

[page 1]

The Destinies of two great empires seem to be tied up in some God dammed things called LSTs. Winston Churchill

I joined L.S.T 302 during May 1944 and became her Chief Bos'n's Mate. On the 1st/2nd of JUNE 44 we commenced loading elements of the British 3rd Division at Gosport Hard. Tanks + tracked vehicles were embarked up the ramp and stowed in the lower deck tank space all ready for beaching. Vehicles + Trailers who would be discharged last were driven up the ramp and on to an elevator where they were lifted to the upper deck and secured for passage. We embarked some Naval Commandoes who were communication specialists with their radio equipment. Army personel were welcomed aboard and over strong cups of tea were soon establishing "townies" with the LST sailors. Many stores including 200 Jerry cans of water were embarked and finally the ramp was raised and bow doors secured. On leaving Gosport Hard we took in tow a Rhino Ferry Pontoon which we were to tow to the beach head. We anchored off Isle of Wight but weather delayed our departure until late on the 5th of June when we sailed with many other landing craft for France. Our landing beach (not known to us at that time) was Lion Sur Mer part of SWORD BEACH and we were known as Assault Group S1 1st LST Flotilla. We arrived at our waiting position early on June the 6th and could hear the "crunch-crunch" of the naval bombardment and most of the Ships being obscured by smoke. Securing chains were removed from the tanks and every one stood by for our landing time. All apprehension seemed to disappear when to the sound of

[page 2]

of guns and small arms fire we became intent on unloading. During the process of unloading we were attacked by two Focke Wulfe aircraft who were engaged by the LSTs in our area. Fortunately for us the bombs released were near misses but one was remarkably close causing damage to our tank deck elevator and putting it out of action. The lift was essential for unloading our upper deck. A nearby LST who had completed unloading (LST 363) came alongside and by bridging between the two LSTs with planks and paint stages we were able to transfer vehicles from us to LST 363 who discharged them down their elevator and out through their tank deck ramp. A certain amount of anxiety was generated by the Army drivers having to take their heavy vehicles across these planks – but it worked. A letter from one of them many years afterwards said it was an experience he would not like to repeat "and he was very glad to "hit the beach" but having done so felt that he was the only soldier to land in Normandy "broke", having lost all his money to the sailors of 'LST302 playing cards. Our LST pulled back from the beach and our tank deck was rigged as an operating theatre manned by a team of Naval Surgeons and Sick Berth Attendants soon to be busy attending to the first wounded. A sight for sore eyes to us was the mass of British Aircraft towing gliders streaming in to land in landing zones. Some didn't make it and para troopers

[page 3]

recovered from the sea were unfortunately dead. That same evening hundreds more aircraft towing gliders were heading for the beach head, they had been attacked

either by E Boats or aircraft and three gliders were on fire. It was quite "spooky" to see these gliders swishing by "on fire" with para troopers jumping out through the fabric + blazing ribs and us quite helplessly watching. The ones recovered all unfortunately dead. Later that evening we recieved some 200 German POW mostly very young and bewildered. One only German Officer complete with his long field coat and highly polished boots looked more like he had just come from the Ritz than the battlefield.

We joined a homeward bound stream of landing craft returning home for further reinforcements and arrived at East India Docks London the following day. I was busy preparing the tank deck for disembarkation so I was just as surprised as the German POWs when our ramp was lowered at the dockside at the sight before us. There, lined up on the jetty was a detachment of the largest, tallest Guardsmen I have ever seen, not one under 6' and their NCO with a voice that put the fear of "Jimmy" in me so no wonder the POW gasped in amazement. The Guards were there to march the POW to their camps some of the first D Day POW to be landed in UK. for them their D day was over and so was ours but only to reload and back to the beaches over the next 4 months or so.

G.W. Drummond
LST 302

Written on behalf of A. HOLMSHAW & C. WASSER both landed from LST 302/362 via the ["planks"] part of REME Light Aid Detachment attached to 7th Field Regiment RA part of 185th BRIGADE of DIVISION LST 302 JIM WILLIAMSON & GEOFF DRUMMOND LST 363 GEORGE STEVENSON.