

# 1945 October 22-28

## Navy Day 1945

### A Proclamation

To the citizens of the city of La Crosse, Wis.

WHEREAS, the Navy League of the United States has been officially designated by the secretary of the navy to arrange annual Navy Day celebration throughout the nation, as it has done since it inaugurated the first Navy Day in 1922; and

WHEREAS, this year with our country victorious in this most terrible of all wars this annual display of support of our Navy should be more complete than ever before, the Navy League and the navy department working in unison to this end; and

WHEREAS, this year has seen the fruits of the navy's hard task of winning the war against the Japanese; and

WHEREAS, the slogan for Navy Day, 1945, "A Strong Navy Guarantees Peace"; and

WHEREAS, the navy day should be made a day of resolution that never again will our navy be anything but strong.

Therefore, I, J. J. Verchota, mayor of the city of La Crosse, Wis., hereby proclaim Saturday, Oct. 27, 1945, as Navy Day and call upon all citizens of La Crosse to take part in observance of this day through the many channels open to them, and to join in the salute to the U. S. navy and its coordinated sea- air power, the marine corps and U. S. coast guard.

Hereinunto I have set my hand this 22nd day of October, 1945.



Mayor, City of La Crosse, Wis.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 October 23, page 7)

Proclamations are often issued in observance of annual events or to recognize significant achievements by an individual or group of people. Navy Day in 1945 was both.

[Navy Day](#) was established by the [Navy League](#) on October 27, 1922. The organization suggested October 27 as the annual day of observance to celebrate the United States Navy for two reasons:

- October 27 was the birthday of former President Theodore Roosevelt who was an advocate of a strong Navy to extend the power of the United States overseas and protect American interests
- October 27, 1775, was the anniversary of a Continental Congress report that called for the purchase of merchant ships to outfit as warships to create a navy<sup>1</sup>

In today's vernacular, one would also say that the navy was coming off a big win. The German and Japanese regimes were in the ashcan in large part because of the United States Navy.

Past Navy Days in La Crosse included a dance at the Avalon ballroom and a mass swearing-in ceremony for new navy recruits. This year, 1945, the year of victory in World War II, offered much more.

The star of Navy Day 1945 in La Crosse was *LSM-104*. LSM stands for "Landing Ship, Medium." It was one of the numerous fleets of amphibious vessels the navy used to deliver men, machines, and supplies to beaches. *LSM-104* arrived in La Crosse on Monday, October 22.<sup>2</sup> The ship had started out from Norfolk, Virginia, with two other ships of the same type. They sailed down the Atlantic seaboard, through the Gulf of Mexico, and up the Mississippi River. The masts on the ships had to be removed to provide enough clearance under the bridges spanning the Mississippi River.<sup>3</sup> *LSM-104* docked at Riverside Park for public tours on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.<sup>4</sup> The other two ships continued on to Minneapolis for Navy Day in the Twin Cities.<sup>5</sup>

Construction on *LSM-104* started on September 30, 1944, at [Brown Ship Building Co.](#) in Houston, Texas. *LSM-104* was launched less than a month later on October 21, 1944. The ship was commissioned on November 13, 1944. Key specifications:

- Length = 203 feet, 6 inches
- Width = 34 feet, 6 inches
- Speed = 14 miles per hour
- Range = 4,900 miles
- Crew = 5 officers, 54 enlisted sailors
- Armament = 1 twin 40mm anti-aircraft gun, 4 single 20mm guns
- Capacity = 5 medium or 3 heavy tanks, or 6 [LVT's](#) or 9 [DUKW's](#)
- Troop accommodations = 2 officers, 46 enlisted men<sup>6</sup>

*LSM-104* was one of 558 *Landing Ship Medium (LSM)* and *Landing Ship Medium (Rocket) (LSM(R)s)* built during World War II.<sup>7</sup> The *LSM(R)s* were fitted with rocket launchers to bombard beach defenses before an amphibious landing.

Even a small vessel such as an LSM required specialization of duties.

- Commanding officer
- Executive officer
- Communications and gunnery officer
- Commissary ensign (commissaries sell goods to the sailors on the ship)<sup>8</sup>
- Engineer ensign

- Ship's secretary (writes official reports and letters for the men)
- Pharmacist's Mate (the equivalent of an Army medic)
- Storekeeper (orders and manages all the food and supplies for the ship)
- Cook, assisted by three men to form the mess crew
- Ship's laundry (for the sailors' clothing)
- Quartermaster (navigator)
- Radar operators
- Radiomen
- Signal crew (hoist signal flags to communicate with other ships)
- Gun maintenance and loading
- Electrician
- Machine shop<sup>9</sup>



*LSM-104* docked at Riverside Park, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 27  
([NavSource Naval History](#))



An LSM unloading at an unknown location and date during World War II  
([NavSource Naval History](#))

LSM's provided a seamless delivery system of men and machines to shorelines around the world. These ocean-going vessels weighed almost 1,000 tons when loaded, but they drafted only four feet of water on the front end. They could be loaded at a port, sail to their destination, and unload 165 tons of cargo directly on a beach.<sup>10</sup>

*LSM-104* never saw any combat action. From its homeport of Norfolk, Virginia, it trained many crews who went on to serve in similar ships. Twenty-two states were represented in the crew at the time *LSM-104* was in La Crosse, including three men from Wisconsin. It was a 3,500-mile trip that brought the latter back to their home state.<sup>11</sup>

Lt. Warren Stringer, from the Navy ROTC unit at Marquette University, spoke at the Tuesday luncheon meeting of the Kiwanis Club at the Hotel Stoddard. He had participated in the famous [Battle of the Surigao Strait](#) in the Philippines a year previously.<sup>12</sup> At that time, he was a gunnery officer on the aircraft carrier [Gambier Bay](#).<sup>13</sup> His task force of six light aircraft carriers and seven destroyers stood up against a superior Japanese force including five battleships and nine cruisers. The American ships' aggressiveness and tenacity caused the Japanese to withdraw after most of their ships were sunk. Stringer's ship was sunk in the battle, and he and about 175 survivors floated in life rafts for 41 hours before being rescued.<sup>14</sup> Lt. Stringer also spoke to the Lions Club and the Rotary Club.<sup>15</sup>

Residents of La Crosse also saw plenty of naval aviation on Wednesday, October 24, as 77 U.S. Navy aircraft flew over during the day from [Grosse Ile, Michigan](#), naval air station to Minneapolis where they were to take part in the Navy Day program there.<sup>16</sup> This included 16 torpedo bombers, 16 [Hellcat](#)

[fighters](#), 15 dive bombers, and 30 [Helldivers](#). Two of the Helldivers landed at the airport on French Island because one had engine trouble. These stragglers departed from the airport at 4:30 p.m.<sup>17</sup>



Two of these Curtiss SB2C Helldiver dive bombers landed at what is now the La Crosse Regional Airport ([National Air and Space Museum](#))

The traditional dance at the Avalon was on Wednesday night, October 24. Joseph Snyder was the master of ceremonies. Music was provided by Don Kaye's orchestra, with singing by the Chords and Keys Trio. Sylvia Cobb and her dancing group performed, as did Elmer Walchak with his accordion for group singing and a square dance. Money raised by the dance went to Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard hospitals.<sup>18</sup>

Lt. Stringer was also the keynote speaker at the Navy League's dinner program at the Hotel Stoddard on Thursday evening, October 25. Judge R. V. Ahlstrom was the master of ceremonies. Junior and senior high schools had held an essay contest with the theme, "What the U.S. Navy Means To Me," and a panel of three judges selected a winner from each school. These students were honored at the dinner, and the outstanding entry of them all advanced to a state contest.<sup>19</sup> The winners were: Ruth Knothe, Aquinas; Neannette Mahlman, Logan; Ruth Sorenson, Central; Patricia Larrabee, Washington Junior High; Illadon Cruickshank, Lincoln Junior High; and Connie Saunders, Longfellow Junior High.<sup>20</sup>





—Tribune Photos  
**Navy Day Tags** were sold to most residents of La Crosse Friday by members of the Navy Mothers' club. Saturday was officially observed in the U. S. as Navy Day. Mrs. George Strittmater, 1314 Denton, is buying a tag from Mrs. L. J. Kaiser, (right), 1250 Farnam. Mrs. Kaiser's son John was discharged last Tuesday after 46 months of service in the navy.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 October 27, page 8)

Tours of the *LSM-104* were wildly popular. The first public access was on Saturday, October 27. A 45-minute tour included the compact galley, gun mounts, engine room, ship's office, laundry room, machine shop, and a water distiller that could convert 2,000 gallons of seawater into freshwater every day. At 10:50 a.m., the crew turned on the aft smoke generator that created a smokescreen hiding the ship. According to a reporter, "The wind carried smoke downtown, puzzling those who knew nothing of the operation."<sup>21</sup> The ship entertained and informed 3,279 visitors on Saturday alone.<sup>22</sup> On Sunday, October 28, another 3,885 people toured the ship. The last day for tours was Monday. Then the *LSM* and *LSM (R)* that had been in Minneapolis came downriver and rejoined *LSM-104* midweek for the trip back to their bases.<sup>23</sup>

After leaving La Crosse, *LSM-104* served in the United States Navy for almost four more years before being decommissioned on April 5, 1949, at Charleston, South Carolina. In November 1958, it was discarded from the Atlantic Reserve Fleet and sold to [Commercial Metals Co.](#) of Dallas, Texas. *LSM-104* escaped the scrap heap and was renamed *MV [Motor Vessel] Caribbean King*. The *Caribbean King* caught fire on October 15, 1974, and it sank two days later off the southern coast of the Dominican Republic.<sup>24</sup>

Just five years after the biggest Navy Day that La Crosse had ever seen, there was no more Navy Day; it was last observed in 1949.<sup>25</sup> The War Department had been replaced by the Defense Department, and the first Secretary of Defense, Louis A. Johnson, decided that the third Saturday in May would be [Armed Forces Day](#) to recognize all branches of the armed forces.<sup>26</sup>

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### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "The Origins of Navy Day," *Military.com*, accessed 2020 October 29, <https://www.military.com/military-appreciation-month/origins-of-navy-day.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Prepare LSM For Inspection," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 24, page 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Public To Inspect LSM 104 At Park Levee Three Days," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 26, page 1.

<sup>4</sup> "LSM Docks At Riverside Park For City Navy Day Observance," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 23, page 1.

<sup>5</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 26, page 1.

<sup>6</sup> "USS LSM-104," *NavSource Naval History*, 2018 June 1, <http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/14/14104.htm>. The single photo of LSM-104 on this website is captioned "USS LSM-104 moored pierside at La Crosse Wisconsin, Navy Day, 27 November 1945." The date must have been October 27, 1945, based on contemporary newspaper stories.

<sup>7</sup> "Landing Ship Medium (LSM) Landing Ship Medium (Rocket) LSM(R) Index," *NavSource Naval History*, 2020, <http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/14/14idx.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> "Commissaries celebrate Navy's 243 years of service," *Commissary.com*, accessed 2020 October 30, <https://www.commissaries.com/our-agency/newsroom/news-releases/commissaries-celebrate-navys-243-years-service>.

<sup>9</sup> "Invite Public To Visit Ship," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 27, page 1.

<sup>10</sup> "Scrappy Little LSM's Story, Important Factor In Winning War, Reflects Engineers' Struggle," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 26, page 12.

<sup>11</sup> "LSM Helped Train Crews," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 26, page 12.

<sup>12</sup> "Calls Surigao Strait Battle Example Of Stupidity Of Japs," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 24, page 12.

<sup>13</sup> "Navy Officer Tells Story Of Jap Defeat At Surigao Strait," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 26, page 12.

<sup>14</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 24.

<sup>15</sup> "Arrange Floor Show At Dance," 1945 October 23, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 23, page 10.

<sup>16</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 24.

<sup>17</sup> "Navy League Holds Dinner," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 25, page 1.

<sup>18</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 23.

<sup>19</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 25.

<sup>20</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 26, "Navy Officer Tells."

<sup>21</sup> "LSM Complete In All Details," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 27, page 2.

<sup>22</sup> "3.279 Visit LSM In Day," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 28, page 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Crowd Views LSM Sunday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 29, page 1.

<sup>24</sup> *NavSource Naval History*, LSM-104.

<sup>25</sup> *Military.com*.

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<sup>26</sup> "Navy Day-October 27, 2020," *National Today*, 2020, <https://nationaltoday.com/navy-day/>.