



Andrew Higgins
1886-1952

Higgins - The Anywhere, Anything Boat

by George Nammack

I was 10 years old when we went to war with the Japanese and I rarely missed a chance to jog over to the beach two blocks from my Far Rockaway

New Orleans and at 26 he founded his own company, the Higgins Lumber and Export Co., importing hardwood from the Philippines, Central America, and Africa and exporting bald cypress and pine. As the business grew, he became owner of a fleet of sailing ships, at the time the largest under American registry. To service this fleet, he started his own shipyard to build and repair his cargo ships and the tugs and barges that supported them.

over its sides, exposing them to enemy fire in combat.

We followed Japan's use of ramp-bowed landing craft after Higgins directed his chief engineer to build a mock-up of the Japanese craft. Within a month, tests of the new boat in Lake Ponchartrain proved such a boat was feasible, the result being our LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), or simply, the "Higgins Boat". In time, its design included a full width ramp permitting troops to disembark en masse and a compact vehicle like a jeep could be carried aboard to be driven onto a beach. Machine gun positions were relocated to the boat's stern. A larger version called a "tank lighter" followed, the precursor of the LCM (Landing Craft, Mechanized). During World War II, Higgins industrial plants supplied the Navy with a variety of battle equipment: landing craft, motor torpedo boats (PT Boats), torpedo tubes, gun turrets, and smoke generators. Higgins produced more than 20,000 boats during the war. General Dwight Eisenhower stated, "Andrew Higgins is the man who won the war for us. If Higgins had not designed and built those LCVPs, we never could have landed over an open beach. The whole strategy of the war would have been different." Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret) said, "The

home to search the ocean for glimpses of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels doing their things. I saw the big gray guys like battleships, cruisers and troop carriers, also plenty of smaller craft shuttling sailors, arms and supplies. One of the more quickly recognizable was the rough and ready Higgins Utility, as Dad used to say with a smile, "...the James Cagneys of the service."

Before we entered the war, in the late 1930s, we supplied the British and others with some of these little scrappers, which were known in the service as LCVPs (landing craft vehicle personnel). By war's end, 199 Higgins had been supplied to the U.S. Navy. My friends and I found that boat and aircraft model-building was really fun and plenty of Higgins boats were fashioned from balsa wood and white pine. They looked great on our bedroom shelves and better on family mantelpieces. They looked best on the water, zipping along on a mission, their wooden "chins" jutting out, ready for anything!

Higgins Industries in New Orleans was among the first boat builders to produce the legendary PT (patrol torpedo) boats for the U.S. Navy. These were based on the prototype designed by Hubert Scott-Paine of the British Power Boat Company. Made of plywood and 78 feet long, the Higgins and Huckins PTs were formidable; the PTs built by Elco were two feet longer. President Kennedy's PT-109 was an Elco. It carried two torpedo tubes, four mine boxes and several fifty-caliber machine guns. The Higgins PTs got their awesome speed from three Packard engines, a trial speed of 40 knots sustained for an hour, and a cruising range of 500 miles. When the enemy saw those boats coming, they usually got going.

How did Higgins evolve? Let's look over our shoulder for a moment or two. Andrew Jackson Higgins was born in Columbus, Nebraska in 1886. He left that town in 1906, age 20, to start in the lumber business in Mobile, Alabama. At age 24, he became manager of a German-owner lumber importing company in

Four years later, in 1926, he designed the Eureka vessel, a shallow-draft craft used by oil drillers and trappers along the Gulf Coast and in the lower Mississippi River. It had a propeller tucked into a semi-tunnel in the hull, so the boat could operate in shallow waters where submerged obstacles and flotsam would cause other usual types of props virtually useless. He also designed a "spoonbill" bow for his boats, permitting them to be run up onto riverbanks and then be backed off easily. These boats were record-beaters. Within 10 years, he had so perfected the design that they could hit high speeds in shallow water and turn within their own length.

Higgins Lumber and Export was eventually put out of business by slumping world trade and the growing use of tramp steamers to handle lumber cargoes. Higgins clung to his boatbuilding

Higgins boats broke the gridlock on the ship-to-shore movement. It is impossible to overstate the tactical advantages this craft gave U.S. amphibious commanders in World War II."

The Higgins Boat was used for many amphibious landings including Operation Overlord (D-Day) in Nazi-occupied Normandy, and previously in Operation Torch in North Africa, the Allied invasion of Sicily, Operation Shingle and Operation Avalanche in Italy, Operation Dragoon, in the Pacific Theatre

(Guadalcanal, Tarawa, the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.)

The classic Higgins was 36'3" in length and had a beam of 10'10". Empty, they displaced 18,000 lbs. and could maintain a 9-knot speed. They mounted a pair of .30 caliber machine guns and could carry 36 fully-equipped infantrymen or 4 tons of cargo. With other American factories assisting, Andrew Higgins produced 23,398 LCVPs during World War II. Referring to our earlier James Cagney comparison, that's an awful lot of really tough chins jutting....

I would not wonder if a number of our readers would join this writer in a formal salute to Andrew Higgins.



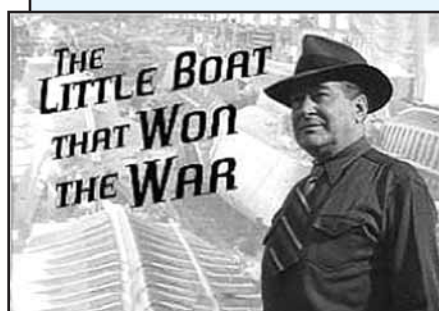
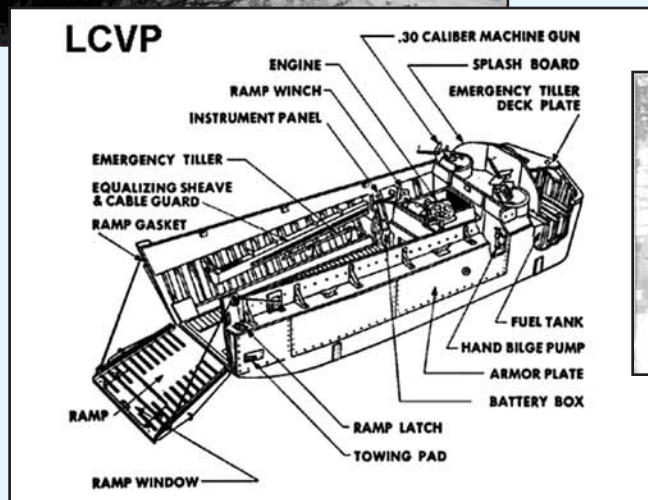
Overview of the Andrew Jackson Higgins National Memorial located in Pawnee Park, Highway 81 South (Andrew Jackson Higgins Freeway) Columbus, Nebraska.

operation, constructing motorboats, tugs and barges, not just for private firms and individuals, but for the Coast Guard as well.

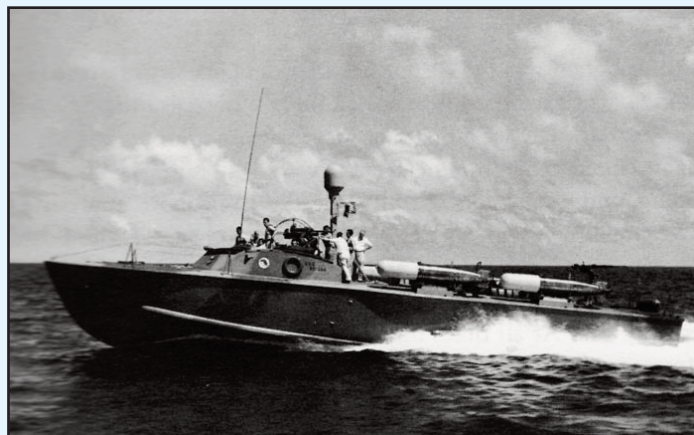
Enter the United States Marine Corps, which saw the Higgins boats as just what they wanted to get men across a beach in amphibious landings. They had been disappointed that the Bureau of Construction and Repair could not build a craft that could do that to their satisfaction. In 1938, the Navy and the Marine Corps tested Higgins' Eureka vessel and found it superior to the Navy-designed boat during fleet landing exercises. Its major shortfall was the fact that disembarking troops had to go

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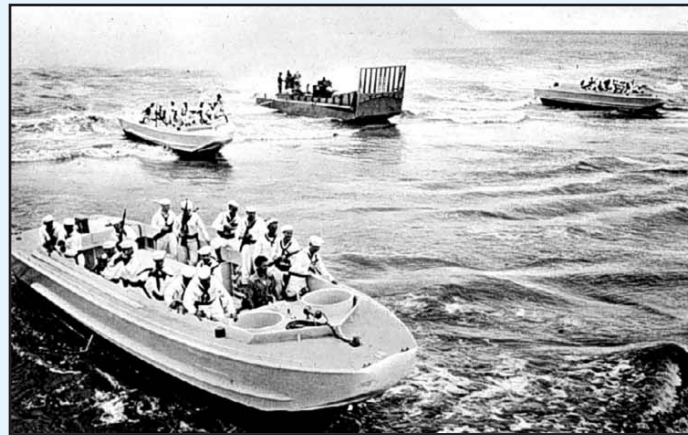
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During WWII, the Higgins Boat or LCVP was the epitome of littoral transportation.



PT 564 70' Higgins Hellcat.



Higgins boats, old Eureka model in front, new 1940 LCVP with ramp in back, from ILN 1942/03/28.



78' Higgins PT200 1943.