

About the Author

This true story is offered by Les Heaberlin to honor a cousin, Hobert George Heaberlin who was 10 years Les' senior and his hero. It relates the heretofore untold account of Hobert's WWII service beginning in 1943 and continuing until the sinking of his ship and his resultant death. Finding Captain Arnow and Seaman Kaminski and learning their accounts of the actions of the crew of USS LCI(G) 82 brought closure to the haunting loss of a life that is sorely missed. The sorrow remains that Aunt Emma and Uncle Bert missed learning of these circumstances and whatever comfort knowing them might have come from that.

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC

Emma stirred from her deep early morning sleep. Had she actually heard Hobert walking in stocking feet? It was like him to wear his socks to bed on such a chilly night when little heat reached upstairs from the downstairs stove. The fire in it had been allowed to die down and a covering of ashes preserved the embers.

Could it have been his hand that had touched her forehead ever so gently? She looked to the clock, the luminous hands showed something past 1:00 a.m. It had been a year before last Thanksgiving since Hobert was home. He had completed training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. He left Deer Creek for California and the start of his Pacific Tour.

Later Emma would remember this dream and connect it to Hobert. She awakened sufficiently to decide it was just a dream, she was home alone, just her, the girls and Grandma Jenny. She turned and slept again 'til daylight.

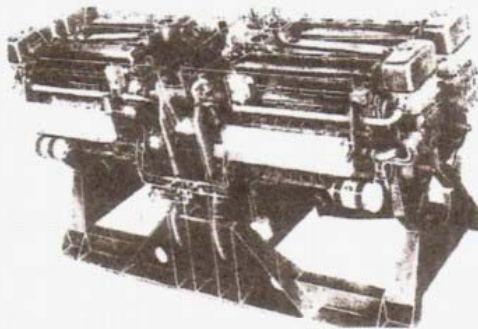
It was April 4th; March had come like a Lion and gone like a Lamb. Most of the orchard trees that Bert's brother planted were starting to bloom. They were the Apple, Peach, Plum, and Pear trees Charles had ordered from the Missouri nursery for a customer who wouldn't or couldn't pay when they were delivered. He had circumvented his loss by getting Bert to pay for the trees. The convincer, Charles agreed to plant them for no additional cost.

Emma was missing her only son more than she might have imagined. Her anxiety for him worsened after Bert left again for work in the ship yards, this last time at Newport News, Va. There were the animals and garden to care for additional to getting Mary off to school and the household chores. Hobert had been a good helper when he was home. Now there was no help at all, Bert had taken his brother Ralph with him. Brother Sam was busy caring for his family, now six in all, since Hugh Wade was born. Anyway Sam was planning to join Bert and Ralph when a place was found for the three of them.

Hobert was assigned in December 1943 to USS LCI(G) 82 at Pearl Harbor. The small ship, initially designed to deliver several hundred troops onto the beach at each landing, was 160 ft long and 23 ft wide. When landing on a beach the forward draft was 2' - 8" and aft 5' - 0". Forward port and

starboard deck ladders could be winched down to the beach for troops to climb down as they landed.

Powered by 8 GM Diesel Engines (similar to a Greyhound Bus Engine), mounted in groups of 4 (Quad), the engines drove twin screws that could propel the ship at a speed of 15.5 knots. Fireman Second Class, (F 2/c) Hobert George Heaberlin was assigned to the ships Engine Room Crew. Such crews on all Navy ships were known as the Black Gang. Subsequently his correspondence included LCI(G) 82 and usually, "Somewhere in the Pacific" for a heading. A cousin Ed Abbott, visited him and his Black Gang and reported to Emma that Hobert was called 'Wheels' by the crew.



Four 'Bus' Engines Mounted as a Quad
Photo by CPO Harry Salisbury LCI 226

The Engine Room was a hot and dirty place. After departing Hawaii the further service of LCI(G)82 would occur in latitudes more southerly until the ship sailed finally to Okinawa. There was good reason to call this Engine Room Crew the Black Gang.

The ship, launched early in 1943, was quickly manned with a crew of 3 Officers and 21 enlisted sailors. Personnel, assigned after the first crew, were told, "Only one of the original crew had ever been to sea before". Though it had limited refrigeration for food, no provision for making fresh water, and no radar, it sailed with the fleet to retake Attu and nearby islands in the Aleutians (May 31 – August 18, 1943). Fortunately it did have a large fuel capacity.



Initial action of LCI 82, Landing Troops in Alaska, ca May 1943.

Amphibious assaults, which began in the Pacific with actions at Tulagi and Guadalcanal, exposed a tactical flaw in Allied Naval Assault Operations. After very heavy shelling and air bombardment ceased there was a period of time, while landing craft were moving toward shore, sufficient for the enemy to reoccupy their positions near the beach. The defenders were then able to incur heavy casualties on the Allied troops attempting to land.

LCI(G) 82 became a part of the solution to reduce casualties in landing operations. After completing the Alaskan Campaign, the ship sailed for Pearl Harbor. In port there the ship, among many similar ones, was converted to a gunship (thus the (G) designation) by swapping formerly troop carrying space for 40mm and 20mm Gun Positions, and for ammunition and rocket storage space. The forward deck ladders were now fixed in position and subsequently used for rocket launching platforms. Hobert and Lt(jg) Theodore Arnow, new Executive, Supply, and Laundry Officer, among others, first reported to the ship during this time. As the conversions were completed, it was necessary to augment the Gun Ship crews to support their new mission.

For security reasons Hobert's family learned nothing of the actions he took part in. Letters never mentioned others of the Black Gang, their associations, origins, ages, just nothing. Bert's nephew Ed Abbott had brought the only news from the ship, the fact that 'Wheels' Heaberlin worked in the Engine Room on LCI(G) 82. It was in June 2007, after Lt Arnow was contacted, that sisters and cousins learned something of Hobert's service and of his closest shipboard associates, the Black Gang.

They were seven including Hobert and they came from six states: Fireman 2/c George Bently Harvey, Santa Cruz, Ca; Fireman 2/c Hobert George Heaberlin, Leon, Ky; Fireman 2/c Chester Carl Harzowski, Stevens Point, Wi; Engine Man 3/c John Francis Krohn, Chicago, Il; Engine Man 3/c Charles Henry Rauch, Allentown, Pa; Fireman 2/c Wilbur Darrell Royster, San Dimas, Ca; and Fireman 2/c Paul Vincent Scott, Mt Clemens, Mi.

LCI(G) 82 sailed from Pearl Harbor in January 1944 and joined LCI(G) FLOTILLA THREE, AMPHIBIOUS FORCES, PACIFIC FLEET gathered with other Allied Naval Forces for assaults on Kwajalein and Majuro (February 1) in the Marshall Islands, about 2000 miles south southwest from Hawaii. New assault tactics, first employed there, had bombardments as usual but a line of LCI(G)'s preceded the troop landing craft as they moved toward the beach. The Gun Ships began firing when the bombardments stopped, when they reached 1000 feet from shore they fired 120 rockets (equivalent of a 6 inch shell) aimed to land on the beach. They then proceeded to within 500 feet of the beach all the while raking the beach with 40mm Cannon Fire. The Gun Boats stopped firing at this point and the Troop Landing Craft moved through their line and more safely to the shore.

LCI(G) 82 was one ship of many, large and small ships, and planes participating in this assault and similar ones at Eniwetok (February 17), Saipan (June 15), Tinian (July 24), and Peleliu in Palau (September 15). With a sped-up 4 ½ Week Navy Training Course just completed, two new sailors, Seaman 1/c Robert J Kaminski of Detroit, Mi; and his bunkmate to be, a Seaman Larsen of Rockford, Il: processed through the Fleet Processing Center at Tulagi. They reported for duty aboard the Eighty-Two prior to the action at Palau.



Seaman 1/c Robert J. Kaminski

One of the other ships, the USS Indianapolis, a heavy Portland Class Cruiser was in the company of LCI(G) 82 for most of its action in the Pacific, including the Alaskan Campaign prior to the start of Hobert's service. The Indianapolis deserves special note in the history of WW II for extensive and critical service. After a crippling Kamikaze attack March 31, 1945 at Okinawa, it limped to the US for repairs, and on returning to service in July, carried parts for 'Little Boy' America's first Atomic Bomb. The parts were delivered July 26 to Tinian, an island that was recaptured from the Japanese a year earlier and was now the US Air Base where the bomb would be assembled, and loaded onto the Enola Gay to be carried to Hiroshima.

The Indianapolis's tragic end came July 30, 1945 when it was attacked at 00:14 Hours, enroute from Guam to Leyte, and sunk by Japanese submarines. The survivors numbering 317 were able to cling to debris and rafts for more than 4 days before they were rescued. About 300 were killed in the initial attack, 579 succumbed to exposure, seawater poisoning and

shark attacks. It was the most casualties suffered in a sinking of a US Navy Ship to that date.

Through September 1944 only two incidents caused much alarm aboard LCI(G) 82. At Saipan, another of the LCI(G)'s had some casualties when it was hit by "friendly fire". A closer call, after the Eighty-Two and a second LCI(G) were ordered at Palau to provide rocket bombardment directed at a Japanese strong point, as they were moving into position to do so the other LCI(G) hit a mine and sank.

Hobert's letters were rare during January thru September 1944. His duties, aboard the ship, hopping from action to action across 4000 miles of the Pacific, kept him busy. At the conclusion of the assault at Peleliu the Captain was transferred to the States and Lt(jg) Theodore Arnow took command of the Eighty-Two. Emma could have taken some relief had she known that beginning in late September 1944, Hobert's ship was in safer waters some distance from the intense action still taking place.

Items of concern in the letters to and from home were about fishing, Tige, his dog, Uncle Oren Heaberlin's location with the Army in Europe, Uncle CPO Fred Heaberlin's retirement from the Navy, and anything regarding cousins and neighbors in the service. He mentioned in a letter to a sister January 2, 1945 that he had liberty the previous day, but nothing of what he had done with it. He asked if she had mailed a picture of herself as she had promised. He mentioned too he was bored with "doing the same old thing". He hoped he could get a different ship and that he didn't have to spend another year on an LCI.

The disposition of the mid-thirties Chevy, sold to Hobert by his Uncle Oren, was discussed. Emma wrote to Hobert a story about Bert and the car. Bert decided he would take Hobert's offer and learn to drive the car. Everyone knew it had no brakes, they had observed Hobert 'gearing down' to bring the car to a stop, a measure he used while a brake repair was delayed. His dad started the engine and engaged the gears but soon ran into a pear tree. The bumper hung on gnarled roots at the base of the tree. Emma reported that Bert was in a big hurry to free the car from the tree (didn't want anyone to know of his accident), said she and Mary worked, "like fighting fire", with a pry pole while Bert pushed and tugged to free the car.

Throughout the school year Emma would host Ralph and Bess' children in her dining room while they waited for the school bus. This was particularly true if the mornings were cold, then they would cross Deer Creek just opposite her home, come inside and hover about the warm stove to watch the bus traveling up Deer Creek Road. Some minutes later they and Mary would dash out to the road when the bus again came in sight on its return. News of the war was always there in the mornings. Radio correspondents Walter Winchell, Lowell Thomas, Gabriel Heatter, or H V Kaltenborn would report on the latest battles in Europe and in the Pacific Theater. Before he left Bert had stocked a supply of the large radio batteries so Emma could listen.

In January 1944 two years had passed since the US began to resist the Japanese in the Pacific. The Navy first sank a Japanese ship near Saipan. As summer neared, the big news was from Europe and the Invasion of Normandy, 'D-Day'. Emma would never learn of Hobert's participation in the Invasion of Saipan June 15. She likely did hear of the nearby 'Marianas Turkey Shoot', a major Allied Air victory wherein 220 Japanese planes were shot down by American carrier based planes while incurring but 20 losses of their own.

As September 1944 ended, Hobert's ship and some others of the Pacific Fleet saw limited action, for about 5 months, while in other areas members of the Fleet continued the fight. The Eighty-Two sailed around Anguar Island, near Peleliu, to reconnoiter some industrial installations there. They encountered gun fire from the island and withdrew when it intensified. Later they sailed to Guadalcanal and Tulagi before returning north.

The Eighty-Two served as station ship for the Fleet at Ulithi Atoll for a time. This was an exciting assignment similar to parking lot attendant except the "cars" in this instance were ships. When a new ship entered the Ulithi Lagoon it would receive initial mooring and similar assignments (where to park) by blinker signal. More detailed information was delivered on written pages. The assignment of the Station Ship was to come alongside every new ship and deliver those pages. That was oft times nerve wracking – coming alongside a carrier or battleship that absolutely dwarfed the Eighty-Two, and particularly so, when the large ship was moving at a much greater speed.

The Eighty-Two removed some prisoners from Fais Island, and rode out a typhoon in the lagoon there. Seaman Kaminski has stated that engines were run full throttle in reverse to keep the ship from being tossed onto the shore.

Elsewhere in the Pacific, Allied Forces invaded Leyte October 20, 1944 to begin retaking the Philippines. Admiral Halsey would later describe the Kamikaze attacks which first occurred there, "the only weapon I feared in the war". November 11th saw land based aerial bombardment attacking the Japanese base at Iwo Jima, additional to aerial attacks begun previously at Okinawa and on mainland Japan near Tokyo.

A letter from Hobert written Friday Morning, March 16, 1945 stated, "I received your letter a few days back". Another letter of February 20th mentioned a recently received letter but said the one previous to it was received last November. "We have been at sea the last few days. The place, where I was at, you could go around without a shirt on. But here, a shirt feels mighty good". He was not aware of his destination but he was likely cruising north, likely too in company with the USS Indianapolis among others. The Indianapolis departed Ulithi March 14, she was headed for Okinawa.

Naval shelling at Okinawa began March 24 and continued thru March 31. The main landings were April 1 at the Hagushi Beaches on the western coast of Okinawa. LCI(G) 82 saw action in a coincident deceptive assault at Minatora Beaches, on the southeastern coast, by the Second Marine Division. This mission was designed to confuse the Japanese about American intentions and to delay movement of Japanese reserves from that location to oppose the main assault.

After troop landing support concluded the Eighty-Two was ordered to patrol the Okinawan coast. On patrol in the very late evening of April 3rd a radio message alerted the ship to lookout for Japanese survivors who had bailed from a plane shot down in the area. Though running with none or minimal lights, a watchman spotted two or more Japanese on a raft near the ship.

S 1/c Robert J Kaminski and another Sailor were ordered to reach out with grappling poles, catch onto the raft, and draw it to where it could be lifted aboard ship. The task was proving difficult in the darkness and after a time lights were turned on. Another instant, a watch called out, "Look out they have grenades"! The grappling poles were tossed as the sailors dropped to

the deck. The watch, or another sailor, fired on the Japanese and killed them. By exposing the grenades the Japanese had sealed their fate.



Shinyo, Japanese Suicide Boat found by Sixth Division Marines
Okinawa April 1945
Picture Courtesy of: Lt (Sr) Theodore Arnow

Lights were turned off and all hands returned to quarters. An hour or more later at 0125 April 4, 1945, in the Captain's words, "the ship was hit directly at a compartment where Hobert was known to have been at the time. The hit was followed by a large explosion, and it is beyond all belief that Hobert could have survived the blast. There is some consolation, however, in the fact that he could not have suffered; everything occurred so rapidly."

Survivors evacuated immediately, other ships in the area circled in a protective action that went on long enough that survivors wondered if they were ever going to be picked up. When they were taken aboard they learned there was concern they would be hit again by a second suicide boat, a Shinyo, a cheaply constructed speed boat that could carry explosives in the bow or depth charges on a rack at the stern. 350 such boats were hidden

about Okinawa. LCI(G) 82 was one of 34 US Navy ships that were sunk at Okinawa, primarily from suicide attacks.

First news of the tragedy, a telegram dated 203 AM, April 24 started, "THE NAVY DEPARTMENT REGRETS TO INFORM YOU" . . . Hobert was missing in action, " THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAIL AS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEROF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED".

Anxiety and hope continued through the rest of April and through May, after all Hobert was just missing, he could be surviving still somewhere out there. The letter from Theodore Arnow, Commanding Officer of the Eighty-Two succinctly destroyed almost all hope as effectively as the hit by the Shinyo and the resulting explosion of 40mm ammo destroyed LCI(G) 82. It was mid-June, Lt (jg) Arnow's letter was dated 5 June 1945.



LCI (G)82 Afternoon April 4, 1945; The Ship beyond the bow is LCI 725
Photo courtesy of Harry M Salem, Hopewell, Va through Robert J Kaminski

The list of casualties of the attack included: GM 3/c Freeman W. Baker; GM 3/c Bernard G. Brockwehl; CBM PA John T. Eastman; F 2/c Hobert G. Heaberlin; Ensign Clyde E. Irvine, Jr; S 2/c Joseph M. Rozman; SM 3/c Earl H Settles; and GM 3/c John C. Wheatly.

The attack occurred at 26 Degrees 26 Minutes North Latitude by 128 Degrees East Longitude off the East Coast of Okinawa at the Mouth of Nakagusuku (Buckner) Bay. All survivors, including the injured, were forced to abandon ship. A search for survivors, including a re-boarding and inspection of available portions of the ship, ensued well into the next day without results. The Eighty-Two continued to take on seawater but remained afloat into the afternoon of April 4th. LCI 725, off the bow (above picture), was attempting to attach a line for towing the Eighty-Two to deeper waters where it would be sunk by naval gunfire. Before the towing could begin, the ship broke and sank at 1600 Hrs.



F 2/c Hobert George Heaberlin
Nov 13, 1924 – Apr 4, 1945

Time at this writing is nearing 64 years elapsed subsequent to the date of the tragedy of those souls lost in the attack on LCI(G) 82. Seaman Robert J Kaminski has related an interesting aftermath to this story. After he and his shipmates were rescued they were given a 30 day "survivors leave". He

returned to the states and after his leave he was assigned to a Naval Station in San Francisco. There in July 1945 Seaman Kaminski was one of a detail of Sailors and Marines assigned the duty of loading crates onto trucks and delivering them to a dock where they were loaded aboard the USS Indianapolis. The Sailors evidently were doing the work and the Marines were providing security. Kaminski states, "everyone was told they were doing a hush-hush job and to keep quiet about it". He said the Marines were armed and their weapons were at the ready throughout the job. He believes, and it appears likely, he assisted with the delivery of the first Atomic Bomb, Little Boy which was subsequently dropped at Hiroshima.

The Carter County community of Deer Creek where Hobert grew up and the property of Heaberlin families since the 1860's, is now submerged beneath the Grayson Reservoir. Bert and Emma surrendered the property to the US Corps of Engineers in the late 1950's and relocated to Emma's childhood home, New Castle, Pa. Both died in New Castle but they rest now in the Carter County Memory Garden at Grayson, Ky. Emma died in January 1982, Bert died about 18 months later in June 1983.

While living in Pennsylvania Bert purchased a property on Four Mile, a community near the old (long closed) Post Office of Leon, Ky. The purpose for the purchase was to have his small tobacco base previously allocated to his Deer Creek property relocated to a new property and thus be able to keep his tobacco base.

After Emma died, when Bert visited Carter County attending his farm business, a daughter suggested that Emma might have left valuable papers with her former bank at Grayson. A query at the bank produced papers which included a quantity of US Savings Bonds. Included were bonds purchased by Hobert with income from his work in the shipyards prior to entering the service. It seems likely some of the bonds were purchased with funds from his service pay.

The bonds had been safely kept for 37 years when Emma died. Could it be she forgot about them? Or, did a loving Mother, with the knowledge that the remains of her son were never found, maintain that tiny spark of hope that somehow, some way, some day Hobert would return home. Perhaps, for the all those years, she hoped he was still out there, *Somewhere in the Pacific*.