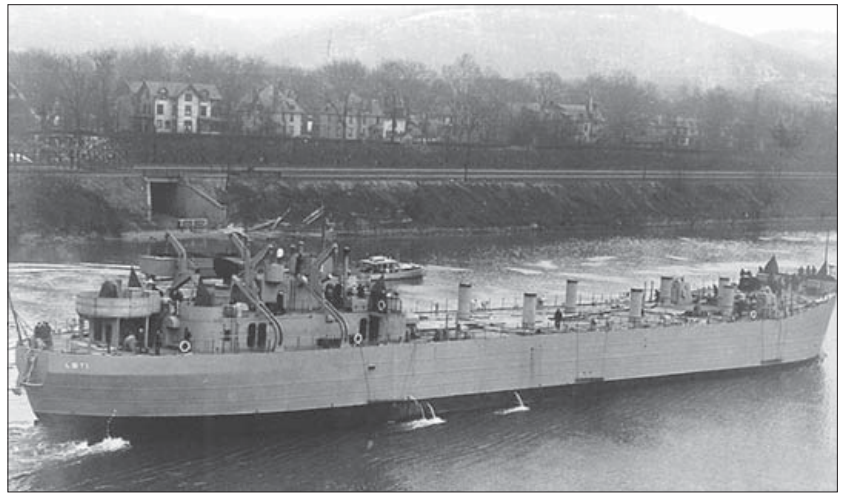
INTRODUCTION

The Landing Ship, Tank (LST), known alternatively by its users as "large slow target," "long slow target," "large stationary target" (when beached), "green dragon" (when in green tropical camouflage), or "manmade whale," is probably one of the better known World War II amphibious ships. It is the largest beaching vessel capable of discharging cargo directly ashore and extracting itself.

The LST saw service from 1942 until 2002 when the last LST in the US Navy was decommissioned. Production lasted through World War II and small numbers of improved LST classes were built in 1973. Besides exceeding expectations, the LST fulfilled all sorts of unforeseen roles, with a number converted to specialized auxiliaries.

LSTs were designed to disembark large quantities of vehicles, equipment, supplies, and materiel without the necessity of prepared dock facilities or the need for cranes necessary to unload cargo ships. They gave the Allies the ability to conduct amphibious invasions on foreign shores at any location that had a gradually sloped beach and suitable beach exit routes. This ability permitted the Allies to assault poorly defended sectors rather than being forced to seize seaports.

Seagoing amphibious landing vessels over 200ft in length were designated "landing ships" and included the LST. Smaller vessels were designated "landing craft." Major variants were further identified by a mark number; for example, the landing ship, tank Mk II was abbreviated LST(2). Both the US and Britain shared the same designation system with mark numbers crossing international lines.



The first LST(2) keel was laid down in June 1942 and LSTs were slipping down the ways in September. LST-1 (ATL-1 when laid down, designation changed in July 1942) was laid down on June 19, 1942 and launched on September 7, to be commissioned in October. This was the grandfather of almost 2,000 US LSTs of all classes.

LSTs were the largest ships to be identified only by Bureau of Ships (BuShips) hull numbers, 1 through 1152, with gaps as 100 LSTs were cancelled in 1942. The remaining 158 post-war LSTs did not receive names until July 1, 1955, when they were christened with the names of US counties and parishes. US LSTs converted to auxiliaries also received names preceded by "USS," as well as new classification letters and hull numbers.

LST DEVELOPMENT

Until the 1930s, ships' long boats ferrying troops ashore delivered landing parties against light to non-existent opposition. Most operations were of relatively small scale and once a protected landing site or seaport had been secured the operation involved the simple transfer of troops from transports. Supplies and equipment too were ferried ashore by boat and often freight barges were used, especially for heavy equipment. As armies adopted mechanization and the scope of future amphibious operations grew, it was necessary to land large quantities of vehicles. Efforts were made to develop tank landing craft. Tanks create special problems for landing craft – they are heavy, bulky, and give craft a high center of gravity, making them unstable. Should the craft have to beach further offshore, the water may be too deep for the tank to wade.

Landing craft with bow ramps, influenced by the Japanese *Daihatsu*, began to be developed on the eve of World War II, but these were for personnel and light equipment. At the time the British had no means of landing tanks directly on to beaches. Consequently, the Admiralty saw the need for larger ocean-going ships capable of landing large numbers of tanks and artillery pieces. Winston Churchill had earlier proposed such craft, but nothing had been done. Development of Landing Craft, Mechanized (LCM) and Landing Craft, Tank (LCT) began in 1940, but a greater capability was needed. US tank battalions and British tank

The main reason for the creation of the LST was to deliver large numbers of tanks to hostile shores. Here an M4A1 Sherman medium tank rolls off an LST over British-designed 10ft-long Vehicle Landing Ramps (VLR). The inside of the doors was normally gray, but was often repainted lead red, black, or one of the colors used for the hull camouflage.

regiments possessed over 50 tanks each. It would require an excessive number of LCMs and LCTs, carrying one and three tanks respectively, to land several battalions/regiments, to say nothing of the beach frontage required. LCTs were small and suited only for cross-Channel operations.

British LST development

Churchill proposed a massive ocean-going landing ship capable of delivering 60 tanks to a hostile shore, the Atlantic LCT or ATL. Such a ship was impractical to construct and required too deep a draft to allow beaching. An alternative was selected in the form of three landing ships carrying 25 tanks each. It would require some 18 months before the "Winettes" could be completed. As an interim measure three shallow-draft tankers were modified. These were 380ft ships built in 1937/38 to transfer oil between the Venezuelan oilfields on Lake Maracaibo down the narrow, shallow Maracaibo River to refineries on Aruba Island. The Maracaibo-class LSTs, HMS *Bachaquero*, *Misoa*, and *Tasajera*, were convoyed to Britain in 1941. Their bows were rebuilt in a blunt design, reducing their speed, with a drawbridge gate and two 68ft sliding ramps to allow off-loading of 18 40ton or 22 25ton tanks or 33 lorries. Two LCMs were carried along with 200 troops. A kedge anchor and capstan were fitted on the stern. LSTs and large landing craft dropped the anchor as they approached shore and the cable was run out. The ship could then winch itself off the beach once its contents were off-loaded. The Maracaibos' speed, however, was too slow and their draft too deep for beaching on projected gradients. They participated in the North Africa invasion in 1942, with many lessons learned. One of the main lessons was the need for a means of bridging the water between the bow and shore. The US-designed pontoon causeway was the answer and the Maracaibos were fitted to carry 60ft causeways.

In the meantime the design of the purpose-built Winettes continued and they were renamed the Boxer-class LST Mk I in July 1942. Construction actually commenced in late 1941, but lasted over a year.

LST-157 under construction at Evansville, Indiana. Temporary cables support the ramp. The horizontal slots are for the geared door-closing ratchet and the upper vertical slots for the ramp chains. The heavy-duty door hinges can be seen along the sides. (Collection of the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science)