

Captain Les Ellison at D-Day Normandy

Dan Friend

One of our Charter Members has an extraordinary past. Les Ellison is now retired and living in Fleming Island, Florida, but during WW2 he served on two ST's, both of which are verified as being at D-Day. Much of his story is also in Gerald Reminick's wonderful book "Little Ships –Tugboats at D-Day Normandy." Les read about the discovery of the DeLand Warboats' history and mailed



me a large binder with tons of documents and articles which have aided greatly in my research.



Capt. Ellison in 1945. Les Ellison.

Les Ellison served as First Officer on **ST 761** which began training in February of 1944 with the large concrete "Phoenix" units that had to be towed over to build the two "Mulberry" artificial harbors in support of the D-Day landings. The small tugs went over with the towed units and began work on D-Day+1. **ST 761** was part of a group of four ST tugs at Omaha Beach that also were involved with the sinking of "blockships", older large ships sacrificed and sunk to create a breakwater for the ports. But the tugs also performed rescue and salvage duty often without a script. Here's what Les had to say about one particularly dangerous assignment: "We were assigned to move a barge loaded with ammunition onto a beach that had not been cleared of mines. It was just one of those things you are told to do, and you do it. Usually, the beach would have been swept for mines first. But they needed the ammunition. Luckily, we

carried out our assignment without mishap. But now I think back how deadly the Normandy invasion proved to be. " – page 211, "Little Ships-Tugboats at D-Day Normandy"

Les served on **ST 761** from June 7 –August 28th, and then was promoted to Captain of **ST 247**, another Army ST tug that had been serving at Normandy. Prior to Ellison taking over the boat **ST 247** was almost sunk when it hit an underwater obstacle and had to be beached to prevent sinking: a photo exists showing the tug on the beach at either Utah or Omaha. At war's end, Ellison received several letters of commendation for his work as well as being named a "Chevalier" of the **Legion of Honor** in 2009 by an appreciative French government.

Les and the other ST crewmen at Normandy were always subject to the risk of mines, attacks from German aircraft, submarine attacks, and shells from land artillery. His extraordinary service is commendable and we are proud to have him as a Charter Member.