

THE PATENT THAT WON THE WAR

HOW ANDREW JACKSON HIGGINS' AMAZING CREATION HELPED OVERWHELM AXIS FORCES DURING WORLD WAR TWO
BY ADAM STANTON

Andrew Jackson Higgins was born in Columbus, Nebraska, during 1886. His early childhood in the then-remote State was unimpressive and little did the world know what was in store from this unique individual. During 1942, *Life* magazine published an article on Higgins and part of it summed up those early years "Two things seem almost certain: Higgins was interested in boats at a very young age, and he fought at the drop of a hat." His father was a prominent lawyer, judge, and newspaper editor but he died when Andrew was seven. His mother then moved the family to Omaha and money was scarce and times were hard. By age nine, Andrew was cutting lawns and had

several paper routes. He quickly learned to delegate — hiring other children to do the hard work while he supervised and collected the most cash. By age twelve, he built his first boat.

The brash young Higgins was often in trouble for brawling and would eventually drop out of high school. After a stint in the Nebraska National Guard, he left the State to work in the lumber industry on the Gulf Coast. During his time in that employment, Higgins started to think about innovative boat designs to improve how the difficult lumber work could get done. While navigating the swamps and bayous, he

conceived of a compact shallow-water boat that could remove and transport heavy logs through challenging, debris-laden waterways.

While improving his designs, Higgins bought a small boatyard in New Orleans and founded Higgins Industries. He branded his improved shallow-water boat, with characteristic flair, the *Eureka*.

The *Eureka* would eventually form the foundation for the iconic Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVP) or, simply, "Higgins Boat" that landed Allied troops not only at Normandy,



Higgins WWII logo

This watercolor on paper by artist Standish Backus (see "Artist At War" in this issue) is titled *First Wave on Japan* and depicts Marines of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Regiment, going ashore at Futtsu Peninsula, following that country's unconditional surrender. The large force of Higgins Boats is creating their own seas in the first test of whether the Japanese would resist or abide by the negotiated surrender terms. For the Marines, it was a tense five minutes since the Japanese would logically wait until the troops were at the shore line before opening a withering fire that could turn

into a massacre. Since there could be no preparatory bombing or bombardment, it had to be done the hard way — by head-on assault. The main group of Higgins Boats landed at Fort #2 while a smaller force landed at Fort #1 at the end of the spit beyond the hulk of a burned-out Japanese destroyer. The setting moon, which stood watch over the landing of the Higgins Boats from the transports, was now relieved by the misty rays of the early sun as portrayed by the artist.