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Weather for De Witt



Cloudy
Time: 10:30 am
Temp: 16
RealFeel Temp: 13
Humidity: 85.8472747802
Winds: ESE at 5 mph

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Landing ship tank (LST) makes trip up the Mississippi

The LST 325, a Landing Ship Tank from the World War II era, will visit several cities on the Mississippi River this summer docking in Moline and Clinton.

LST 325 was at Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. It was one of the first to be built, as launched Feb. 1, 1943, and is the only operational LST in the United States.

LST 325 was the product of a shipyard in Seneca, Ill., on the Illinois River a few miles upstream from Ottawa. The shipyard could turn out a hull every five days. Then workers, welders and equipment installers boarded the vessels and completed the work as the ships sailed down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.

The LSTs were the only ships ever made that could go anywhere in the world, deposit their cargo on a hostile beach and go get another load.

The ships could carry 20 Sherman tanks in the giant hold below the deck. On the main deck, they housed 30-40 trucks as well as many tons of ammunition, supplies, soldiers and Marines.

In addition to D-Day, LST 325 made six trips to Sicily in support of the offensive before Messina fell, July 11, 1943, and was part of the Northern Attack Force in support of the invasion at Salerno Sept. 13,

Memorial museum to visit Clinton

LST 325 serves as a floating museum and memorial for the men who bravely served their country aboard LSTs during World War II.

The vessel, which is home ported in Evansville, Ind., will arrive in Moline, Wednesday, Aug. 27, and remain in port through Tuesday, Sept. 2.

It will sail to Clinton, arriving Wednesday, Sept. 3, and remain until Tuesday, Sept. 9.

The 328-foot ship will be open for public tours while it is docked.

In order to make extensive repairs and keep the vessel operational, the memorial needs to raise several million dollars. Visitors can help by volunteering labor, challenging veterans or other groups to raise funds, encouraging corporate sponsorships, joining the memorial membership or making a personal donation.

1943.

Other ships, including battle ships, received more publicity and glory for their accomplishments during World War II and the Korean and the Vietnam conflicts, but the LSTs were particularly valuable because of their capabilities.

Air strikes and shelling from ships never caused the enemy to give up. Tanks and men were needed. No other ship could land on a beach and open its front doors for troops and tanks to storm on shore to battle.

That tactic was sometimes bloody and resulted in loss of troops, but it was necessary to win the war- making the LST an important player in victory.

George White, a World War II Marine from Coal Valley, will be among the crew guiding LST 325 up river.

He was a U.S. Marine 1944-1946 and trained to be a scout sniper. He helped with the cleanup operations on Saipan and participated in the invasion of Okinawa on board LST 884.

His ship was struck by kamikaze planes on both April Fool's Day and Easter, 1945, the latter time being forced to abandon ship because of explosions and fire about 5 miles off shore.

Now 83 years old, White was accepted to be a crewman for LST 325 in 1998. He traveled to Greece in July 2000 as a member of an advance crew for what was supposed to be a six-week trip.

The men found the ship neither seaworthy or in running condition. Under the worst of conditions, including temperatures of 100 degrees in Crete for weeks at a time, the crew had to walk nearly a mile to Souda for two meals a day. They did not eat lunch.

White and another man finally were able to get the galley ready for use.

He recalls it was impossible to sleep below deck because of the absorbed daytime heat. There was no rain all summer.

Finally, after three months of work, the crew was ready to perform the all-important sea trial. Within 15 minutes, it was clear it was going to be a success.

White remembers it as the most emotional time of the entire trip. "I could see grown men reduced to tears, and the beer flowed rather freely that night in the little town of Souda, Crete."

The crew encountered a steering problem as it left Crete but sailed to Athens on White's 75th birthday, Nov. 15, 2000. He served as helmsman as the ship began to navigate the Mediterranean Sea.

After battling two violent storms, losing one of the two engines and having the steering go out again, LST 325 reached Gibraltar, where the crew hired the engine repairs.

White says he was thankful that part of the journey was over, but he was sad to leave the ship due to a family illness.

He missed seeing the jubilation of civilians as the ship docked to a hero's welcome in Mobile, Ala.