LST-124 GOES TO WAR

BY BOB BURR

Seaman 2C Martin Pintar served aboard LST-124 for his WWII tour. He kept a periodic diary of each movement of his ship from his joining up in Pearl Harbor on 6 May 1944 until his departure on 24 Dec 1945 at Noumea, New Caledonia. He wrote frequently to his parents during the war and they kept all of the letters plus a few which were never delivered and returned by the FPO service.

A copy of the handwritten diary, a compilation of letters with those hard-to-identify FPO locations and some online research allows us to detail a very busy wartime LST, some formerly classified data, and a seamen's communications to home.

First the details of LST-124:

LST-124 was laid down on 7 June 1943 at Evansville, Ind., by the Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Co.; launched on 18 August 1943; sponsored by Mrs. Hunt Greathouse; and commissioned on 24 September 1943, Ens. William A. Bartos in command. Unbeknownst to Martin Pintar, a shipmate named Leo Bednarczyk, machinist mate 2nd class was assigned to LST-124 during its built-out and launch. Leo relates later in this saga. During World War II, LST-124 was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific Theater and participated in the Marianas operation including the capture and occupation of Tinian in June 1944 and the capture and occupation of Saipan in June and July 1944 and the Okinawa Gunto operation which was the assault and occupation of Okinawa Gunto during May and June 1945. The ship was awarded three battle stars.

Upon her return to the United States, the ship was decommissioned on 26 July 1946 and struck from the Navy list on 28 August 1946. On 13 December 1947, she was sold to the Kaiser Co., Inc., of Seattle, Wash., and subsequently scrapped.

LST 124, Noumea, New Caledonia, Dec. 15 1945
Half mast flag honors shipmate Williams, burled in National cemetery, New Caledonia
Having passed his Physical in January 1944 Pintar started naval basic training “boats” at Great Lakes Naval Training Center on 1 February and was finished by 23 March 1944. After some additional training at O.G.U. at Great Lakes in April he is sent to Camp Shoemaker, CA. He gets letters send home on 12, 14 and 23 April.

By 23 April he is assigned to Treasure Island Naval Base for shipment to Hawaii. Departing on 24 April and arriving at Pearl Harbor on 29 April Seaman 2nd class Martin Pintar is assigned to LST-124 on 6 May 1944. Working for over two weeks he and shipmate Bednarczyk, Seaman 2nd Class Wes Freeman and Pharmacist Mate 3th Class Ernie Andrus and 122 others helped loaded the LST in preparation of the invasion of the Marianas.

In May 1944, the West Loch area of Pearl Harbor was unusually crowded with various vessels as it was being used as a staging area for the upcoming Operation Forager. Twenty-nine
Landing Ships, Tank (LSTs) were tied up, beam to beam, at six Tare piers. Many of the LSTs, in addition to carrying their own complement of munitions and fuel, were also fully loaded with the munitions, fuel, vehicles, equipment, and other general stores required by the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions for the invasion of the Marianas, that was to begin in mid-June. To aid quick deployment once ashore, high-octane gasoline was stored in barrels on deck.

In the weeks leading up to 21 May, the vessels and crews had all been training for the upcoming invasion. The LSTs were each crewed by around 120 Navy sailors or Coast Guardsmen, and manned by around 200 Marine loaders, drivers and mechanics. The rapid expansion of the fleet meant many of the crews were made up of inexperienced sailors and Marines. On 21 May, many of the LSTs had only half their crew aboard because, after a week of intensive training, most officers and ratings had been given shore leave.

At 15:08, the LST-353 moored at Tare 8 exploded sending a large fireball into the sky. The noise was heard miles away at Pearl Harbor Headquarters. More explosions of increasing intensity followed, sparking fears of a Japanese attack or even an earthquake. Fire and debris raining down on the fuel and munitions stored on the decks of other LSTs had caused an explosive chain reaction. Within minutes, 200 men had been blown into the water. Eleven wooden buildings on the shore were destroyed and vehicles blown on their side. In all, 20 buildings were damaged.
Initial efforts by the crews to fight the fires were impeded by the heat, although some ships further away managed to muster damage control parties. Many of the LSTs tied together at Tare 8 began to sink. Within the hour, Admiral Richmond K. Turner was directing fire-fighting efforts from a launch.

Various LSTs managed to move to safety under their own power or with assistance by tugboats. However, others were abandoned and allowed to drift, spreading fires, before sinking in the channel. Leaking oil ignited on the water also spread fires to Tares 7 and 9 even though they had been unharmed after the first explosions at Tare 8. Eventually tugboats and foam-carrying salvage ships from Pearl Harbor arrived to fight the spreading fires. One ship managed to turn a drifting LST away from a collision course with an ammunition ship docked across the loch at the ammunition depot.

A final explosion occurred at 22:30, while several LSTs continued to burn for 24 hours. In total, the harbor tugs Osceola, Hoga, and Geronimo, the net tender Tamaha, the chartered tug Mikioi, and smaller tugs YTL-233, YTL-306, YTL-307, YTL-308, YTL-309, and YTL-339 were damaged while engaged in fire control efforts.

In Bednarczyk’s words in 2002: “another one of the worst experiences that I had, it was a non-combat experience and it happened on May 21, 1944, in a place called Westlock, an annex of Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor has annexes called Southlock, Westlock, Northlock and Eastlock and we happened to be in Westlock and it was an area where ships with a shallow bottom such as an LST was, could go in and get their fuel and ammunition and in this case, there must have been 50 LST’s tied up in groups of five or six.

In our case, we were the outboard ship and the inboard ship caught fire. It not only caught fire, it exploded. We had skid loads of armament for fuel artillery aboard ship. The second one caught fire and exploded. The third exploded. The fourth sunk and we were the sixth ship and we were able to survive. Most of the sailors in this crew and most of the cargo were ashore. It was the middle of the afternoon about 3:00 when it happened. Since I was responsible for taking on the fuel, I was aboard ship.

My executive officer at the time could see what was happening and immediately summoned me to start the engines along with another one of our engine men, and we got the crew members to untie the ship and he just took us away. We started the engines and we gradually drifted away from the holocaust that happened there. We were just extremely fortunate."

The Westlock disaster remained classified until 2000. Pintar forwarded a letter on 24 May, three days later. LST-124 left Pearl Harbor for war on the 25th of May.
On 31 May the convoy crossed the International Dateline and arrived 7 June at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. Pintar posted two letters on 7 June at Eniwetok. The LST departed Eniwetok on 9 June as part of “Task Force 58”.

Convoy of packed LSTs enroute to Saipan.
The invasion of Saipan started on 15 June. By 18 June the LST had endured its tenth air raid by Japanese planes. It was the first LST to hit the beach. On the 22nd it was shelled and machine gunned by unknown sources. Pintar went ashore for souvenir hunting.

Shipmate Bednarczyk recalled: "because we had a doctor aboard, our small boats were assigned to go pick up the boys that could be treated aboard our LST. Our cargo hold below decks, when emptied, appeared to be a dancehall perhaps 40 feet wide and 80/90 feet long, became a hospital"

LST-124 left Saipan on 24 June and arrived 30 June at Eniwetok. Pintar mailed three letters from Eniwetok, 3, 7 and 11 July 1944.
Leaving Eniwetok on the 12th of July and arriving back at Saipan on the 16th, LST-124 prepares for the invasion of Tinian Island in the Marianas. Pintar mails home another letter prior to the invasion.
LST-124 supports the invasion of Tinian Island on 24 July leaving on the 28th and arriving back at Eniwetok on August 3rd. It departed Eniwetok on 5 August, crossed the equator on the 7th and arrived at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on 11 August. LST-124 now performs as a workhorse of the Gator Navy. Pintar gets his first Guadalcanal letter out on 14 August 1944.

LST-124 Sea Routes 11 Aug 44 to 1 April 1945.

Guadalcanal FPO 1st use of 6c envelope.
Pintar describes 17 August as making runs between Guadalcanal and Tulagi (in the Florida Islands north of Guadalcanal) (a major refueling point). 20 August leaving Guadalcanal for a Bougainville 23 August arrival with a same day return to Guadalcanal on the 24th. The ship arrived in time for Pintar and crew to see Jack Benny and Carole Landis at a USO show.

The next day the ship is arrived at Russell Island, departed on the 26th and arrived at Green Island by the 27th transporting New Zealanders and Aussie troops. Pintar left Green Island on the 28th of August for Bougainville by the 29th. Over two weeks since his last letter Pintar forwards a letter home on the 29th. Leaving Bougainville on the 30th LST-124 arrives at Guadalcanal on the 1st of September.

Pintar and crew do a visit and return to Russell Island between 5 and 10 Sept. 1944 and a similar run to Tulagi between 16 and 18 September. Pintar wrote a 7 Sept. letter from Russell Is.

Pintar, back in Guadalcanal, between trips wrote a letter on 14 Sept. (not shown). By 19 Sept. LST-124 has arrived at Munda, New Georgia Islands. It left the next day arriving at the Treasury Islands on the 21st and left the same day for Bougainville arriving on the 22nd. It returned to Treasury Is. on the 23rd for a few hours and left for and arrived at Munda on the 24th.

LST-124 left Munda on 25 Sept. for a 26 Sept Bougainville arrival. Between 27 and 30 Sept. it did the Bougainville-Treasury-Munda-Treasury-Bougainville circuit. Departing Bougainville on the 30th, until the 15th of October 1944, the LST did a 15 day circuit between Green Island and Bougainville. After thirty days of non-stop work Pintar penned a letter home.
Starting on the 16\textsuperscript{th} Oct. to 19\textsuperscript{th} Oct the LST did a Bougainville to Treasury Is. trip twice and returned to Bougainville. Arriving at Guadalcanal on the 26\textsuperscript{th} and leaving for Tulagi on the 27\textsuperscript{th} for probable refueling, Pintar now Seaman 1\textsuperscript{st} class, while there, penned a 29 Oct letter to home.

After a week at Tulagi LST-124 departed on 6 Nov and arrived 3 days later on 9 Nov at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides apparently for a 10-day overhaul. Pintar send two letters home during the 10 day visit at Espiritu Santo.

At Espiritu Santo, the 57\textsuperscript{th} Construction Battalion built a seven-acre ammunition dump and ordnance facilities, and rebuilt a portion of the 7,000-foot airstrip at Lugenville Bomber Field No. 3. At Aore Island, the battalion erected quonset huts for housing, 30 magazines for mine storage, and other installations for the mine-assembly, target-repair, and mine-recovery plants. On the same island, they constructed fifty 10,000-barrel bolted tanks for fuel storage, 25,000 feet of 12-inch spiral pipe, and 50 pump units. Other oil facilities provided at Santo included seventeen 1,000-barrel tanks for motor gas storage, two 10,000-barrel tanks for diesel storage, and twenty-three 1,000-barrel tanks for aviation gasoline.
Pontoon assembly was a major activity of the 57th Battalion. Pontoons were assembled into barges with propulsion units, two seaplane dry docks, bridge units, and numerous wharves. They also constructed a cruiser dry dock, 840 feet long, 55 feet high, beam inside 140 feet, width outside 180 feet, with 5-foot wing walls.

The 57th built additional facilities for the seaplane base and for Base Hospital No. 3. Hangars were erected at Fighter Strip No. 1 and at Laganville. The battalion also participated in the repair and restoration of a number of warships which had been damaged in battle and put into Santo for repairs.

After refit LST-124 left Espiritu Santo on 19 Nov arriving Russell Is. on 22 Nov. Leaving on 27 Nov the LST arrives at Manus, Admiralty Islands. A 4 Dec 1944 letter was generated for home. Leaving Manus on 6 Dec LST-124 arrives on 10 Dec at Peleliu in the Palau's Island, the westernmost travels of LST-124.

The battle of Peleliu, codenamed Operation Stalemate II by the United States, was fought from September–November 1944 on the island of Peleliu, present-day Palau. U.S. Marines of the First Marine Division and later soldiers of the U.S. Army's 81st Infantry Division, fought as part of a campaign known as Operation Forager. Due to Japan's well-crafted fortifications and stiff resistance, the battle lasted over two months. The National Museum of the Marine Corps called it "the bitterest battle of the war for the Marines".

Pintar wrote two letters home from the Peleliu battle area.
Map showing all Pacific travels of LST-124.

Top: Manus FPO  Bottom Pair: Peleliu FPO
LST-124 left the Peleliu war zone on 16 Dec heading for Manus Is. They arrived at Manus on the 22nd and departed on the 24th for Guadalcanal. The crew of LST-124 spend Christmas off the coast of New Guinea finally arriving at Guadalcanal on 29 Dec. 1944. On the 29th, Pintar forwarded home two Christmas letters he had drafted at sea.

Guadalcanal FPO

Pintar left Guadalcanal on 30 Dec for Tulagi and spend New Year’s Day at Carter City, Tulagi, Florida Islands. He dashed off his first letter of 1945 on the 2nd.

Tulagi FPO

Returned to Guadalcanal in time to leave on 11 Jan 1945 for a 3-day turnaround to the Russell Is. On 16 Jan returned to the Russell Is and for the next 12 days did runs between Banika Island and Pavuvu Is., temporary home of 1st Marine Division. Two letters out during this time.
LST-124 left the Russells on 28 Jan and beached at Kukum Beach on Guadalcanal.

![Image of soldiers preparing for embarkation.](image)

**READY FOR EMBARKATION AT KUKUM BEACH, GUADALCANAL**

before sailing for Vella Lavella. In the background is a Landing Ship (Tank)

LST-124 left Guadalcanal on 1 Feb going to Tulagi Is. and anchoring in Pervis Bay. On 7 Feb it returned to Guadalcanal departing the next day for Pavuvu Is. in the Russells. Five days later it returned to Guadalcanal. For the next twenty days LST-124 does a round trip circuit between the Russell Is. and Guadalcanal. It finally beaches at Kukum Beach on 7 March 1945.

The LST continued to support the Seabees hauling construction gear and supplies from island to island. From 9 to 10 March it conducted a trip to the Russell Is and between 15 to 19 March it was on a trip to Tulagi Is. From 20 to 22 March it's back to the Russell Is. again. After 6 days at Guadalcanal, LST-124 left for a few hours stay at Tugali arriving 30 March at Bougainville and beaching at Cape Torakina.

Marty Pintar managed to write seven letters from the middle of January until the end of March 1945. Six are shown on the next page.
Bottom to Top: Pavuvu Is. FPO, 17/25 Jan, Russells Is. FPO, Guadalcanal FPO, Russells Is. FPO, Guadalcanal FPO.

Time and the seawater was taking its toll on LST-124 and on 1 April the ship departed Bougainville headed for New Zealand for well-needed repairs. LST-124 arrived at Wellington, New Zealand, North Island docking at Queen’s Wharf on 12 April 1945 after 12 days at sea.
The ship spent five days in Wellington for repairs. On the 16th of April a ship's dance was held at the Roseland Cabaret for the entire crew. The next day, the 18th, LST-124 was underway for New Caledonia. Arriving six days from Wellington, the ship beached next the Nickel Works at Noumea.

On the 24th of April 1945 Marty Pintar threw a liberty at Noumea. He mailed a letter home on the 26th and left Noumea, New Caledonia on the 27th. On 29 April LST-124 arrived at Espiritu Santo where it would spend the next two months moving supplies between Noumea and Espiritu Santo. 8 May 1945 was VE Day. He mailed a letter every time he returned to Noumea, about every two weeks, with 21 June the last for a while.

These are all Noumea FPO mailings.

After 60 days of the same routine, the next few days would prove very interesting. On 26 June the ship departed Espiritu Santo for Efati in the New Hebrides Islands, arriving on the 30th and returned to Espiritu Santo on the 1st of July. Leaving E. Santo on the 3rd the ship arrived at the Island of Tutuila, Pago Pago on the 8th, left on the 9th and arrived on the 14th of July at Bora Bora in the Society Islands. Look at the map on page 12.

After 9 days at Bora Bora LST-124 left on the 23rd for Samoa arriving on the 31st of July. Departing Samoa on 2 August the ship arrived at Tongatabu in the Tonga Group, on the 5th of
August for an overnight stay, departing the next day for a five day passage to arrive at Noumea on the 11th of August.

VJ Day is celebrated at Noumea on the 15 of August. Shipmate Bednarczyk recalls, that while beached at Noumea, “Captain Williams announced the war was over and signaled the crew to put flags the full length of the ship. We had a cargo of beer aboard which we were not permitted to drink aboard. The LST lowered the landing ramp and every crew member was given two cans of beer to drink on the beach and the crew celebrated. Bednarczyk has a photograph of the entire crew in front of the LST.”

Pintar finally gets another letter out for home by the 19th the day LST-124 leaves again for Wellington, NZ. This time not in an official war zone. Leaving Wellington on the 29th, a letter is late posted on the 31st of August at Wellington, while he is enroute to Auckland, NZ.

During this time in Wellington and Auckland, through the 25th of September 1945 Marty Pintar is on R&R. LST-124 returned to Noumea on 30 Sept. and departed for a 1 Oct. Guadalcanal arrival.

LST-124 left Guadalcanal on 9 Oct arriving at 0900 14 Oct, then proceeded to Maraki for a 1730 arrival. Departing Maraki the next day for Apia (Apia) for a single night stay, the LST departed on 16 Oct crossing the equator arriving the same day at Tarawa. Departing Tarawa on the 19th and arrived at Tabetuea in the Gilbert Is. Pintar left Tabetuea and arrived at Guadalcanal on 24 Oct. He penned a letter home on 25 Oct 1945. It was the first letter without censorship since Pearl Harbor in May 1944.
The LST continued to make cargo runs to the Russells Is. Pintar wrote two letters on the 5th of Nov. He apparently forgot something important.

LST-124 left Guadalcanal and arrived at Noumea on 15 Nov. The job of LST-124 was basically over so she stayed at Noumea.

Marty Pintar, with his free time, wrote six letters home between 15 Nov and 22 Dec 1945.
Unbeknownst to Pintar, his parents had written three letters to him probably in preparation of the upcoming Christmas season. With the area still being on a war footing all mail was transported by ship. The mail never reached him because he was transferred from LST-124 on the day before Christmas, 24 December 1945 and assigned to Receiving Ship-Noumea in preparation for stateside transfer.
Three Dec 1945 letters returned to sender.

Pintar send two letters home on 26 Dec 1945. One was probably written Christmas Day about his transfer and the next with likely info about his pending return home.

Noumea FPO
Marty Pintar was reassigned to the USS Granville on 9 Jan 1946. He left the Pacific War Zone on the 10th and arrived at Treasure Island Naval Base, CA, USA on 25 Jan, a 15 day boat trip.

USS Granville (troopship-1945/6)

Pintar went home on two weeks leave and returned in early Feb 1946 to his new assignment aboard the USS South Dakota at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. He wrote his last navy letter home on 22 March 1946.
Battleship USS South Dakota

Marty Pintar left the USS South Dakota for Bainbridge MD where he was discharged from active duty on 18 April 1946. He was twenty years old.