

WORLD WAR II HISTORY  
OF  
RICHARD MILTON CRENSHAW



By James K. Voyles  
Husband of Rhonda Crenshaw Voyles

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Prepared in 2017

By James K. Voyles, husband of Rhonda Crenshaw Voyles

### Introduction

*Richard Milton "Dick" Crenshaw was among the millions of World War II veterans who said little if anything about their military service. He told his sister, Nona, that he wanted to be in the submarine service but could not serve in that capacity because he was colorblind. Beyond that, he told Rhonda that he served on a ship in California. That was an incredible understatement. In fact, he served on an attack transport ship, the U.S.S. Lamar, that saw action in several critical battles and other operations in the Pacific from April 1944 through April 1946. He was trained, and presumably served, as a Beach Master. He would have gone to the beach early during amphibious landings and coordinated communications and the landing of men and cargo from the "beach side." In this capacity, he would have seen and experienced many things that he probably wished to forget more than share. At the same time, he saw much of the world, including the Panama Canal, Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papa New Guinea, Okinawa, numerous other islands in the Pacific, as well as Seattle, San Francisco, San Diego, Florida, and Texas. He even sailed to Japan before the final voyage home.*

*The weakness of this history is that we can only conjecture what Dick may have seen or what he may have been doing at any specific time or place. But we do know that his service was significant, and he saw and experienced many things that parents hope their children – or anyone for that matter – will never have to see. My faith tells me that one day we will see Dick again, and at that time, I hope each of us will thank him for his service.*

*Dick's generation has been denominated the Greatest Generation, and evidence supports that case. Our American boys and girls played the leading role in saving the world from Nazism and Fascism in Europe, Fascism and Nationalism in Japan, and later, Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. I frequently reflect upon the words that President George W. Bush delivered at the dedication of the World War II Memorial on the Capital Mall in Washington, D.C. on May 29, 2004. Describing the 16 million who served in World War II, President Bush said:*

*These were the modest sons of a peaceful country, and millions of us are very proud to call them "Dad." They gave the best years of their lives to the greatest mission their country ever accepted. They faced the most extreme danger, which took some and spared others for reasons only known to God. And wherever they advanced or touched ground, they are remembered for their goodness and their decency.*

*Dick was one of them, and his children are very proud to call him Dad. President Bush later wrote that growing up, he did not have to look far for a hero: his dad was George Bush. Joyce, Rick, Rhonda, and Phillip, along with all the grandchildren, need look no further than Dick Crenshaw to find a hero of magnificent proportions.*

## **Enlistment**

Dick was born in Washington, D.C. on September 28, 1925 to Percy Lee Crenshaw and Hilda Leona Kidwell. He grew up in Arlington, Virginia, graduating from Washington-Lee High School in Arlington County. His high school diploma had an unusual date: August 31, 1943. According to Nona, he graduated in August rather than May or June because he attended summer school to graduate early.

I will leave it to others to provide any further history about his childhood since that is beyond the scope of this history. I will note, however, that Nona said Dick enjoyed teasing her, but that ended after the war, and they got along well for the remainder of his life.

In 1990, Dick requested his government personnel records. They reflect that he began working at the U.S. Department of Treasury in May 1943 as a Junior Clerk in the Procurement Division with an annual salary of \$1440. His initial service at Treasury was short-lived. According to Nona, he did not want to be drafted into the Army but rather wanted to serve in the Navy. His mother Hilda accompanied him to the Navy recruiting office and signed the permission form to let him join the Navy at seventeen years old. He enlisted for two years of service on September 18, 1943, and Treasury gave him an indefinite furlough "DUE TO ENLISTMENT IN THE U.S. NAVY." He received pay for the next ten days as annual leave through September 28. Treasury held his job open for him during the war, and he returned to Treasury on May 15, 1946 into the same position but with a pay raise to \$1836 per year.

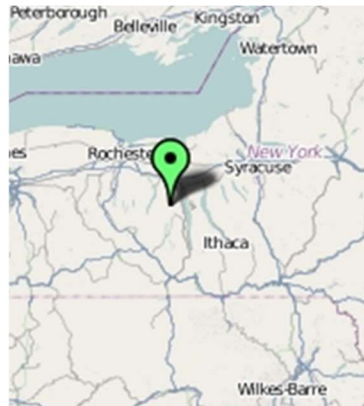
## **Boot Camp**

The Navy immediately ordered Dick to active duty at the Navy Recruiting Station in Washington, D.C. On the same day, he was transferred to the Naval Training Station in Sampson, New York for Boot Camp. He arrived on September 19, 1943, presumably arriving by train. His initial rank was Apprentice Seaman (A.S.). At that rank, he would have made \$50 per month. At his other ranks, Seaman 2nd class, \$54; Seaman 1st class, \$66. His final rank was Coxswain, and below was the insignia he would have worn for that rank.



The Naval Training Station at Sampson was established in 1942 for training large numbers of new naval recruits in support of the war effort. The station was named after Rear Admiral William T. Sampson. The Navy obtained 2,600 acres of former farmland and vineyards for the facility on the east side of Lake Seneca, New York. Construction of the facility took 270 days. The Navy also constructed a 1500-bed hospital. During the war, over 411,000 recruits were trained at the station. [Coincidentally, I

drove by there several times while a student in Ithaca. It was on the way to Palmyra to see Mormon church history sites. Lake Seneca is in the Finger Lakes region of New York and nowhere near the ocean, but the lake is beautiful.] The picture of Dick's basic training class is attached.



Dick completed boot camp in the ordinary course, and his service record shows that he met all the basic requirements, including:

1. He received gas chamber instruction. The training appears to have consisted of placing the men in a "confidence chamber" filled with tear gas to teach them defensive chemical warfare. I relate it to fire training I had at a refinery. They put us in a trailer full of smoke so that we learned to remain calm but to safely proceed through the trailer to the exit on the other end. Confidence training means learning to not panic.
2. He applied for life insurance in the amount of \$10,000 on November 11, 1943.
3. He qualified in swimming, fifty yards.
4. He completed Recruit Training on November 4, 1943 and advanced to Seaman 2nd Class



Sampson today

### **Submarine School**

On November 27, 1943, Dick was transferred to the submarine base in New London, Connecticut for submarine training. He arrived on November 28. He was immediately sent to the U.S. Navy Hospital in St. Albans, Long Island, New York. The notation in the record was “Received for Treatment.” We do not know what the treatment was for, but we know that he was “Discharged from treatment this date. Not misconduct.” The date was December 17, 1943. He then reported on the same day to the submarine base in New London, where he hoped to resume submarine school.

Unfortunately, on December 21, 1943, Dick was “Examined and found NOT physically qualified for Submarine duty.” He was colorblind, and the navy does not allow colorblindness in submarine service. As far I can tell, that remains true today unless a colorblind person can obtain a special waiver by demonstrating an ability to sufficiently distinguish among colors. So, on Christmas Eve 1943, he was transferred from New London to a station in New York for general duty and “FFT” – for further transfer – to sea duty.

### **Amphibious Training and Beach Battalions**

Dick remained in New York where he received orders on January 4, 1944 to proceed to the Amphibious Training Base at Camp Bradford, VA. The transfer was effective on January 7, and he reported at Camp Bradford in Norfolk on January 8. At this point, his performance ratings begin showing up on the back of the transfer records. He did not receive a detailed proficiency rating, but his conduct was 4.0, which was the highest rating.

He was at Camp Bradford for only five days before being assigned to the Amphibian Training Base in Fort Pierce, Florida for duty with the 9th Beach Battalion. He left for Florida on the 13th and arrived on the 14th of January. For the next three months, he received training to be part of a beach battalion.

Beach battalions grew out of Allied and American experiences in Africa and on Pacific Islands, which convinced United States military leaders of the need for instruction in amphibious combat techniques. After the Allies were driven off Dunkirk, Crete, and Corregidor (Philippines), the military understood that lost territory could only be regained by storming the coasts of Europe, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. To take and maintain the beaches and continue the assault further inland, the infantry

had to be supplied with food, weapons, clothing, ammunition, artillery, and tank support. Beach battalions with sailors trained as beach masters were developed to control the gigantic flow of material across the beaches during and after the assault. Fort Pierce, Florida was selected as the training location because the protective barrier islands along the Florida Atlantic Coast made it ideal for training in amphibious warfare. Participants received instruction as small craft landing crews, combat engineers, beach battalions, Navy Seabees, scouts, raiders, and underwater demolition teams. They were also trained in the use of various landing craft designs.



The 9<sup>th</sup> Beach Battalion never seems to have been a completely organized unit. Rather, it seems to have been a placeholder for trainees and recent graduates until they were transferred to service on a specific ship. During the invasion of Normandy in France, beach battalions were separate units with specified missions. In the Pacific, members of beach battalions appear to have been embedded with the Marine and Army units that would land on the beaches, although they withdrew as soon as their ships were ready to depart. The following is from a few different accounts of how beach battalions performed their shore duties.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Naval Beach Battalion was commissioned in 1943 and was trained exclusively for OVERLORD, the Allied invasion of France in 1944. Upon arrival at Camp Bradford, VA, personnel were assigned to one of four sections: communications, hydrographic, boat repair, or medical. As training progressed, these Navy specialists began to resemble an Army battalion, broken into three companies and nine platoons. Each platoon had a medical doctor.

WWII Naval Beach Battalions were indistinguishable from Army assault troops. While training at Fort Pierce, these Navy amphibians wore coveralls, field shoes, life belts, gas masks, leather gloves and full packs with rifles slung over their shoulders. They engaged in joint maneuvers with the Army off the coast of Florida. Having been issued Thompson submachine guns and wearing steel helmets with a sky blue "6" (later a red arc) painted on the front, the 6<sup>th</sup> Naval Beach Battalion looked more like soldiers



than sailors. The Army counterparts of the Navy beach battalions were amphibious engineers. Dr. Ralph Hall, a graduate of Syracuse Medical School, wrote to his pregnant wife that he "joined the Navy to get out of the Army. The army boys that are here joined the Army and are headed to go to sea and fight from boats. All is very ironical." Dick must have felt the irony in particularly large measure since he joined the Navy to avoid the Army and then found himself in a beach support unit close to the action with the infantry on many beaches.

We learn more about beach battalions from the history of the 7<sup>th</sup> Beach Battalion, which was originally assigned to Normandy but then reassigned to ships in the Pacific. The 7<sup>th</sup> Beach Battalion's history in the Pacific closely parallels Dick's action in the Pacific. The history describes that the primary purpose of the battalion was to act as a liaison between the Navy's seaborne forces and the Army's ground forces. Members of the battalion went ashore scattered amongst various other units' landing craft. Among the tasks of a Navy beach battalion were:

1. Establish and maintain shore-to-ship communications,
2. Guide incoming and outgoing beach traffic,
3. Small boat repair,
4. Setup aid stations and field hospitals,
5. Evacuate casualties, and
6. Demolition of beach obstacles.

It would be interesting to know what Dick thought and saw and felt during his time in boot camp, his elimination from the submarine service due to colorblindness, and his beach battalion training at Fort Pierce. Most of us have probably felt lonely when we first left home for college, missions, marriage, jobs, or other reasons. Most of us, however, could reasonably expect to return home absent some strange, unforeseen circumstances. Dick and his fellow servicemen, on the other hand, were headed for war with risk of never returning home. In addition to loneliness, they likely also felt emotions ranging from trepidation to terror. We know, however, that there was some relief available from the loneliness and homesickness in Fort Pierce. The Florida History Museum notes that the local community created a volunteer service organization to help the trainees, and three USO clubs were established throughout the city to provide recreation and entertainment during the training period. Perhaps Dick spent some time at these venues.

On April 21, 1944, upon completion of his amphibious training, he was transferred to the Amphibious Training Base in Solomons, Maryland, for further transfer to his assignment for the duration of the war: the *USS Lamar*. He arrived on April 23, 1944.

### **The USS Lamar**

The *Lamar* (APA-47) was a Bayfield-class attack transport acquired by the U.S. Navy during World War II for the task of mounting amphibious invasions on hostile shores. It was a specialized ship known as an "attack transport." Attack transports were converted from standard transport vessels by being upgraded with extra firepower and outfitted with a number of smaller landing craft for amphibious assaults. To accommodate the troops, two cargo holds amidships were converted into troop accommodations. This was achieved by dividing each hold into three decks, and then building passageways along each deck. Along both walls of each passageway, bunk-beds tiered five high were installed, and since space was still at a premium, each bunk was only thirty inches wide. The troops had

their own galley and mess separate from the those of the ship's crew, but they had no dining hall and had to use their own mess kits to eat. The ships also had sick bays and dental clinics. The troop areas were equipped with a loudspeaker system for hearing commands and announcements as well as music and entertainment during their long, crowded voyages.

Since attack transports would be operating in hostile waters, they were outfitted with anti-aircraft defense. The Navy armed each Bayfield class vessel with two 5"/38 caliber dual purpose guns, one fore and one aft, two to four twin 40mm anti-aircraft mounts, two single 40 mm mounts, and eighteen 20mm mounts. The *Lamar* was reclassified as an attack transport on February 1, 1943 and commissioned for service on April 6, 1944. After a "shakedown" voyage to Norfolk, Virginia, on April 16 to 17, the *Lamar* embarked 1,621 U.S. Marines, and departed on May 13 for the Pacific Ocean. Dick, along with his shipmates and the Marines, were off to war.



*USS Lamar (APA-47) underway, date and location unknown*

### **First Action: Guam**

The *Lamar* reached Pearl Harbor on June 1, 1944. On her way she would have passed through the Panama Canal. She then steamed for the U.S. West Coast on June 5, visiting San Diego, California, and Seattle, Washington, returning to Pearl Harbor June 26. We can only surmise that the *Lamar* was transporting troops and material during its trip to the mainland. During this time, Dick would have learned of the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, but it may not have meant much to those serving in the Pacific since they had their own set of challenges in fighting the Japanese.

At Pearl Harbor, the *Lamar* prepared for participation in its first assault convoy. She left Pearl Harbor on July 1, 1944 and steamed to Eniwetok. At either Eniwetok or Pearl Harbor, most likely the former, she embarked 1445 troops. Destination: Guam.





Guam is the southernmost island in the Northern Mariana Islands, and at 212 square miles, it is the largest island of the Marianas, with a length of 32 miles and a width ranging from 12 miles to 4 miles at different points. The United States took Guam from Spain in 1898 and retained possession until the Japanese invasion on December 10, 1941, immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941). It was not as heavily fortified as the other Mariana Islands, but by 1944, Guam had a large Japanese garrison.

The Allied invasion plan called for heavy preliminary bombardment, first by carrier aircraft and planes based in the Marshall Islands to the east, followed by close bombardment by battleships. Guam, along with Saipan and Tinian, were chosen as targets due to their size and suitability as bases for supporting the next stage of operations toward the Philippines. Guam had a deep-water harbor at Apra that was suitable for the largest Allied ships, and the island could accommodate airfields for Boeing B-29 Superfortresses to be used in bombing Japan. The U.S. attacked Saipan first in mid-June 1944. The landing on Guam was originally scheduled for June 18, 1944, but a large Japanese carrier attack and stubborn resistance on Saipan caused the assault of Guam to be postponed. U.S. naval and air bombardments of Guam began on June 11.

Guam, with its reefs, cliffs, and heavy surf, presented a formidable challenge for the attackers. Underwater demolition teams removed obstacles from July 14 to 17 July. The *Lamar* debarked its 1445 troops on July 21 with American forces landed on both sides of the Orote Peninsula on the western side of Guam, with the objective of securing Apra Harbor. Japanese artillery sank twenty landing craft and inflicted heavy casualties on the landing troops, but by 9:00 a.m., men and tanks were ashore at both

beaches. By nightfall of the first day, the U.S. Marines and soldiers had established beachheads about 6,600 feet deep. We don't know when Dick went ashore, but the action remained intense for the first few days. Japanese counterattacks were made throughout those early days, mostly at night, using infiltration tactics. Several times the Japanese penetrated the American defenses and were driven back with heavy losses of men and equipment. The *Lamar* remained engaged until July 27. By July 29, the Americans had secured the peninsula.

The *Lamar* then steamed back to Pearl Harbor, where she arrived on August 10, 1944. Back in Hawaii, she participated in landing rehearsals off Maui to prepare for the invasion of the Philippines. As flagship for TransDiv 38, she steamed to Manus in the Admiralty Islands from September 15 to October 3 and joined the U.S. 7th Fleet.

### **Crossing the Equator: October 1, 1944**

The Navy is chock full of myth and tradition, and one tradition that sailors have enjoyed for millennia is initiation into the Realm of Neptunus Rex upon crossing the equator for the first time. Dick and his shipmates, like millions of sailors before and after, were inducted into that Realm on October 1, 1944. The traditions vary somewhat from country to country and from ship to ship, but basically, "Pollywogs," who are crossing the equator for the first time, become "Shellbacks" as they participate in various rites of initiation.

High ranking members of the crew and those who have been Shellbacks the longest dress in elaborate costumes and each plays a part of King Neptune's court. Frequently, the ship captain plays the part of King Neptune himself. King Neptune's court includes his queen, Davy Jones, the royal baby, and other dignitaries. The court arrives on the ship the night before the crossing. The Pollywogs entertain the royal court with a talent show, which can include dancing, songs, skits, or poetry reading. After the show, Pollywogs receive a subpoena from Davy Jones to stand before the court the next day and answer to charges brought against them by the Shellbacks. In the morning, breakfast is served, but it is usually too spicy for the Pollywogs to eat. The "accused" appear before King Neptune, who sits in judgement. The Pollywogs perform a variety of activities, which may include wearing their clothes inside out or backwards and crawling across the deck through objectionable debris, which might include the inedible breakfast. The Pollywogs next kneel before King Neptune and kiss the royal baby's belly, which is the belly of a large sailor typically covered in grease. Finally, the Pollywogs bathe in a pool of sea water and are declared Shellbacks. They receive a certificate that they can proudly display throughout their lives. Dick's certificate was not in the folder along with other certificates and diplomas, but his service record duly notes:

Crossed the equator, southward bound, at Latitude 153o – 47' E. on Secret Operation, World War II. Duly initiated into Realm of Neptunus Rex. QUALIFIED SHELLBACK.

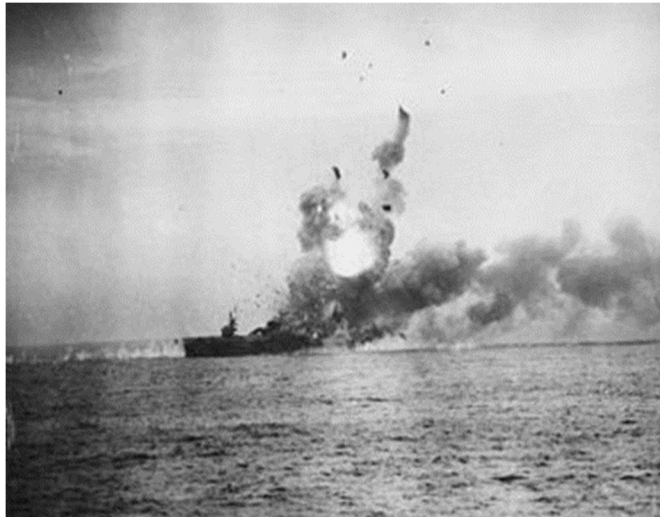
### **The Philippines: Leyte Gulf**

From October 14 to 20, 1944, the *Lamar* sailed in convoy to Leyte Gulf for the long-awaited reconquest of the Philippines. Japan had conquered the Philippines in 1942. Controlling it was vital for Japan's survival in World War II because it commanded sea routes to Borneo and Sumatra through

which rubber and petroleum were shipped to Japan. For the U.S., capturing the Philippines was a key strategic step in isolating Imperial Japan's military holdings in China and the Pacific Theater. It was also matter of personal pride for General Douglas MacArthur. As the Japanese closed in on the final remnants of the Americans troops under MacArthur's command in the Philippines in 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered him to leave his troops, presumably to reorganize forces in Australia. In fact, Roosevelt gave the order for MacArthur to leave to avoid capture while thousands of his soldiers were taken captive and suffered brutally at the hands of the Japanese. The order subjected MacArthur to embarrassment and even ridicule by some in the American military and public. MacArthur promised he would return.



The recapture of the Philippines commenced with the amphibious invasion of the Leyte Gulf by American forces and Filipino guerrillas under MacArthur's command. The *Lamar* debarked assault troops at Dulag on the eastern shore of Leyte under cover of smoke on October 20 and 21, 1944. Unfortunately for Dick and his shipmates, the Japanese initiated suicide attacks on Allied navy vessels at Leyte Gulf in October 1944 after several critical Japanese defeats. (There were reports of suicide attacks before Leyte, but they were apparently on the initiative of individual pilots. Suicide pilot training was not begun until mid-1944.) The Japanese had lost dominance in the air because of both outdated aircraft and a shortage of experienced pilots. The loss of air dominance, coupled with the Japanese unwillingness to surrender for purposes of honor, resulted in an increase of kamikaze attacks as the Allies progressed closer to Japan. During the war, about 3,862 kamikaze pilots died, and more than 7,000 Allied naval personnel were killed by kamikazes. Estimates vary, but approximately 47 ships were sunk by kamikazes and numerous others were damaged.



USS St. Lo attacked by a kamikaze on October 25, 1944

Kamikaze planes were essentially pilot-guided explosive missiles. Pilots would attempt to crash their aircraft laden with some combination of explosives, bombs, torpedoes, and full fuel tanks into enemy ships. Accuracy was much better than a conventional bombing or aerial torpedo attacks, and the payload and explosion were larger. Approximately 19% of kamikaze attacks were successful. A kamikaze could sustain damage that would disable a conventional attacker but still achieve its objective. The goal of crippling or destroying large numbers of Allied ships, particularly aircraft carriers, was considered by the Empire of Japan to be a just reason for sacrificing pilots and aircraft.

Navy veteran Julius Shoulars of North Carolina witnessed kamikaze attacks at Okinawa. He wrote:

That was the time of the height of the Japanese suicide attacks. The planes would fly in from the west as the sun was setting, so they could not be easily detected. All the ships in the harbor would begin firing their guns at them. With all of the firepower being put up, it seemed

impossible that a plane could get through without being shot down, but a few would always make it through the ack-ack.

The cruiser USS Birmingham was anchored approximately 500 yards to the [USS] Karnes' port. A suicide plane came through the anti-aircraft fire and flew down its smokestack and exploded, setting the ship on fire. We picked up wounded and brought them aboard the Karnes, and our hospital corpsmen and doctors treated them.

Dick and the *Lamar* fought off enemy air attacks with its anti-aircraft guns during the debarkation in Leyte Gulf. Ships defended against kamikaze attacks by creating an umbrella of "flak" high above the ships to create a screen of metal shrapnel that would disable or destroy any enemy plane attempting to penetrate the airspace. The umbrella of flak was largely effective in most cases, although as previously noted the attacks were more effective than conventional air attacks. The flak umbrella also prevented friendly aircraft from attacking any enemy planes that might penetrate the umbrella. U.S. planes had to down kamikazes at higher altitudes, before the final dives toward the ships began. The *Lamar* "splashed" or shot down a Japanese bomber on October 21, the second day of the troop debarkation.

We don't know if Dick was ashore for this event, but on October 20, 1944, McArthur waded onto the beach in Leyte, fulfilling his promise to return to liberate the Philippines, as pictured below.

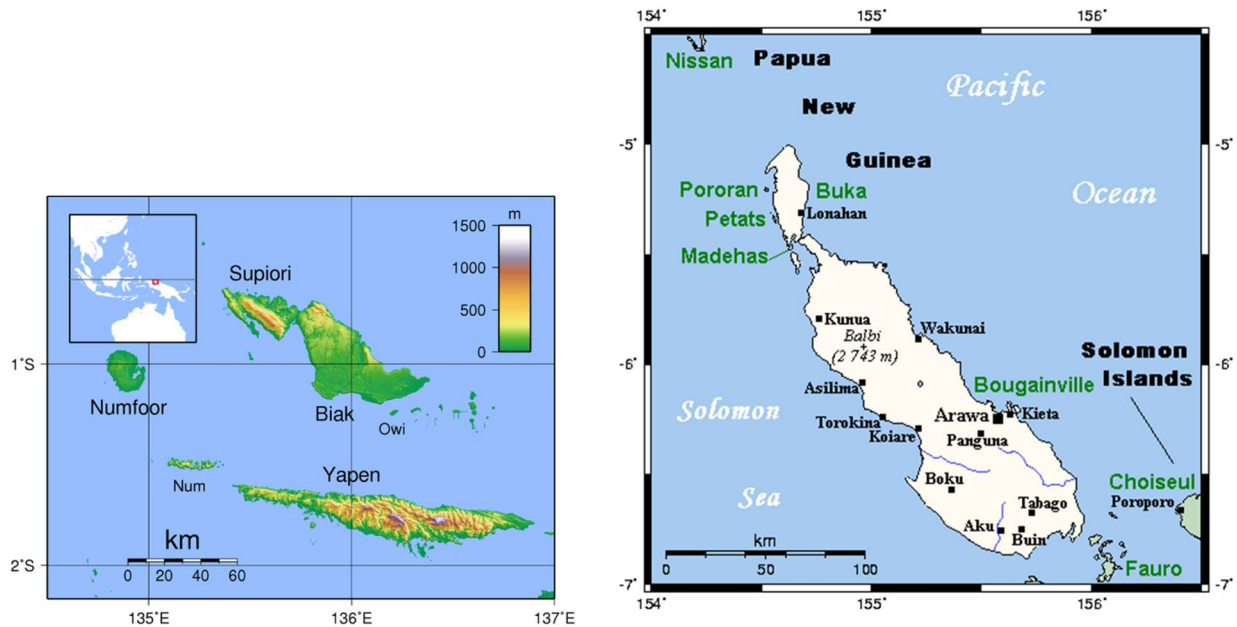


Having fulfilled its first mission at Leyte, the *Lamar* set sail on the October 21 for Hollandia, New Guinea, where it arrived on October 26. Why Hollandia? The transport ships carried assault troops into battle but also carried wounded to hospitals. The 27th General Hospital was at Hollandia, Dutch East Indies, and was the furthest forward of all general hospitals in the Southwest Pacific Theater. It had opened for patients on August 1, 1944 and operated until July 15, 1945, when the last patients were transferred to another hospital. During those months, the hospital cared for 21,054 patients who were either local admissions from Army units in the area or battle casualties that had been evacuated to



Hollandia from forward areas ranging from Biak to Luzon. That time period would have included the Battle of Leyte. The *Lamar* was likely carrying casualties from Leyte to Hollandia. In his role, Dick would have seen both action on the beach and the grisly results of that action in the form of many casualties.

From Hollandia, the *Lamar* sailed to Biak and Mio Woendi in Indonesia where she embarked troops and returned to Leyte on November 18 with reinforcements and cargo. She departed the same day, touched Manus, an island in northern Papua New Guinea and the largest of the Admiralty Islands. At the beginning of the war, Manus was an observation post manned by Australian Imperial Forces. The Japanese overran the Aussies in 1942 and later in the year established a military base. American forces retook Manus in early 1944 and established an Allied naval base. The purpose of the *Lamar's* first stop in November 1944 is not clear. She continued to Bougainville, Solomon Islands, arriving on December 1, 1944. Bougainville had been a large Japanese base from which they supported their troops as they tried to hang onto the island of Guadalcanal, further south in the Solomons. Although it had not been completely conquered, Bougainville was nevertheless a large and important U.S. naval base with three airfields. There, the *Lamar* took on board troops and cargo before returning to Manus on December 21 to prepare for the invasion of the island of Luzon in the Philippines.

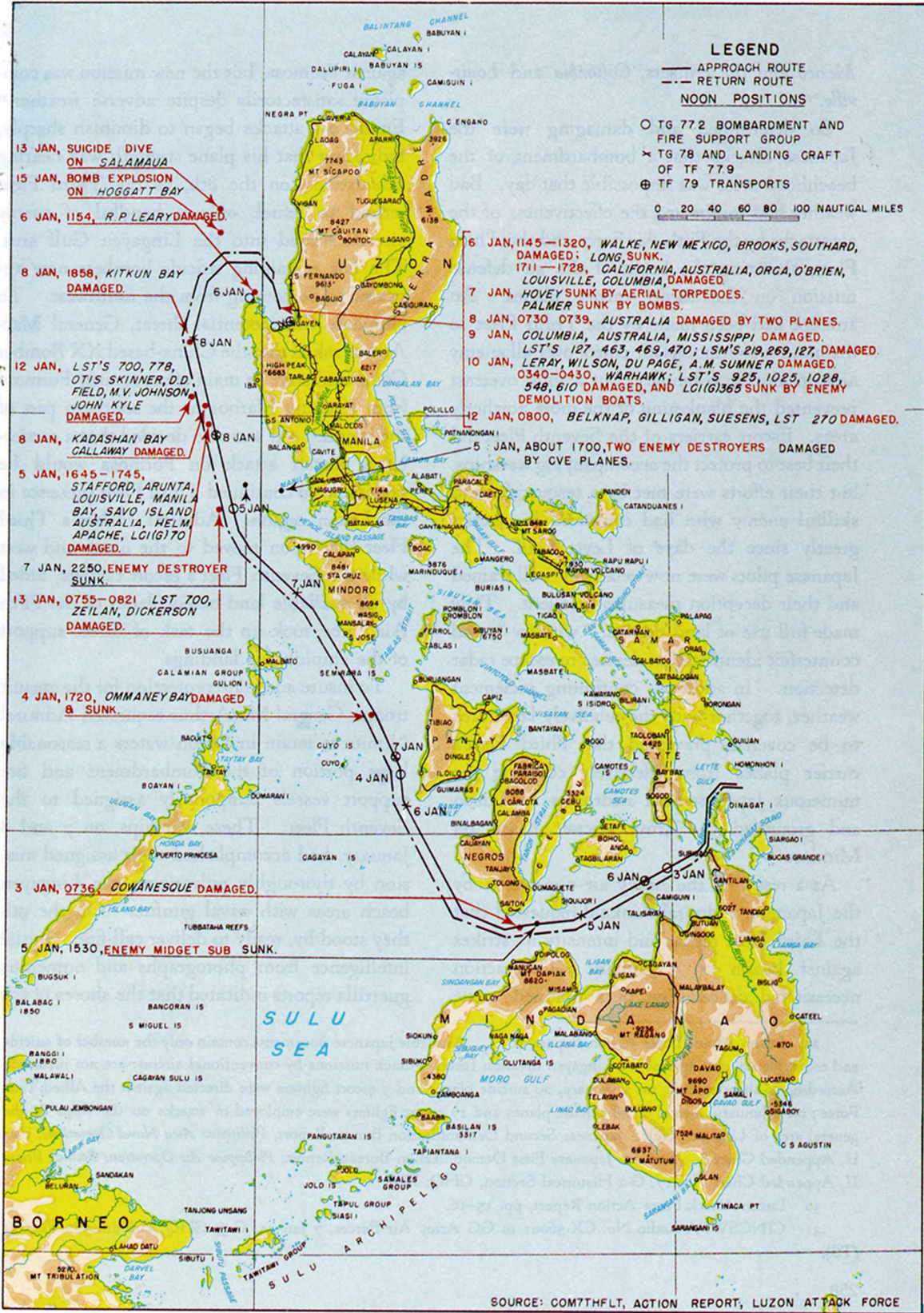


### The Philippines: Luzon

The *Lamar* set sail on December 31, 1944 with Task Group 79.1 for Lingayen Gulf in Luzon, another Philippine island north of Leyte. Enemy aerial resistance increased as the task force closed on its objective. On January 8, 1945, dogfights peppered the sky. Kamikaze attacks also resumed, and at least two task force escort aircraft carriers were hit and damaged. The *Lamar* entered Lingayen Gulf on January 9, 1945 and began debarking combat troops. Despite frequent alerts and intermittent air attacks, the transport completed unloading on the 11th and departed for Leyte, where she arrived January 14. She returned to the western coast of Luzon January 29 to debark American engineers and troops at San Narciso.







This map demonstrates the risks to ships during the Luzon action

## Okinawa

From February 1 to March 27, 1945, the Lamar operated out of Leyte Gulf in preparation for Operation Iceberg, the invasion of Okinawa. The Battle of Okinawa was particularly critical because the island was Japanese territory, and being only 340 miles from Japan's home islands, would provide an Allied air base to support the invasion of Japan. The initial invasion of Okinawa on April 1, 1945, was the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theater of World War II. The 82-day battle lasted from April 1 until June 22, 1945. The battle has been referred to as the "typhoon of steel" in English, and *tetsu no ame* ("rain of steel") or *tetsu no bōfū* ("violent wind of steel") in Japanese. The nicknames refer to the ferocity of the fighting, the intensity of Japanese kamikaze attacks, and the sheer numbers of Allied ships and armored vehicles that assaulted the island. The battle was one of the bloodiest in the Pacific, with approximately 160,000+ casualties on both sides: 75,682 Allied and 84,166-117,000+ Japanese, including drafted Okinawans wearing Japanese uniforms. Okinawans also suffered severe war casualties as 149,425 were killed, committed suicide, or went missing, which represented nearly half of the local pre-war population estimated at 300,000. The suicides were the result of Japanese propaganda about how the Okinawans, as Japanese citizens, would be treated by the invading Americans.



The *Lamar* was part of Task Group 55.1 headed to Okinawa and carried the U.S. Army 77th Infantry Division. She departed the Philippines on March 27, 1945 with 1,366 assault troops and reached Okinawa on April 1. She completed landing men and cargo the next day. Thereafter, she took on battle wounded. The embarkation of casualties brings to mind the movie "Hacksaw Ridge" about Army medic Desmond T. Doss, who won the Medal of Honor for his role in saving many wounded soldiers on Okinawa. The movie illustrates the kind of casualties Dick would have seen – or perhaps did see – as he executed his duties as a member of a beach battalion. Perhaps this explains why Dick did not speak of the war once he returned home. The *Lamar* transported the wounded to Guam from April 4 to 9 and then sailed on the 10th for San Francisco, arriving April 29, 1945.

Fortunately for Dick and the *Lamar*, the air attacks by the Japanese were quite light during the first few days of the landing. It was not until April 6 that the Japanese stepped up their attacks. Between April 6 and June 22, the Japanese flew 1,465 kamikaze aircraft in large-scale attacks from Kyushu, 185 individual kamikaze sorties from Kyushu, and perhaps additional sorties from Formosa.

[Dick's son Rick was posted on Okinawa when he served in the US Marine Corps in the 1970s.]

### **End of War**

On April 12, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. Roosevelt was the only President that many in the war generation had ever known, and the nation and the troops suffered deep mourning and some consternation about the continued prosecution of the war. A month later, those in the Pacific Theater learned of victory in Europe. To many in the Pacific, the news was interesting, but they did not know that the war in the Pacific would end soon with the dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan three months later. Their happiness that the European ended was severely dampened by the prospect of invading Japan. The European Theater troops also well knew that they would soon be redeployed to the Pacific. It would be interesting to know Dick's thoughts and feelings regarding these events.

The *Lamar* left San Francisco May 22, 1945, with personnel and cargo destined for Pearl Harbor and Ulithi, eventually reaching Guiuan, Samar, Philippines on June 23, 1945. From June 27 to July 14, she sailed with a Service Squadron that supplied forward bases supporting troops and naval operations. After loading cargo at Guiuan, she steamed to Pearl Harbor from July 19 to August 1. After discharging her cargo, she departed the following day for San Francisco where she arrived on August 9.

Victory Japan Day was August 15, 1945, but it is not clear where Dick would have been that day. We know that the *Lamar* was in San Francisco on August 9, but we next find her in Seattle for unspecified repairs. She left Seattle on September 8, sailing for the Marianas, reaching Guam September 24. She discharged 1,517 military passengers, embarked 1,829 returning veterans, and steamed to San Diego from September 28 (Dick's 20th birthday) to October 12. On October 28, she departed for Japan on "Operation Magic Carpet" duty. Magic Carpet was the massive post-World War II operation by the War Shipping Administration to repatriate over eight million American military personnel from the European, Pacific, and Asian theaters. Hundreds of Liberty ships, Victory ships, and troop transports repatriated soldiers from Europe between June 1945 to February 1946. The Navy employed over 370 navy ships for repatriation duties in the Pacific between October 1945 and September 1946. The *Lamar* arrived in Yokosuka, Japan on November 28, 1945, where she embarked 1,810 passengers before sailing December 1, 1945 for Seattle, Washington, where she arrived on the 14th via the North Pacific.



On January 14, 1946, the *Lamar* departed Puget Sound for the U.S. Gulf Coast, arriving in New Orleans, Louisiana, February 3. She proceeded to Beaumont, Texas from February 23 to 24 and was decommissioned from naval service on March 7, 1946. She was turned over to the Maritime Commission July 3, 1946.

The end of *Lamar's* service also marked the end of Dick's service in the Navy. He was transferred to U.S. Naval Receiving Station, Galveston, Texas on March 3, 1946. On April 13, 1946, he received orders for an honorable discharge in Galveston having thirty or more "points," which established the order in which military personnel were discharged from duty at the end of the war. Points were counted for things such as time of service, the type of actions, and medals earned. He was transferred effective April 17, 1945 to the base in Shelton, Virginia. He arrived at the family home at 303 South Barton Street a few days later to an undoubtedly warm reception from his parents and sister.

Dick finished the war being recognized as a good seaman. His proficiency rating in his rank was 3.0 of 4.0, and more importantly, his conduct was exemplary: for conduct he received a rating of 4.0 of 4.0. He was authorized to wear the following medals:

1. The American Area Medal, also known as the American Campaign Medal. He would have received this medal for 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days in the American area (presumably between Hawaii and the mainland).



2. Victory World War II Medal. This one speaks for itself.



3. Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four stars. The four stars represent that Dick participated in four separate campaigns: Guam, Leyte, Luzon, and Okinawa.



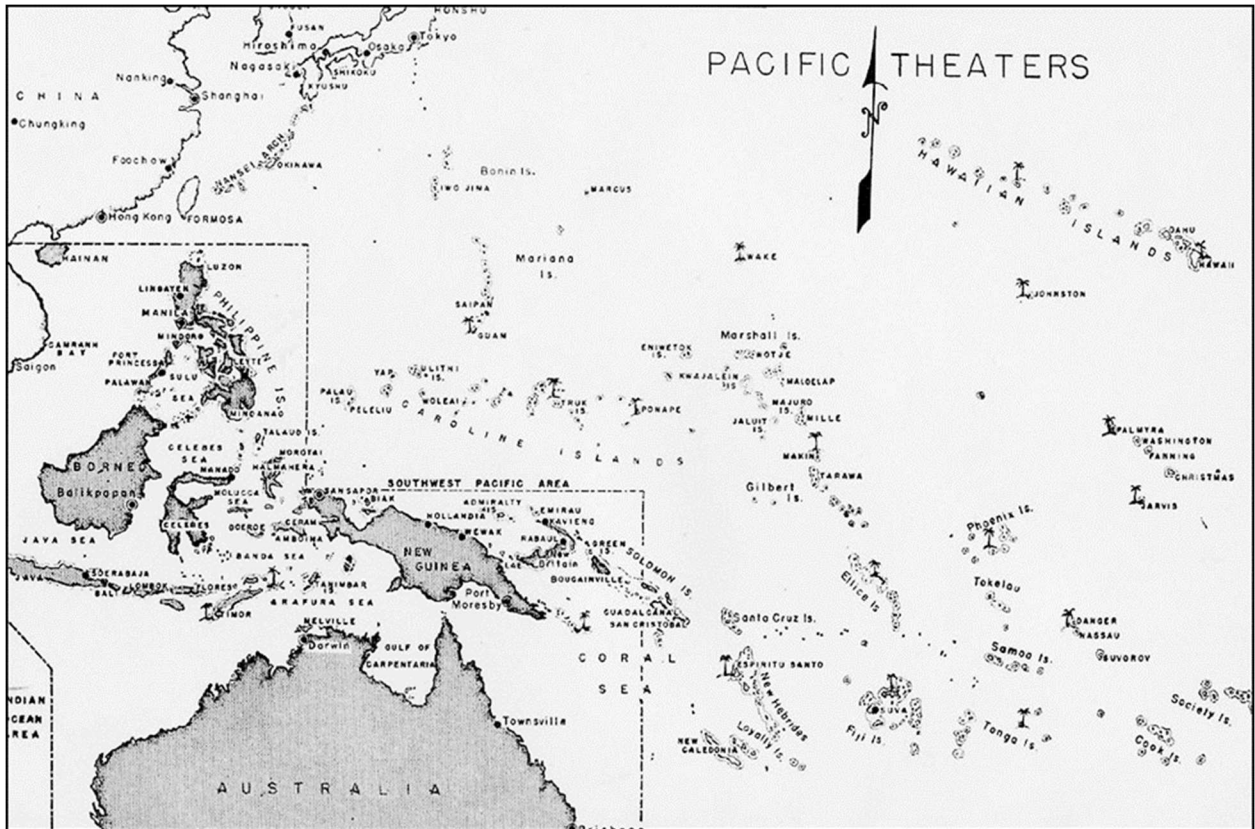
4. Philippine Liberation Medal with two stars. The two stars mean that he participated in two or all of the following: the initial invasion at Leyte, any other engagement in the Philippine Liberation Campaign, or operation in Philippine waters for more than 30 days. I believed Dick meets all three criteria.



Upon his discharge, the Navy gave Dick his final pay of \$130.78, \$10.50 of which was for travel or mileage. By statute, the Navy also provided him with \$100 "initial mustering out pay," which was to help servicemen restart their civilian lives after the war.

Copies of his honorable discharge and his letter from President Truman thanking him for his service are included below, along with his service records.

President Truman's letter thanked Dick on behalf of a grateful nation for his service in World War II. We join President Truman in expressing our thanks for his service and especially that he came home to be the Husband and Dad to an eternal family!



## SOURCES

- Embarrassingly, I admit that I looked to Wikipedia for many of the basics surrounding the various battles, as well as the compilation of the Lamar's service record, although several other sources backed up the Wikipedia version and can be quickly located with a google search.
- There is a website dedicated to Sampson Naval Training Station at <http://www.rpadden.com/sampson.htm> . It is very informative with lots of pictures. There is also a yearbook for Sampson at <https://militaryyearbookproject.com/platoon-photos/us-navy-recruit-training-center-rtc-photos/sampson-ny-naval-training-center> that includes pictures of many of the Sampson graduating classes. Dick's picture does not appear on the website, however, he saved it, and it is included below. Dick was in Company 521, with the photo dated October 20, 1943.
- Beach Battalions. There was no history of the 9<sup>th</sup>, but I do not think it existed other than as a holding station for Fort Pierce graduates headed for service on individual ships. The history of the 6<sup>th</sup> is at <http://www.6thbeachbattalion.org/> . See also, <http://ww2f.com/threads/naval-beach-battalions.33924/> . From this forum: "Problem #1 is that the only 'Beach Battalions' were used in European theaters along with the Seabees and NCDU units. This caused consternation as to whether there were even these guys in the south pacific as naval personnel. I finally found a guy with a website and book that explained to me that they were called Beach Parties in the South Pacific and worked independently with the Marine Corps in prepping Beaches and ship to shore communications. Something the Raiders vehemently denied." The history of the 7<sup>th</sup> is at

<http://wwii.unctv.org/julius-shoulars> . At this site, we get detail about what the 7<sup>th</sup> beach battalion did on Omaha Beach in Normandy, but that unit was then reassigned to the Pacific, and specifically Okinawa. The paragraphs quoted above regarding kamikaze attacks are from this site. This site, <http://www.sproe.com/s/7th-nbb.html> , describes what Naval Beach Battalions did and provided the list quoted in the text. The history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Beach Battalion is at [http://www.1stbeachbattalion.org/beach\\_boys.htm](http://www.1stbeachbattalion.org/beach_boys.htm) . This may be the best summary source for the beach master issue: <http://www.public.navy.mil/surflant/bmu2/Pages/History.aspx> .

- I did not keep careful track of the sources for the initiation in the Realm of Neptunus Rex. However, documentation from a contemporaneous initiation on board the Lamar's sister ship, the USS Wayne (APA 54) can be found at <http://www.rpadden.com/rex/rexpage.htm> .





Company 521

October 20, 1943

*W.D. Forward. C. - Comdr.*

U.S. Naval Training Station

Sampson, N. Y.

N.T.S. SAMPSON  
CO. 521

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Company 521

October 20, 1943

*W.D. Forward. C. - Comdr.*

U. S. Naval Training Station

Sampson, N. Y.

N.T.S. SAMPSON  
CO. 521



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 4. Dale ...  
 5. Walter ...  
 6. Fred ...  
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RICHARD M. CRENSHAW

*To you who answered the call of your country and served in its Armed Forces to bring about the total defeat of the enemy, I extend the heartfelt thanks of a grateful Nation. As one of the Nation's finest, you undertook the most severe task one can be called upon to perform. Because you demonstrated the fortitude, resourcefulness and calm judgment necessary to carry out that task, we now look to you for leadership and example in further exalting our country in peace.*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Harry Truman".

THE WHITE HOUSE



In reply address not the signer of this letter, but Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. Refer to No.

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Pers- 824C-VAN  
256 60 55

9 March 1948

Mr. Richard Milton Crenshaw  
(Delivered in person)

Dear Mr. Crenshaw:

The following is a transcript of your sea service:

- 18 Sep 1943 Enl in USNR as Apprentice Seaman at NRS, Washington, D.C. RepAD.
- 5 Nov 1943 CR to Seaman second class.
- 1 Feb 1945 CR to Seaman first class.
- 1 Jun 1945 CR to Coxswain.
- 19 Apr 1946 Issued an Honorable Discharge as Coxswain from PSC, Shelton, Norfolk, Va.

Date and place of birth: 28 Sep 1925, District of Columbia.

You served on board the following vessel:

USS LAMAR From: 23 Apr 1944 to 2 Mar 1946

By direction of Chief of Naval Personnel:

Sincerely yours,

A. R. ROMANOWSKI  
CHSCLK, USN  
Records Activity

TRANSCRIPT CODE	
AGC	Armed Guard Center
AOL	Absent over leave
AWOL	Absent without official leave
CR	Change of rating
Des	Deserted
Dis	Discharged
DOW	Duration of war
EE	Expiration of enlistment
Enl	Enlisted
Ext. Enl.	Extended enlistment
FAW	Fleet Air Wing
FEA	For further assignment
FFT	For further transfer
Ind	Inducted
NAF	Naval Air Facility
NAS	Naval Air Station
NOB	Naval Operating Base
NPDI	Nonperform, duty-imprisoned
NTC	Naval Training Center
NRS	Naval Recruiting Station
NTS	Naval Training Station
PSC	Personnel Separation Center
R	Received
NYd	Navy Yard
RAD	Released from active duty
RecSta	Receiving Station
Reenl	Reenlisted
RepAD	Reported for active duty
Ret	Retired
RS	Receiving Ship
SKMC	Sick misconduct
T	Transferred
TER	Transferred to Fleet Reserve
T&R	Transferred and received
USAFI	U. S. Armed Forces Institute
USN	United States Navy
USCH	U. S. Naval Convales. Hosp.
USNH	U. S. Naval Hospital
USN-I	U. S. Navy-inductee
USNR	U. S. Naval Reserve
USNRF	N. S. Naval Reserve Force
USNSH	U. S. Naval Special Hospital



NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM U. S. NAVAL SERVICE  
NAVPERS-553 (REV. 8-45)

31

1. SERIAL OR FILE NO. RANK AND CLASSIFICATION	2. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE) CRENSHAW, RICHARD MILTON COX V6 USNR	3. RATE AND CLASS/OR PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES 303 S. Barton St., Arlington Arlington Co., Va.	5. PLACE OF SEPARATION USNPSC, SHELTON, VA.
6. CHARACTER OF SEPARATION HONORABLE			7. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT Arlington, Va.

8. RACE R	9. SEX M	10. MARITAL STATUS S	11. U.S. CITIZEN (YES OR NO) YES	12. DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH 28 Sept 1925 Washington, D. C.
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13. REGISTERED YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14. SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD OF REGISTRATION	15. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE 303 S. Barton St., Arlington, Va.
	16. MEANS OF ENTRY (INDICATE BY CHECK IN APPROPRIATE BOX) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED <input type="checkbox"/> INDUCTED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMISSIONED DATE 18 Sept 1943 DATE	17. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE 18 Sept 1943
19. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE Washington, D. C.		20. RATINGS HELD AS; S2c; S1c; Cox;

21. QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATES HELD, ETC. See Rating Description Booklet For COX	22. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE WORLD WAR II <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
23. SERVICE SCHOOLS COMPLETED WEEKS FOR CONVENIENCE, A CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY NO. 5052917-DC HAS BEEN ISSUED BY THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION TO BE USED FOR THE FUTURE REQUEST OF ANY GUARANTY OR INCURANCE BENEFIT UNDER TITLE III OF THE SERVICE MEN'S READJUSTMENT ACT OF 1944, AS AMENDED, THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO THE PERSON TO WHOM	24. SERVICE (VESSELS AND STATIONS SERVED ON) NTS, SAMPSON, N.Y.; SUB BASE, NEW LONDON, CONN.; ATB, CAMP BRADFORD, NOB, NORFOLK, VA.; USNATB, FT. PIERCE, FLA.; NINTH BEACH BATTALION: U.S.S. LAMAR;

IMPORTANT: THIS SEPARATION ORDER WAS ISSUED WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTOR'S SUBDIVISION, VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.				
25. KIND OF INSURANCE N	26. EFFECTIVE MONTH OF ALIQUOT CONTINUANCE pr 1946	27. MO. NEXT PREMIUM DUE May. 1946	28. AMOUNT OF PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH 6.40	29. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO CONTINUE INS. Yes
30. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON DISCHARGE \$ 130.78	31. TRAVEL OR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN TOTAL PAYMENT \$ 10.50	32. INITIAL MUSTERING OUT PAY \$100	33. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER R.N. ADAMS, LT. (SC) USNR	

34. REMARKS POINT SYSTEM MEDALS: AMERICAN AREA VICTORY WORLD WAR II ASIATIC PACIFIC (4 stars) PHILIPPINE LIBERATION (2 STARS)	35. SIGNATURE (BY DIRECTION OF COMMANDING OFFICER) <i>L. J. Snyder</i> L. J. SNYDER, LT. COMDR., USNR
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36. NAME AND ADDRESS OF LAST EMPLOYER U.S. Treasury Procurement Division 7th & D St. S.W., Washington, D. C.	37. DATES OF LAST ENPL'MT. FROM June 42 Sept. 43	38. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D. O. T. NO. Accounting Clerk 1-01.31
39. JOB PREFERENCE (LIST TYPE, LOCALITY, AND GENERAL AREA) Accounting Clerk, Va.	40. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING) Accounting	
41. NON-SERVICE EDU. (YRS. SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED) GRAM.: 8 H. S.: 4 COLL.: 0	42. DEGREES None	43. MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD Academic
44. VOCATIONAL OR TRADE COURSES (NATURE AND LENGTH OF COURSE) Drafting 4 years		

45. RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT 	46. OFF DUTY EDUCATIONAL COURSES COMPLETED 4-19-46 <i>Richard M. Crenshaw</i>
47. DATE OF SEPARATION	48. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED