

Hi 'ya Vaughn, I'm Vito P. Colamussi and a plank owner of the LCI (L) 77 as I was in the original crew when she was commissioned and I was the only Apprentice Seaman aboard ship. I was in the last class from Boot Camp, graduating as an AS 3/c as all the later classes became S2/c) and had a longer Boot Camp than our class. It was 11 January 1943, 3 months after taking my oath, in Orange, Texas when we commissioned the # -77. There were 3 Officers and 21 enlisted Reserves assigned as crew. In mid March, after shakedown cruises & docking maneuvers i.e., seeing which ship in the group could knock down the most stanchions or make the biggest hull hole etc., we sailed for the Canal Zone. We had our first shipboard casualty during this trip; a Radioman 3/c was washed overboard and wasn't found after a 4-hour search. He was the only death on our ship during my time aboard. We went thru the Canal, and then north to San Diego in April 1943. Along the way, the CO called for Target Practice and we shot at and killed many Sea Turtles. Thinking back about that shooting, it was a crime for us to shoot those turtles. We sailed to the San Diego Destroyer Base where we stayed about a month having some work done on the ship. Then on to Monterey, where we held war game exercises with the Army troops from Ft Ord, picking up the GI's from transports and then beaching and landing them. Month of June 43 found us in San Francisco Navy Yard where we had more work done; July was Port Angeles and then in Seattle for 2 weeks. We then sailed thru the beauty of the Inland Channel to Ketchikan Alaska where I was made an SP, it was a rugged town, had logs for sidewalks & streets because of all the mud and our uniform was whites because we were SP's. Every saloon we checked out, we were plied with free drinks, we ended up being carried back aboard our ship. Next stop was Sitka, and then thru Glacier Bay, which was awesome, icebergs all over and then liberty port at Dutch Harbor. Well, if you remember the liberty party from the movie "Mr. Roberts", that was mild compared to the one we had. It was "WILD"! The SP's put a blockade around the ship and we had no more liberty. Next stop was Adak where we trained the Army 77th Division for the Invasion of Kiska on 15 September 1943. The #77 hit

the beach 14 times that day, round trips from the AKA ship's to shore. The next morning, there were 19 crosses, all American who were killed by "Friendly Fire", some one fouled up there were no Jap's, and they had sneaked off to????? Without being observed by the Army, Navy or OSS and who ever else had their eyes closed. We then went back to Adak for R&R. We went on a hunting party armed with carbines, Springfield's, Garand Rifles, Thompson 45 machine guns and Colt 45's. Over hill & dale, we shot anything that moved foxes, grouse and even field mice; it was the most dangerous place for me in the entire war, as there was wild shooting all over. A crew from a Destroyer had a Kodiak bear hung from their 5" gun mount weighing over a 1000 lbs plus many pounds of imbedded shells in its carcass. The last of November we set out for the Hula Hula Land. Underway southward, we went thru 2 Williwaw's which are Aleutians Hurricanes, 3 LCT's hulls cracked and sank, don't recall how many lives were lost and two weeks later we sailed into Pearl Harbor. We get refitted again, new paint job and maneuvers at Maui and back to Pearl where they removed the ramps and our 50 cal. Machine guns and converted us to one of the first gun ships; we lost our "L" and became a "G". On our first test run as a "Gunboat", we had an Admiral & His Staff aboard because we became the Group Flag and then on to the big island of Hawaii to shoot the rockets. Well, 504 Rockets were fired, a whole lot of noise, the entire new paint job is burnt off the deck, the Admiral seemed to have panicked with all the commotion and screams get me off of this thing. A gig is sent over from a destroyer and a shaken Admiral with "Brown Pants" departs. How do you think that we "Suckers" who were left behind to serve on this "LCI (G) 77" felt? Well, I guess we were fearless, so back to Pearl and into dry-dock for new paint job, and more rocket launchers. The amazing thing about our rocket launchers, each rack held 15 rockets and every firing, there was a dud or one stuck, then we had to unload the racks and walk the dud back to the fantail to dump them over the side into the deep, being careful because they were primed and they could blow up! On 15 June 1944 we were at Saipan, oh what a bloody show; the first 3 waves of

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Marines were blown out. Two days later, I and 2 other men (1 from Kentucky and 1 from West Virginia) are ordered to take a LCVP and go in Garapan Bay to take soundings. When we arrived on the site, there was a Chaplin & Cox'n in a dory, the Cox'n would pick up a body, The Chaplin would clip the dog tags and then they'd repeat that with the next body. There were hundreds of dead Marines all around us. The most amazing spectacle was when the outgoing tide picked up speed, all the bodies in formation started floating out to sea, one of the saddest sights I recall during the war. While we were taking soundings, we could see tanks that were in battle above us in the hills, meanwhile, the old boy from Kentucky suggested we sneak ashore and try and get some souvenirs, so we do. Upon landing, we spot a lot of dead Jap's but the Marines had stripped them of anything worthwhile. Those "Good ole Southern Boys" decide to stomp the Jap's Skulls and get their gold teeth. A few days later, we invaded Tinian, not as much beach action like Saipan had. Rumors began we were going to Australia with all those beautiful women who we heard were crazy for Yanks. We left the Marianna's heading SE on the Blue Pacific. On the way, we had a change of orders; they were for us to tow these huge cement dry-docks to the Solomon Islands. So we lose a chance for some good liberty. While the Flotilla is being overhauled, my duty was with an LCVP to pickup ship's Officers and deliver them to Liberty Island where they were able to have "Picnics" with the USO 'Ladies, the enlisted men were sent to a R&R camp for 5 days, where we had all the warm beer we could drink, we had many wild fights between the different ship's companies. While there we got another paint job, more rockets, ammo, and fresh food and then sailed for Ulithi and join the largest fleet ever assembled in the huge lagoon. On 15 September 1944 was the invasion of the Palau and the famous picture of the Flag Ship LCI 77 made LIFE Magazine and shown in "Victory at Sea", There's where some shrapnel hit the bulkhead between Kentuck & me, Phew! in the confusion, someone yelled, "Abandon Ship" and a few of the crew did jump overboard but it was the Amtrak's blowing up around us that really took the big hits. By this

time I had my fill of this war. A month later, I got orders to report stateside for a new assignment, which was aboard the USS Wichita, a cruiser for a while and never went back overseas. I ended up getting shore duty at the Portsmouth Navy Yard, VA, for one year and then civilian life. Lots of small details have been forgotten. (Old Kentuck' ended up becoming a Washington DC Capitol Police Officer after getting out. I visited him after the war and you know what? He was wearing a gold necklace with those danged gold teeth he had knocked out back on Saipan on it. Young servicemen were a bunch of wild mavericks during the war years and did many wild things then, they wouldn't dream of doing today. I was known as 'Moose' while serving in the Navy.

*Vito Colomussi*