

MAJOR LANDING CRAFT OF WORLD WAR II

LC Gun (Large)

RM detachments of two officers and 31 other ranks served in these modified Mark 3 LCTs, which had a total complement of 47, commanded usually by a lieutenant RNVR. The craft carried two 4.7-in BL or QF guns on a reinforced deck over the tank well, with large quantities of ammunition above the water line. They also carried two or four 20-mm quick firing cannons. The craft numbers were:

1-4, 6-7, 9-10, 12-14, 17-25 of which Nos 1, 2 and 15 were sunk.

The G(L) built on a modified Mark 4 LCT, had a slightly larger complement and the two 4.7-in guns were mounted so that both could fire forward, with the second turret superimposed to fire over the forward turret. They also carried three 20-mm cannons. Intended for operations in the Far East, these craft had better accommodation, a ship-type bow and improved armour, compared to the Mark 3 modifications. Few were completed before August 1945, but the following were commissioned:

26, 27, 330, 334, 371, 424, 426, 449, 500, 680-687, 764, 811, 831, 893, 939, 1007, 1062, and probably some others, as there is reference in one record to No. 251. Nos 764, 831 and 1062 were lost in action.

LC Flak

LCF No. 1, formerly Beach Patrol craft (BPC) No. 1 was built experimentally in the summer of 1942, as the forerunner of a monitor-like vessel to bombard Sicily's defences. She had twin 4-in HA/LA guns with several 20-mm cannons in a modified LCT Mark 2. Her gun houses were on a deck over the well. She accompanied several night raiding parties before her first daylight operation at Dieppe, on the French Channel coast. She was in action on 6 June 1944 during the Normandy landings. Sunk by a torpedo while in the 'Trout' line on 17 August, there were few survivors from her RM detachment of 50 all ranks.

LCF No. 2 carried 12 or more light AA guns as an experiment in 1942, using a modified LCT Mark 2 hull. On 19 August 1942, she closed the beaches during the operation at Dieppe, and was sunk by shore batteries, with few survivors from her RM detachment of about 50. Some LCFs were built as modified Mark 3 LCTs, with an RM detachment of two officers and 48 other ranks. These LCFs carried 2-pdr Pom-Poms and 20-mm Oerlikons as follows: Nos 3-6 8 x 2-pdr + 4 x 20-mm;

Nos 7-18 4 x 2-pdr + 8 x 20-mm.

Later craft were built on a modified LCT Mark 4 hull with 4 x 2-pdrs and 8 x 20-mm guns.

LC Gun (Medium)

These purpose-built craft carried an RM detachment of a lieutenant and 13 or 14 other ranks, as part of the total complement of 31. The RMs manned two 25-pdr or two 17-pdr guns in single turrets. The two craft in action at Walcheren in November 1944, were lost. The remainder were preparing for the invasion of Japan when World War II ended. The craft numbers were: 101-112, 114-125, 127, 129 commissioned in September 1945, 144-150, 175-181, 184-186, 192-196, of these Nos 101 and 102 were lost at Walcheren.

There are records of what were probably experimental G(M)s: Nos 4, 53, 54 and 68. Nos 91 and 93 are also recorded but probably commissioned as LCR(M), these rocket firing craft did not carry an RM detachment.

LC Support (Large)

These were converted LC Infantry (Small) with armour over wooden hulls and in the LCS(Large) Mark 1 carried a 2-pdr anti-tank gun in the type of turret used by Daimler Armoured cars. The Mark 2s were similar but carried a 6-pdr anti-tank gun in the turret. Both Marks carried an RM detachment of eight other ranks, part of a total complement of two RN officers and 23 other ranks. On 6 June 1944 one flotilla of four Mark 1 craft, was in action off Normandy. The craft numbers included:

Mark 1 Nos 202-205 and Mark 2 Nos 251-260. At least four were lost. Records suggest that one LCS(L) flotilla, became RM LCS(L) Flotilla 900.

LC Headquarters

These were converted LC Infantry (Large) equipped as flotilla flagships and had first been designed as LC(Flotilla Flagship). The staff on these craft with Support Flotillas included the RM Flotilla Officers, their administrative staffs, and gunnery control staffs, as well as the Flotilla Flag Officer's personnel.

MINOR LANDING CRAFT OF WORLD WAR II

These craft were normally carried on Landing Ships infantry, which were a variety of converted merchantmen; some — like the Glen ships — were given a major refit to carry landing craft, and some were Liberty ships using their lifeboat davits and with little major alteration. A wide range of steamers, motor vessels, oilers and ferries were adapted in various degrees as LSI (Large), (Medium), (Small), and (Hand Hoist). The last were LSI(HH)s with their craft lowered by handworked falls normally used for ships' lifeboats.

Training Flotillas

These initially were all manned by seamen rates, although at Eastney in Portsmouth, there were craft in 1940 manned by Marines for training purposes. In 1943 RN officers and ratings continued to carry out the major part of the crews' instruction but by the end of World War II there were RM training staffs, with flotillas of various types of landing craft, including the following:

400–435, 437 and 490 of 1945.

In a typical change over to RM staff, 235 RM LCP Flotilla relieved the training staff of RN Training Flotilla 188 as early as 18 June 1943.

Some training flotillas also served in operations as Ancillary flotillas.

LC Assault

These wooden craft were 41ft 6in overall, with a well to carry troops. Flotillas were commissioned in the early 1940s with RN officers and ratings. But by the end of 1943 the RM flotillas began to assemble, although not all became 'formed units' appearing in the Admiralty Green Lists of ships and craft locations, until later. Some had been commissioned by RN officers and ratings before being taken over by the Marines, but most early RN flotillas were disbanded. There had also been some LC Support with RM gunners and seaman crews attached to LCA flotillas manned by seamen. For example Flotillas 504, 505 and 507 were initially manned

by seamen but each had an LCS(M) attached, other flotillas had two support craft.

The sizes and therefore the complement of flotillas varied according to the lifting capacity of the LSI to which they were attached. Of these the following have been identified as RM LCA flotillas:

504–510, 521, 524–529, 533, 535–565, 570–579, 590–594, 597 and 780.

A number of these, like '780', were manned by seamen on 6 June 1944 but later became RM flotillas. The records are incomplete, as, for example, with '126', which may latterly have been RM-manned. There were also two flotillas of LCAs among those converted to LC Navigation, with RM crews as 340 and 597 Flotillas.

LC Personnel and LC Vehicle Personnel

There were several types of LCP and LCVP, which were wooden assault craft or used for ferry work and ancillary services. The following have been identified as RM Flotillas at some stage in their existence:

LCP Ancillary Flotillas with either LCP(Large) of 36ft 8in or LCP(Small) of under 30ft, and sometimes with other LCP-types: Nos 441–449, 452, 477, 478, 469, 470, 476, 481, 490, 493, 495, 498 and 780. Others existed for short periods with RM crews.

LCP(Ramped), similar to an LCP(L) but with a ramped bow, and used to land personnel and stores. Those identified as manned by RMs were:

454 and 480

LC Vehicle, a wooden craft used to land 36 troops or 4½ tons of stores. Those identified as manned by RMs were:

455 at Kabrit, Egypt, originally manned by seamen, 456 and 491,

LC Vehicle Personnel, an improved LCV, used in ferry services from ships to shore. The RM Build-up Flotillas included:

459, 800–814 and 823.

LCP(Large) was originally a raiding craft but by 1944 many were being used as ferry craft etc. in Ancillary Flotillas. Those identified as manned by RMs were:

704, 708–711, 713 and possibly 700–702 and 705–707, although these last six flotillas were manned by seamen crews on 6 June 1944.

LCP(Medium) a clinker built coxle, this craft was intended for landings on rocky coasts, but an RM LCP(M) flotilla landed Marines from the Fleet in January 1945 at Cheduba Island.

LC Mechanised

Designed to carry vehicles or tanks, these were steel craft either Mark 1s of 44ft 8in overall or Mark 3s of 50ft overall. They could be hoisted out from many LSIs or used in ferry services after a sea crossing, for example, of the English Channel. A Mark 7 was designed for use in surf on Far East beaches. Some craft were built for RM Flotillas, but the programme to build 250 Mark 7s was not completed. The following RM LCM Flotillas have been identified, but there were more which did not become operational:

600, 601, 604–607, 609, 640–642, 665–669, 672–675, 680–683, 690, 691, 698, 901 and 903.

One flotilla might often be carried in several LSIs, with a couple of craft attached to the LSI's flotilla of LCAs or LCPs, and several LCM flotillas had both Mark 1 and Mark 3 craft. In June 1944, the RM LCM Flotillas on ferry work in Normandy each had 16 craft.

LC Support (Medium)

These craft provided fire support and smoke cover for assault flotillas, and had been manned by seamen crews with a small RM detachment of gunners, until they were taken over by all-RM crews. The LCS(Medium), of which both Mark 2s and 3s were in action on 6 June 1944 off Normandy, with twin-.5 machine guns, a 4-in smoke mortar (later firing an HE bomb) and smoke generators. The following RM LCS(M) Flotillas have been identified:

901 and 903–6, and there is one reference to No. 902 as an RM Flotilla of 1945.

LCA (HEDGEROW)

These adaptations of LCAs carried four rows each of six Spigot mortars; they were kept 'on the secret list' until 1944, and do not appear in many records of that time including RM Force orders. Three flotillas manned by Royal Marines from their inception, covered part of the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944. They were:

590 with 18 craft on 'Juno 2' beach, 591 also with 18 craft on 'Gold' beach and 592 with 9 craft on 'Sword' beach.

There are also records of 593, 594 and 595 Flotillas in training during 1944.

LC Control

These flotillas were deployed as individual or pairs of craft to control minor landing craft flotillas. They carried RM staff from time to time before the autumn of 1944, when some of these modified LCS(M)s were entirely manned by Marines.

LANDING CRAFT 1946–1997

Manning

Since 1945 all British landing craft have been manned by Royal Marines for operations, and have included the LCA(Large), able to land a Jeep or its equivalent as well as personnel. The LCA(Large) was later designated the LCP and the LC Mechanised Mark 9 — sometimes 'Mechanical' — replaced the LCMs of World War II. In broad terms these LCMs were larger than their forerunners, providing temporary living quarters for the crew. Craft were grouped in Assault Squadrons, the equivalent to World War II flotillas.

Rhine Squadron

In 1946 there were RM landing craft flotillas and SBS with the RN Rhine Flotilla. This had the role of moving Allied tanks behind the Rhine, if that had become the 'holding line' in Germany against an advance from the Warsaw Pact countries. The Marines at times had many types of boat for demolition work, had this been necessary in a withdrawal. In the early 1950s, the chiefs of staff decided that this squadron should become a royal Marine commitment, and in 1953 Marines began to replace sailors in the squadron which they would operate for the next ten years. RM officers captained LCTs and the Squadron's second-in-command was a major RM, its commander was a captain RN. Its craft included a Naval Servicing Craft Engineers (NSCE), equivalent to the world War II LCE which was equipped to do emergency repairs. The Squadron also had many former German air/sea rescue and torpedo-recovery craft carrying demolition parties. In the early 1960s this squadron ceased to be an RM commitment.

Elbe Squadron

In 1945–6 a squadron of craft with mainly captured German vessels, operated on the Elbe. It included many RM personnel manning small craft, for intelligence gathering and internal security of activities on the river.

Assault Squadrons

After 1946 the run-down in landing craft numbers led to a much smaller amphibious capability being developed, although these Squadrons were each capable of lifting more personnel and stores than their equivalent flotillas of World War II. And from the introduction of Commando Carriers in the 1950s, LC Assault Squadrons were embarked

in LPHs and LPDs as part of the ship's company. A Royal Marine officer commanded the Motor Launch (ML) in an Assault Squadron, as its forward control craft. The Assault Squadrons by the late-1990s included '539' which was organic to the Cdo Bde and two which were deployed on the LPHs (see Other sub-units of 3 Commando Brigade RM 1981–97 and Amphibious Units NOT under direct command of Brigade).

The Assault Squadrons had 6 June (Normandy 1944) as their memorable date by 1980.

Amphibious Warfare Squadron

In the 1950s and 1960s the Mediterranean fleet had an Amphibious Warfare Squadron which was employed in landing commandos and army troops for operations and exercises. The Headquarters Ship HMS *Meon* carried a naval and RM operational staff. Ships serving in the Squadron included at various times: LST(Assault)s *Reggio* and *Striker*, each with an RM Assault Squadron of eight LCAs; and the Mark 8 LSTs *Bastion* and *Redoubt*. In the Suez operation and elsewhere, the Squadron was reinforced being joined by other LST(A)s and LSTs.

The Squadron and its successors operated in the Persian Gulf landing tanks and army troops as well as RM Commandos. But once the LPDs and LPHs were established as the royal navy's principal assault ships, the Mediterranean Squadron was disbanded. However, a number of LSTs were operated by the royal corps of Transport until the late 1970s.

Forward Operating bases 1971–1997

In 1971 the Assault Squadron from *Fearless* established procedures for craft operating independently from a parent ship (cp: MOLCABs of world War II). They landed at night by LCUs and four LCVPs from *Albion*, to set up a base with radio communications, service and repair facilities. Such operations in the Arctic required — and require — special procedures. These bases were more mobile than their predecessors and were integral parts of RM landing craft operations. In 1982 the landing craft operating with 3 Cdo Bde formed an *ad hoc* squadron (see chapter 11) with its own base. And in the 1990s elements of 539 Assault Sqn could operate from a forward base.