

## Coxswain Amin Isbir



In the early morning hours of June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, my Great Uncle Amin Isbir, the oldest sailor of the 6<sup>th</sup> Navel Beach Battalion, Platoon C-8, was on board LCI-L #88 (Landing Craft Infantry, Large) along with soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and those of the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Engineers Brigade, heading East on course to Omaha Beach, Easy Red One sector. At 7:35 in the morning, Uncle Amin along with his commanding officer, Ensign Joe Vaghi and Seaman Ed Marriot and others in the platoon approached the beach without incident. In a recent phone interview that I had with Ensign Vaghi, he said to me, "Smooth sailing, all the way in". Ensign Vaghi was "Beach Master" for Easy Red One.

Ensign Vaghi continues. "200 yards offshore, the boat came to a halt and started disembarking the troops down the port and starboard side ramps. All was going good and then bam, a 88mm shell took off the starboard side ramp and killed many of the soldiers in a haze of red smoke." Not knowing the extent of the damage, the sailors dressed as soldiers moved forward to help the infantry move down the remaining ramp under increasing enemy fire. German fire continued to harass the soldiers on the beach as well as the landing party. Despite the increasing danger, Uncle Amin and Ensign Vaghi continued with the job they had to do preparing the beach as a Navel Hydrographic Team. The group now ashore, an Army officer approached Ensign Vaghi telling him what the infantry guys needed, which ammo, etc. Using a Walkie Talkie, Ensign Vaghi would signal the ship and what ever he wanted would be brought down to assist the infantry. The LCI-L carried about 200 soldiers and their cargo, including specialized equipment. Despite the continued shelling and random round that would rain down onto the beach, the sailors continued to support the infantry.



A short time later, Uncle Amin and Ensign Vaghi lent a hand to the attending medic as he attempted to place a wounded soldier onto a stretcher. Ensign Vaghi was on his knees while Amin was standing at the other end of the stretcher. "All of a sudden there was a tremendous explosion," that knocked Ensign Vaghi unconscious for a short time. Unfortunately, my Uncle Amin would receive a much more lethal blow. "What happened, as I later found out, was that some 5 miles from the landing beaches

the Germans had a railway gun." These massive guns were capable of lobbing a massive shell nearly 16 miles. "The shell from that gun landed nearby, hitting a jeep that flew into the air. Your uncle was killed when that jeep landed right on top of him. He never knew what hit him." Uncle Amin was killed, but like all other guys who were on that beach that day, there was nothing that could have been done to prevent it. Later that morning, a now conscious Ensign Vaghi would take it upon himself to remove ammo, grenades, and gasoline from another jeep that was set ablaze by continuing fire.



Weeks later Ensign Vaghi had found out from intelligence officers that the German's targeted the location of where he and Amin were by homing in on the radio transmissions he was making back to the ship. When Ensign Vaghi was told that the Germans zeroed in on his broadcasts back to the ship he couldn't believe it. "How they did that, I don't know, but that is what they told me." Nearly a year later for his actions on D-Day, Ensign Vaghi was awarded the Bronze Star for saving the lives of countless soldiers and sailors.

During my interview with Joe, he told me a lot about my Uncle. "Amin told me that he felt that he would never get home again to see his Little Woman," his common law wife, whose name he did not know. "He was a very religious man, very smart, and knew so much about being a sailor. He was the oldest of all the guys onboard and had the respect of all the other younger sailors. We had the best Company because of Amin!" During our conversation, Ensign Vaghi told me that Amin used to call him Mr. Vogli. In fact as our conversation continued, I too called him Vogli by mistake. Given the seriousness of our conversation, we laughed aloud together. I told him that I would continue to call him Mr. Vogli in our future conversations. It would be like my Uncle Amin was speaking to him again. Uncle Amin was 36 years old.



When I first started researching my Uncle, I found that his tombstone in Normandy and in McKeesport indicated the he was killed on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Yet history knows otherwise. I asked Joe if he knew of this and asked him how such a thing could happen. "There simply wasn't a way to take care of the fellows that were killed like we wanted to. We had a job to do. Two days later, the graves registration units tagged all of those boys Killed in Action on June 8<sup>th</sup>." He said that he was trying to get that changed. I have pledged my assistance in setting the story straight by getting my uncle's record changed. Not only will accomplishing this restore the memory of my Uncle, but let him lie in Peace. Uncle Amin was awarded the Purple Heart and received statements from the French Government and President Roosevelt honoring his service and sacrifice. The French Government also awarded him and all



the members of the 6<sup>th</sup> Navel Beach Battalion the French Croix de Guerre for bravery. In 1999, the 6<sup>th</sup> Navel Beach Battalion was finally awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and both Ensign Vaghi and Ed Marriot received the Citation personally.

Uncle Amin was the first of 11 children to be born in the United States. His brother Espir, better known as Izzy, was like a father to me. His brother J.B., my Step Grandfather, supported my mother and Grandmother during the depression and throughout the war years. His Uncles sister, my Great Aunt Della just met for the first time. She couldn't believe I was so interested in what happened to her brother. Until I told her what Ensign Vaghi told me about my Uncle's final moments, she too never knew the complete story. We now share a moment in history, a look back in time, reflecting upon his life, a life cut so short for the freedom of others.

In a very interesting side story, while in Florida visiting my mother this past winter I attended a Living History event held at Miami Beach hosted by members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division Reenactors. While visiting the camp, I opened up my photo album of family members who served in WWII. Contained inside the Album I have a photo of Amin and his brothers, Espir and JB. JB had been crippled early in life and his crutches were visible in most photos taken of him.

As I was showing the album to a group of reenactors, one asked me, “who is the guy on the crutches”? I replied, “that is my step grand-pap, JB.” The soldier said, “JB Isbir?” “How did you know that” I replied. Well his grandmother and JB were cousins. We looked at each other and couldn’t believe it. Now, my cousin Jim Ameen and I are close friends, having met via our mutual interest in honoring our family.



Ensign Joe Vaghi and other members of the 6<sup>th</sup> Navel Beach Battalion  
on the shores of Normandy again.

Ensign Vaghi is dressed in a bow tie.

Ed Marriot is directly across from the Navel Officer.



Jim Ameen (right) and I meet in Miami...