

# Restored warship set to dock in Q-C

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With a statue of a young Samuel Clemens in the foreground, LST-325 has been docked along the Hannibal, Mo., riverfront for a week before it sails for its next stops in the Quad-Cities and Clinton, Iowa. The World War II-era ship attracted more than 10,000 visitors, the volunteer crew said. (DANNY HENLEY/HANNIBAL COURIER-POST) [Buy this Photo](#)

When an old World War II ship — turned floating museum — docks this week in Moline, 81-year-old Donald Chapman won't need to take a guided tour.

He knows that vessel by heart.

The East Moline man served as chief electrician among a group of veterans — including two other Quad-City men — who volunteered in 2000 to spend several months preparing the ship for a 6,500-mile journey from Crete, in Greece, to the United States.

Their efforts resulted in the restoration of one of the only LST, or Landing Ship Tank, ships still operating in the country.

“There were 29 of us who sailed it across the ocean, and the average age was 72,”

Chapman said.

When the ship arrives Wednesday on its maiden visit to the Quad-City area, it will be piloted by another East Moline man and his son: John W. Vize, who operates Great River Tours with Riversong in LeClaire, and his son, John H. Vize, of Evansville, Ind., where the ship is headquartered.

The younger Vize is a regular volunteer on the ship, which is run as a military museum and memorial to those who served on board LST ships during the 1940s and 1950s.

The ship is a decommissioned World War II amphibious vessel, which was designed to land battle-ready tanks, troops and supplies directly onto enemy shores. It almost is as long as a football field, measuring 329 feet in length and 50 feet wide.

Originally used by the U.S. Navy, it was known as LST-325 during the war, and then called USNS LST-325 during its Arctic operations in the 1950s. It then was used in the Greek Navy.

A group of retired U.S. military members — including Roald Zvonik of Moline and George White of Coal Valley, Ill. — paid their own way to Greece in 2000 to begin its restoration and changeover to a floating museum.

This type of ship was used during World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam War — and this particular ship was at Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

“Other ships, such as battle ships, received much publicity and glory for their accomplishments during these wars, but it is my opinion the LST was more valuable in its own right because of its capabilities,” wrote White, whom, at age 75, spent more than four months in Greece making the LST seaworthy. “No other ship could land on a beach and open its front doors for troops and tanks to storm on shore to battle.”

The history of this ship is fascinating to John W. Vize, who is piloting the ship with his son — a master pilot — this week from Hannibal, Mo., to Moline.

He said he especially is impressed because this is one of the few remaining ships in the U.S., if not the world, that can be tracked back to the invasion of Normandy. A documentary about the ship even aired on the History Channel, he said.

Although his son “runs tow boats far bigger than this,” John W. Vize said he hasn’t piloted a ship this big since his U.S. Coast Guard days.

“It will be a bit of a re-acclimation curve for me, but you don’t forget,” he said. “It’s kind of neat to think you’re going back to a place that was significant in history.”

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## **TRACK THE SHIP**

The USS LST 325 Ship Memorial is open for tours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the following days during stops in the Quad-City area on its summer river cruise:

- Moline — Arrives Wednesday, but tours will run Thursday through Sept. 2 along the riverfront, next to the Celebration Belle excursion boat.
- Clinton, Iowa — Sept. 4-8 at the riverfront landing where the former riverboat casino was docked.

The ship will travel past the Quad-Cities again on its way to Fort Madison, Iowa, where it will be open for tours Sept. 10-14. The LST is scheduled to return Sept. 18 to its home port in Evansville, Ind.

To track the ship online, go to <http://shiptrak.org/>. The ship’s call sign is WW2LST.

Cost for tours is \$10 per adult and \$5 per child under 17 years old, free for under 6 years; \$20 for a family ticket. All proceeds will be used for further ship restoration and maintenance.

To learn more about the boat at its dock in Evansville, Ind., go online to [lstmemorial.org](http://lstmemorial.org) or call (812) 435-8678.

## **What is this ship?**

This Landing Ship Tank, or LST, is an amphibious vessel designed to land battle-ready tanks, troops and supplies directly onto enemy shores.

This particular LST was commissioned in 1942 and originally known as LST-325 during World War II, and USNS LST-325 during its Arctic operations in the 1950s. Later, the ship was called L-144 (A/G Syros) after the U.S. Navy discontinued its service, and the ship was transferred to the Greek Navy.

The ship was launched for the first time Oct. 27, 1942, from Philadelphia, Pa., participating in the invasions at Sicily and Italy. On June 6, 1944, it became part of the largest armada in history by participating in the D-Day invasion at Omaha Beach.

On its first trip back to England from France, the ship hauled 38 casualties back to a friendly port. Ship volunteers say Navy records show that over the next nine months, the ship made more than 40 trips back and forth across the English Channel, carrying thousands of men and pieces of equipment that troops needed to complete the liberation of Europe.

The ship continued to run supply trips between England and France before returning to the U.S. in March 1945.

LST-325 was decommissioned in 1946 and sent to Greece in 1964.

The ship was acquired in 2000 for restoration by volunteers involved with USS LST Ship Memorial Inc., made up of retired military members. They paid their way to Greece, made the necessary repairs to the ship and sailed it back to the U.S., arriving in January 2001.

In 2003, LST-325 made a sentimental journey up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. It sailed again in 2005 before making Evansville, Ind., its home.

The ship continues to undergo maintenance and restoration. To read more about its history, go online to [lstmemorial.org](http://lstmemorial.org).