



## EPISODE 3 2004 - LCT 103, BAYFIELD, WISCONSIN.

Elyse Luray: Our first investigation will reveal new details about D-Day and the invasion of Europe. It is 1944 and Germany occupies Europe. In Great Britain, Allied troops mobilize to liberate the continent. They will have to attack from the sea. On June 6, D-Day, Allied armies mount one of the greatest amphibious invasions in history. Crucial to the operation's success are hundreds of small landing crafts, which brave stormy seas and deadly fire to ferry men, armor, and supplies onto the beaches of northern France.

Sixty years later, those dramatic events lead us here, to the remote town of Bayfield, in Northern Wisconsin. And to an old boat called the "Outer Island". When it's not frozen into Bayfield Harbor, the Outer Island is used for dredging, construction, and sometimes taking youth groups on vacation. But local legend claims it was once a navy vessel that landed tanks on the beaches of France.

That story is of special interest to World War II Navy veteran Doug Swanson and his son, Ron. They first heard about the Outer Island on a recent navy reunion.

Ron: One of the fellows just happened to mention in passing that, uh, well, there's, there's one of these landing craft up on Lake Superior.

Doug: When we got here and looked over this one, I stood and went, (gasp) "I don't believe this." Time has just turned back. I'm 23 years old again!

Elyse: Ron and Doug were so pleased to have found a World War II landing craft so close to home, they tried to find out more about it. But despite intensive research, they could find no evidence confirming the rumors of the Outer Island's past. I'm Elyse Luray. I've come to meet Ron and Doug and help them get to the bottom of their puzzle.

Elyse: You know, it's amazing, it really looks like a barge. It-it looks beat up...

Doug: It's really what [Elyse: Yeah...] it is, you know. It's a...

Elyse: So what can we do for you?

Ron: Well, we'd like to confirm that this is, in fact, a landing craft that was used by the Navy during World War II, and in particular, we'd like to know if the local stories about this craft being at Normandy are true.

Elyse: So what exactly do you know? What do I have to go on?

Ron: Well, we've been told that, uh, this craft was purchased by The, uh, Lullabye Furniture Company in the late 1940's, and that it was the number 103. And that's really all that we know.

Elyse: Not a lot to go on, but let me see what I can do.

Ron: That's great.

Elyse: Since I can't bring the Navy to the Ship, I'm going to have to bring the ship to the Navy. My first step is to confirm the Outer Island was once an L.C.T. So I've come to Washington D.C. to meet John Riley, an expert on naval craft. First, he explains exactly what an L.C.T. is.

John: An L.C.T. is a landing craft tank. It is essentially a flat-bottomed barge with a bow ramp. It's designed to carry three to five tanks, artillery pieces, other military vehicles, troops, cargo, anything that needs carrying into an invasion beach, and to-to-to nose up to the beach, drop its ramp, and roll its cargo ashore. Now this is a landing craft tank, doing what it was designed to do- carry 5 medium tanks.

Elyse: According to John, L.C.T.'s were originally British inventions, but were mass-produced by the U.S. Navy after America entered the war. L.C.T.'s, Marks 1 through 7, were used extensively in landings in the Mediterranean and the Pacific. But their most significant contribution was in the English Channel, on D-Day, when the Allies invaded northern

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France.

John: The only way Hitler could be defeated was to carry armies into the European continent, and this had to be done by water.

Elyse: So there's no doubt L.C.T.'s played a vital role in the war's success... but is the Outer Island one of them? John describes the distinguishing features of American-built L.C.T.'s: A pilot house, to provide protection for the crew; a front ramp, to disembark men and machines; and a large stern anchor, used to pull L.C.T.'s back off the beach. He then examines my photographs of the Outer Island.

John: She has an open cargo deck here, a bow ramp, it has a superstructure across the stern, with the wheelhouse on the center line. So I would have to say yes, I think that it is a former L.C.T. Mark 5.

Elyse: That's great news for me. Thank you.

John: You're very welcome.

Elyse: Next, I need to know if the hull number Ron gave me--103--can tell me anything about the Outer Island's past. I'm meeting World War II historian Tim Francis at the Navy's Division of Ships History.

Elyse: Tell me: what are we looking for?

Tim: Well, we're looking for a record of all the ships that were built at, uh...

Elyse: Here the Navy keeps detailed records of the thousands of ships built during the war. We're looking for details of their L.C.T.'s.

Tim: Here it is. This is the Ships Data book, U.S. Naval Vessels. This is gonna be all the ships built during World War II, actually just-just a part of the immense number that were built. So we have mine craft, patrol craft, patrol boats...

Elyse: Wow, there's amazing amount of production going on in America.

Tim: Yeah, it was incredible. The war really expanded the American industrial economy.

Elyse: Shipyards and factories sprang up across the country. People poured into big cities. Some six million women appeared on the industrial workforce for the first time. And among the hardware to roll off America's assembly lines ... were 1500 L.C.T.'s.

The Navy would have given them all hull numbers, so Tim's listing should at least tell me when the Outer Island was built.

Tim: And what are we looking for?

Elyse: 103.

Tim: Here we go... L.C.T. Landing Craft, comma tank, Mark 5... should be on this page...

Elyse: We soon discover a problem.

Elyse: It goes from 88 to 125. There's no 103!

Tim: That probably means that the, the construction was canceled. Let me check in the front. L.C.T...89 to 118... Canceled. That probably means it was, uh... it was scheduled to be built late in the war and... with changing priorities or they had enough already, whatever firm was scheduled to build it, didn't build it.



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Elyse: So that means I hit a dead end.

Tim: Correct.

Elyse: The legend that the Outer Island was once the L.C.T. 103 can't be true. So which L.C.T. was it? The only other clue I have to go on, is that it was bought from the Navy by a company named Lullaby Furniture. So I've come back to Wisconsin – to Stephen's Point, where Lullaby was once based. The company folded in 1991, but some of its records are held here at the University of Wisconsin's archive.

Elyse: Okay, this is the Lullaby Furniture Expense Ledgers from 1933 to 1947. Okay... May, 1945... Okay, nothing for May... ah, here's something. "June 29, Treasury-United States of America"...but it's only for 1,875 dollars.

Elyse: I know that after the war, the Navy sold off its L.C.T.'s for tens of thousands of dollars each. So this can't be it. And this is the only evidence of a government transaction. I'll have to try Lullaby's other records.

Elyse: Here's a catalog from 1962, and it looks like it's just showing all their products. ...Hey, look at this! "The Outer Island: Hauling Lullaby logs, nature's finest hardwoods." So we know, that in 1962, the Lullaby Furniture company did own the Outer Island.

Elyse: Huh, this is interesting."50 Years of woodworking experience- The Lullaby Furniture Company, 1947." Hey! Here's our ship again! " This shallow draft vessel, is a former seagoing L.C.T. converted to reductive peace time service." But it's got a different name! "Pluswood"!

Elyse: So it looks like it wasn't Lullaby, but its a subsidiary, Pluswood, that bought our L.C.T. from the Navy. Perhaps this information can help us find out more about it. I'm going back to D.C. for another try. Back in the Navy archives, historian Kevin Hurst points me towards the records of all ships sold off after the war.

Kevin: Well, we do have cards on each L.C.T. Now this box has L.C.T. 1 through 450. Now these cards are over 50 years old, so unfortunately, we're going to have to do this the old-fashioned way.

Elyse: Okay, let's take a look. ... I need to see, if I can find Pluswood in any of these. "Sold to Hughes Brothers, New York... Broke in two in heavy seas... Sunk by gunfire... Lost at sea... Sold to Brockton, Massachusetts... Sank while under tow... Sold to Kansas City Steel Co... Towed to sea and sunk... Bought by Bison Company, Buffalo, New York... Sunk off coast of France during invasion of Normandy."

Elyse: Here it is! "Sold to Pluswood, delivered July 8, 1946."

Elyse VO: And look here! The Outer Island wasn't L.C.T. 103, but 203!

Perhaps this hull number will tell me if the Outer Island saw action at Normandy.

To find out, I've come to the repository for the Navy's wartime records- The National Archives.

Unfortunately, the L.C.T. records aren't in good shape. It looks like they were just thrown into these boxes after the war.

But let's see if I can find any mention of L.C.T. 203 from D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Elyse: Okay, this is interesting. This is the action reports, which are the daily logs of L.C.T.'s. And... I see a lot in the 200's... but I'm not seeing 203.

Elyse: Now, listen to this: "Report of amphibious operations by the LCT 203". And, it looks like they were in Europe... but I don't see anything about Normandy, although, I do see "Conducted against the enemy by this craft in Southern France, during the period of August, 1944."

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Elyse: This is 2 months after D-Day! I need to find out what was going on. The landing in the South of France was originally code-named Operation Anvil, but changed to Operation Dragoon because British Prime Minister Winston Churchill felt dragooned into it by American General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Dragoon was originally scheduled to coincide with the Normandy landings, in the hope it would pin down German forces in Southern Europe and open additional ports through which the Allies could ship supplies.

But due to a shortage of landing crafts Dragoon was postponed for eight weeks. And here, in these records, you really get a sense of what went on. It is early morning on August 15<sup>th</sup>. An invasion force of some 900 warships and 1300 landing crafts lies off the French coast, just south of St. Tropez. At 8.50 a.m., the first wave of 60,000 men lands on three different beaches. The Outer Island, carrying 200 tons of ammunition, is sent to one the most westerly beaches, Alpha Red, where the Germans have strung out their defenses. In the chaos and confusion, the Outer Island is sent criss-crossing around the bay, in search of a safe place to unload. Fighting on Alpha Red takes place until 10.40 a.m., when the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division neutralizes the German defenses. Ten hours later, the Outer Island finally lands. And over the next ten days, unloads some 1600 tons of armor and supplies. With a quarter of a million Allied troops involved, Anvil is the second largest landing of the war. Its forces annihilate Hitler's 19th Army, capture over 100,000 German prisoners, liberate the southern two-thirds of France, and link up with the Normandy invasion forces.

Elyse: They marched to the Rhine to put an end to the war.

Elyse: I can't wait to tell Doug and Ron what I've discovered.

Elyse: ... I mean, it was really a-a ship that was an important part of the war.

Ron: That's fantastic!

Doug: Great, really great.

Elyse: Now one more thing...

Doug: Yeah.

Ron: Okay.

Elyse: If you could just follow me, I have something to show you. Around this way...

Elyse: To thank you for contacting us, we wanted to give you a little bit of a gift.

We've decided to give the Outer Island its name back.

Ron: Wow, I don't believe it...

Elyse: It's now the Outer Island LCT 203.

Doug: Ohhh!...

Ron: There's a number printed back on it!

Elyse: Yeah.

Doug: Neat!

Ron: Ha-ha! That's marvelous.



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Doug: Ha-ha! Did you guys do that?

Elyse: We did it! For you!...

Doug: ...Oh my goodness... that's great!

Elyse VO: Sixty years after its finest moment, the Outer Island has been given back its true identity--as one of the Navy's heroes in World War II.

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