

Vella Lavella invasion Sept. 25, 1943.

The latter's casualty list — seven men killed, 23 wounded, of whom three died of their wounds, and five men missing — was the largest suffered by a Coast Guard-manned landing ship or craft.

The LCI(L)s were 160-foot vessels with a ramp on each side of the bow that could be lowered to permit infantrymen to debark after beaching. Faster and more maneuverable than the LSTs, they were uncomfortable at sea with almost 200 soldiers aboard, and their small crews which included 24 officers and men, needed careful training to lower and raise the heavy ramps safely.

The Coast Guard-manned *bobtail* flotilla of 24 LCI(L)s received its baptism of fire in the Sicily invasion July 9, 1943, the first major operation for ships of this type.

They emerged unscathed from the Sicily landings and the subsequent Salerno invasion, but the Coast Guard flotilla lost the LCI(L)s 85, 91 and 92 to mines at Normandy June 6, 1944, and the LCI(L) 93 had to be abandoned after 10 direct hits by a German shore battery.

The LCI(L) 83 was also abandoned when it struck a mine almost two weeks later, but when the ebbing tide exposed the hole, its men were able to patch it well enough so that the ship could return to England for repair.

OTHER DUTIES IN THE PACIFIC

The 20 surviving Coast Guard LCI(L)s sailed to the United States in the autumn of 1944, and after overhaul and training with four replacement vessels, went to the Pacific, where 13 of them added the Okinawa campaign to their battle records.

Their beaching capability was not needed there, most of the troops having been landed before the Coast Guard-manned vessels joined the invasion force, so they were used in a variety of other duties, making smoke frequently to screen larger ships from Japanese air attack.

Eight of the LCI(L) 90's men were burned seriously, one fatally, when a

kamikaze crashed into the conning station June 13, 1945, but the ship survived, making off under its own power.

While the threat of U-boats and, to a lesser degree, German air attack posed the greatest danger, the sea itself could also be considered an enemy.

Since its cutters had been serving as convoy escorts almost from the beginning of the United States involvement in World War II, it was to be expected that the Coast Guard should provide crews for some of the myriad escort vessels built for the

Navy during the war.

First of these were eight corvettes, 208-foot vessels built in Canada and commissioned between November 1942 and August

Below: Signalmen J/c Theodore Cholewinski uses a blinker lamp to send a message to a nearby supply ship during operations off the East Coast, Oct. 8, 1942.

