

THE HIGGINS LANDING CRAFT THE BOAT THAT WON WW2

268



JULY 10, 2016



TAKING THE TIME ON THE 75TH ANIVERSARY OF D-DAY TO REMEMBER ANDREW JACKSON HIGGINS AND "THE HIGGINS BOAT"

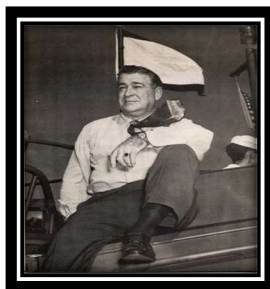
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Who was Andrew Higgins? Almost forgotten now, he was, according to Dwight Eisenhower, "the man who won [World War II] for us."

As General William T. Sherman observed, "War is hell." That hell includes oppressive taxes, loss of freedom, and crushing debt, as well as combat deaths. But once in war, as the United States was after Pearl Harbor, losing is an even greater hell. Thus we needed war entrepreneurs, and some—like Higgins—were given enough freedom to innovate and help U.S. troops finish the war sooner than expected.



Higgins in 1944

Andrew Higgins became indispensable because he was one of the very few men who could create and manufacture reliable landing craft to transport troops from ship to shore. Using landing craft in warfare was a key World War II innovation. Troop ships would bring thousands of soldiers within a mile or so of the coast. Then the soldiers would climb down the sides of the ships on cargo nets into Higgins boats (as his assortment of landing craft came to be called), **each holding 36 men**. The landing craft would then bring the soldiers into shore—a ramp would open at the end of the boat, and the men would disembark. Then the boats would return to the troop ship to load more men.

Higgins's boats were so reliable, so flexible, and so fast that Americans could reach many different parts of a coastline, not just the major ports. Thus the Higgins boats gave Eisenhower many options for landing spots in North Africa, then into Italy, and finally into France. The Germans couldn't cover the entire European coast, and the Allied forces used thousands of landing craft to hit Normandy beach on D-Day.

What's especially remarkable about the Higgins story is that he almost didn't get a chance to show the world what he could do. The biggest obstacle Higgins faced was overcoming the bureaucrats in the U.S. Navy.

In particular, the Bureau of Ships, which had the authority to buy landing craft for the Navy, regularly refused to consider Higgins's offers to supply various landing craft and PT boats. Why? First, the Bureau of Ships wanted to use its own internally designed landing craft. What's more, the naval leaders couldn't imagine Higgins, a small boat builder from Nebraska, having the answers to the Navy's needs. Therefore, they usually rejected his offers and nitpicked his designs, then purchased their inferior vessels.

With the success of the war, and his company, at stake, Higgins fought back. "I don't wait for the opportunity to knock," he said. "I send out a welcoming committee to drag the old harlot in." He openly condemned the Bureau of Ships for "prejudice" against his boats. American lives were being lost, he contended, because Higgins boats were on the sidelines. Jerry Strahan describes Higgins's battle with the Navy bureaucracy in *Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Boats that Won World War II*.



US Army troops as reinforcements at Okinawa, circa 9 to 14 April 1945.

Higgins called the tank lighter—the mechanized landing craft that carried tanks—built by the Bureau of Ships “godawful.” He added, “I want to say that there are no officers, whether present in this room or otherwise in the Navy who know a goddamn thing about small boat design, construction, or operation—but by God, I do.”

Of the Bureau of Ships, Higgins said, “If the ‘red tape’ and the outmoded and outlandish Civil War methods of doing business were eliminated, the work could be done in the Bureau of Ships very efficiently with about one-sixth the present personnel.” ***The bureaucrats at the Bureau of Ships loathed Higgins and rejected his superior boats, even when their vessels malfunctioned and killed American soldiers in transport.***

Fortunately for Higgins, the U.S. war effort was just decentralized enough to give him a chance to go outside the naval bureaucracy to prove himself. First, the Marines desperately needed amphibious boats, and after doing tests they discovered that the Navy's landing craft often didn't work but Higgins boats did. The Marines bought Higgins boats when possible and helped get a hearing for Higgins in higher tribunals. Second, Congress authorized the Truman Committee to investigate waste and corruption in the war effort. Higgins at last won a hearing from Senator Harry Truman and dramatic results followed: ***Truman demanded a “head-to-head operational test” of a Higgins boat and a Navy boat.***

HEAD TO HEAD

That was all Higgins ever asked for. In the dramatic contest that followed at Norfolk, Virginia, on May 25, 1942, both Higgins and the Navy had to have their landing craft carry a 30-ton tank through choppy waters. During the race, the highly touted boat built by the Bureau of Ships failed—and almost sank—while the Higgins boat dazzled the spectators. With the scrutiny of the Truman Committee, the Bureau of Ships had to convert to Higgins's design and immediately he began receiving important contracts.



Utah Beach – June 6, 1944

Shocked that the Navy had repeatedly rejected the best boat available, Truman launched a full investigation into naval purchasing and concluded, “*The Bureau of Ships has, for reasons known only to itself, stubbornly persisted for over five years in clinging to an unseaworthy tank lighter design of its own. . . . Higgins Industries did design and build a superior lighter, but was ignored because of a “flagrant disregard for the facts, if not the safety and success of American troops.”*

With a green light from the Truman Committee and the Bureau of Ships, Higgins expanded his New Orleans plant and frantically churned out landing craft. He attracted good workers from across the country for his assembly lines by paying high wages, offering free medical care, and providing great training and some community services. He hired black and white workers and, although he had to segregate them, he paid them similar wages. Getting good workers and training them was only part of his challenge. He also had to find loopholes in the new federal laws that limited wages and controlled prices and purchases. Higgins often had to buy steel on the black market, and once, when no bronze shafting was available for making tank lighters, he stole the needed material from an oil company in nearby Texas. (He later paid for it.)

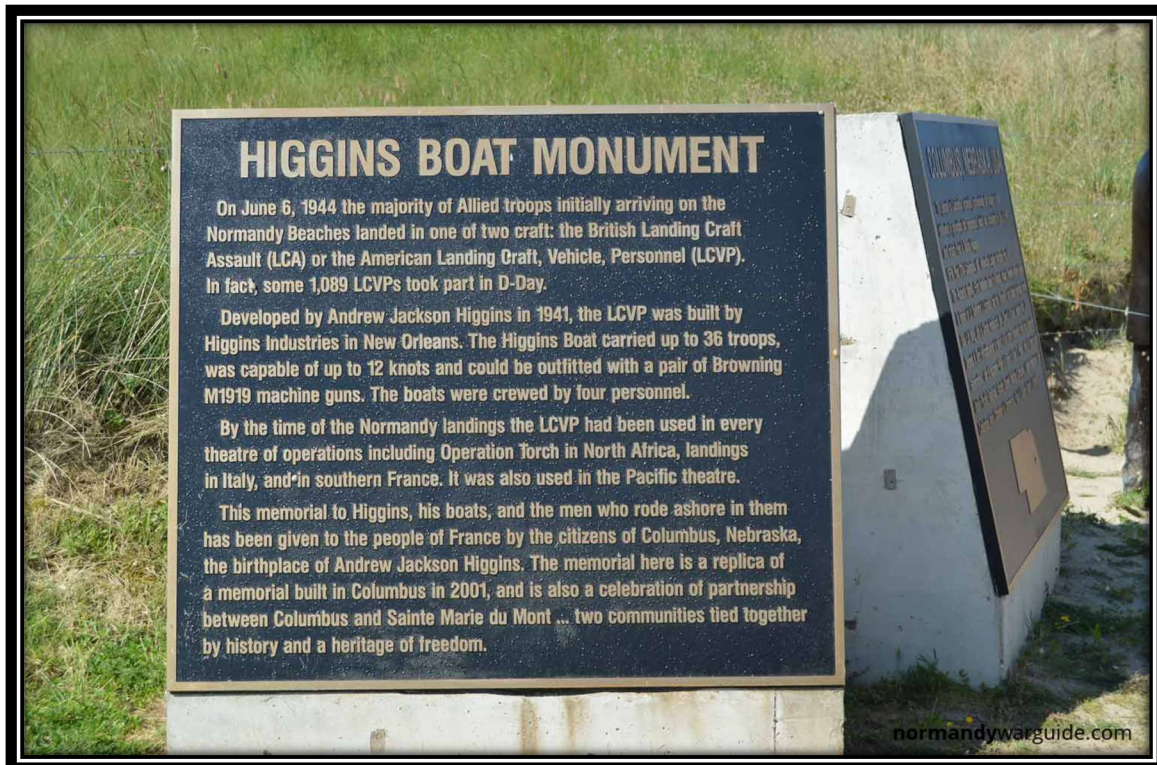
In March 1943, as Eisenhower began to prepare to invade Sicily and Italy, he had nightmares of shortages of landing craft. “*When I die,” Eisenhower said, my “coffin should be in the shape of a landing craft, as they are practically killing [me] with worry.”* The next year, when Ike planned the D-Day invasion, he said, “Let us thank God for Higgins Industries, management, and labor which has given us the landing boats with which to conduct our campaign.” *A frustrated Adolf Hitler, who could not stop thousands of Higgins boats from landing soldiers at Normandy beach, called Higgins the “new Noah.”* The old Noah helped save the animals; the new Noah helped save his country.

Today, a seven-block stretch between Lee Circle and Convention Center Drive bears the industrialist’s name. Nearby, at the [National WWII Museum](#), a replica of his famed landing craft sits. The lone Higgins boat lives permanently docked in an airy hall, its ramp lowered open, a reminder of the brave soldiers who disembarked there, and of one man’s invaluable contribution to the war.

The Higgins landing craft cannot be overlooked when discussing factors that led to the Allied victory in World War II. Andrew Jackson Higgins created the LCVP that brought the Allies onto the beaches of Normandy in 1944. *General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said that Higgins was “the man who won the war for us.”*

Higgins employed roughly 25,000 workers at Higgins Industries during the height of the war and owned seven boatyards and factories in the New Orleans area.

Higgins died in 1952, and Higgins Industries closed its doors in 1959, but the legacy of his invention lives on in wartime history.



If interested in more information concerning the “Higgins Boat(s)” **[copy the links below and paste them into your browser to view the video.](#)**

[MORE ABOUT ANDREW HIGGINS](#)

<https://militaryhistorynow.com/2019/06/02/the-higgins-boat-9-fast-facts-about-the-d-day-landing-craft-that-changed-history/>

[ADDITIONAL INFORMATION](#)

Instantly recognizable by its droppable bow-ramp, thousands of these small, shallow-draught motor barges famously landed American GIs and Commonwealth troops on the beaches of France on June 6, 1944.

The entire [Operation Overlord](#) plan, and by extension the liberation of Europe itself, depended on vessels like the LCVPs. Supreme Allied Commander, [General Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) admitted as much.



"[Without them] we never could have landed over an open beach," Ike said. ***"The whole strategy of the war would have been different."***

More than 23,000 Higgins boats were manufactured during the Second World War. The typical model was 36 feet long and nearly 11 feet in the beam. Powered by a 225-horsepower diesel engine, it could cruise at 12 knots (14 mph) and unload 36 fully armed combat troops or a 6,000-pound vehicle. Higgins boats were typically operated by a crew of four and armed with a pair of .30 caliber machine guns.

And they served everywhere — from the wind-swept coastlines of Northern France to the far-flung tropical shores of the Pacific — ultimately changing the very nature of amphibious warfare.



HIGGINS PT BOAT

Higgins Company also made PT boats during the War. 199 total Higgins 78-foot boats were eventually built and these included designations PT-71 to PT-94, PT-197 to PT-254, PT-265 to PT-313, PT-450 to PT-485, PT-564 and PT-625 to PT-660. PT-564 was strictly an experimental development while PT-657 through PT-660 were all cancelled for the war had ended in September of 1945. ***146 were utilized by the United States Navy alone while a total of 46 made their way to the Soviet Union. Seven were handed over to the British Royal Navy.***



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