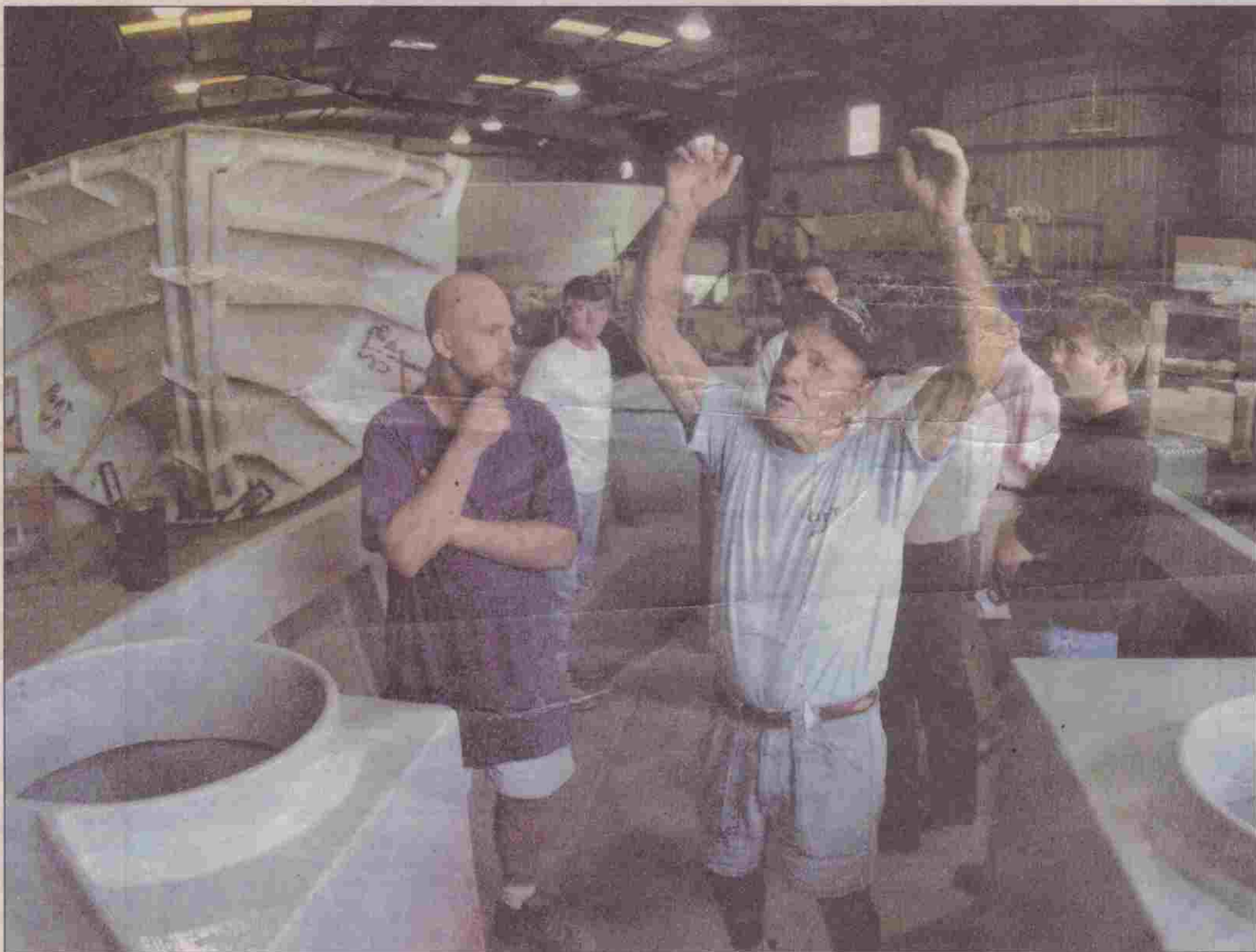


# WWII craft replica brings back memories for SEAL veterans



Boat builders from Garlington Landeweer Marine, designers from Applied Concepts and two World War II veterans talk about the LCPR (Landing Craft Personnel Ramp) replica.



Photographer: STEVEN R. MARTINE

Frank Meder, right, describes to Craig Cobourn how the waves tossed him around during World War II. Meder helped designers at Applied Concepts Unleashed of Stuart, on a boat building project for the UDT Navy SEALs Museum in Fort Pierce.

■ The landing craft, assembled in Stuart, will go on display at the UDT Navy SEALs Museum north of Fort Pierce.

By Martin R. Drummond  
of the News staff

STUART — Frank Meder's eyes locked onto the freshly painted World War II landing craft, and his thoughts instantly returned to a bullet-ridden scene 54 years ago in the South Pacific.

Though the air around him last week was heavy with the smell of fiberglass resin and fresh paint, Meder's mind recalled the diesel fumes and the staccato enemy gunfire intended to kill him and 19 others on the wooden vessel racing toward a Borneo beach.

As part of a Navy frogman team assigned to lead the 1945 assault by Australian soldiers, Meder was familiar with the left front corner of the 36-foot landing craft carrying him and 15 other underwater explosives experts.

Months of training inside the Landing Craft Personnel Ramp, or LCPR, had prepared Meder for one of war's most dangerous missions. He was to drop from the speeding boat, gather a 100-pound bundle of explosives tossed into the water with him and swim to designated areas to blow up landing craft obstacles, pass through coral reefs or underwater mines.

More than five decades after that successful mission, the Port St. Lucie retiree was on another mission Tuesday on behalf of the UDT-Navy SEALs Museum Association.

He and Bob Marshall, an Underwater Demolition Team veteran living in Vero Beach, were assigned the task of inspecting the LCPR replica nearing completion at Garlington Landeweer Marine in Stuart.

The non-motorized vessel is said to be the only one of its kind in the world.

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Meder stood next to project coordinator Steve French and pointed to the deck's left front corner. "When I see this spot, I see myself right there getting ready to go over the side. Then I see myself floating there in the water and asking, 'What am I doing here?'" he said.

For Marshall, seeing the just-built replica of his WWII job site was both a treat and a relief.

"We were afraid that it would not be as good as it is," he said.

By the end of this week, Marshall and Meder hope to see the LCPR in place at the UDT Navy SEALs Museum on North Hutchinson Island.

Former museum association President Andy Andrews said the landing craft will be placed in front of actual landing craft obstacles used in frogman training during the war and retrieved several years ago from nearby beaches.

"This will effectively complete our display of UDT training and operations," Andrews said. "About the only thing that will remain is making a rubber raft to put beside the LCPR."

The LCPR replica is the culmination of a six-year mission undertaken by Andrews, a former Palm City resident living north of Orlando. He and several other UDT veterans searched through sources around the world to find an actual World War II LCPR.

## **Andrews said other types of landing craft were found, but authenticity required the LCPRs because UDT members used that craft exclusively.**

Andrews said other types of landing craft were found, but authenticity required the LCPRs because UDT members used that craft exclusively because of its 15-knot speed, more than double that of other landing craft.

When the Navy Historical Commission confirmed there were no operable LCPRs in existence, Andrews secured copies of the vessel's original blueprints and launched a fund-raising effort to have one built.

Andrews called Whitacar Boat Works and was referred to French, who in 1994 quoted a \$9,400 price for the non-working replica. After four years of seeking money, the fund-raising goal was reached.

Despite sharp inflation in materials prices, French agreed to build the boat for \$10,000. His company, Applied Concepts Unleashed of Stuart, contacted a number of companies to assist in the effort by cutting their normal prices.

Garlington Landeweer Marine assigned two employees, Harry Shifflett and Craig Coburn, to assemble, laminate and paint the replica. The components had been designed on computer and cut from 67 sheets of plywood.

"It's a fairly simple geometric shape. The challenge was to cut costs," French said.

He didn't know how much the boat would have cost if built at market labor and materials rates. "It would have been much higher," he said.

Also assisting in the project was Kauff's Towing of Fort Pierce, which will transport the boat to the museum, and Mullins Inc. of Fort Pierce, which will provide a crane to lift the boat onto its mounting pad.

Andrews said he knew the LCPR wouldn't have been built without "a lot of pro bono."

"I really appreciate it. I think people in St. Lucie, Martin and Indian River counties know this (museum) is a real asset to the area. I mean we're putting 30,000 people a year through the place," Andrews said. "And that helps the local economy."