



LCTs 354 & 991 at tinian

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Officer-in-Charge LCT-354

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When the war in the Pacific ended in 1945, I was stationed at Tinian, one of the northern Mariana Islands. I was the officer-in-charge of Landing Craft Tank (LCT) 354, Group 39, Flotilla 13. Most of the bombs and equipment on the island had been hauled ship-to-shore by Group 39 LCTs. Cargo ships anchored inside the anti-submarine net in Tinian Town bay and the LCTs went to them for loading and took their cargo to Tinian Town Beach.

By July 1945, the construction of a breakwater and docks to handle up to eight ships was essentially completed. This reduced LCT work load to a minimum. People were rotating home, LCTs were being tied up in the small boat basin and LCT officers were taking turns as operations' officer for Group 39.

On July 26, 1945, I was on operations duty when the heavy cruiser U.S.S. Indianapolis (CA 35) anchored in Tinian Town bay in the morning. A call came from the Army Island Command requesting a ship to haul some cargo from the Indianapolis to shore. I assigned U.S.S. LCT 991 to the job. The officer in charge was Ensign James Fitzpatrick.

I decided to go along out to the Indianapolis as my good friend Ensign Telford Morgan from Warner, S.D. was on board. Morgan was a classmate at Northern State Teachers College in Aberdeen, S.D. in 1942-43 and my roommate for 12 months in V-12 officers training. Morgan was not available the first trip out, but we did have a good visit on the second trip. Morgan went down with his ship four days later when she was sunk near the Philippines (July 30, 1945).

The cargo on the first trip out to the Indianapolis was the lead-lined container holding the Uranium-235. Of course, no one knew what it was at the time. The container was the size of and looked like a converted 40mm ammunition can. That was the first load. It had a 100-yard long line with a buoy tied to it. Something that small setting in the middle of a 30-foot by 100-

foot tank deck looked rather incongruous. It seemed less out of place when someone finally threw a rain coat over it.

A crane was used at the dock to pick up the U-235 container and place it into the rear of a command car.

The cargo on the second trip was a crate about 8-feet long and about 4-feet high and 4-feet wide. This had a line and buoy attached also. When at the dock, the crate was placed on a waiting Army 6x6 truck.

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To bring this episode to an end, there will be no further documentation to the fact that after the Pacific War ended, the U.S.S. LCT 354 hauled three truck loads of unused atomic bomb cases out to sea where they were put to rest in deep water.

As an added note, the Nuclear Defense Agency, the National Archives, The Washington National Records Center and the Naval Historical Center all state that they have published histories of the event that do not mention the aid of another vessel in the transportation of the Uranium-235 off the Indianapolis. They adamantly imply that they are not interested in learning because the Indianapolis's log was lost when she sank, and the deck log of the U.S.S. LCT 991 is not present. Consequently without formal records, they are willing to leave a void in Naval history.

There was little celebration of note on Tinian when VJ Day finally arrived. It was a little anti-climactic as talk of something big had been going on for a long time. When the B-29 officers visited the Navy on the beach, they had rumors of something big in late June already. They had betting pools going in July on the date the war would end. The best kept secret of the war seeped across 7,000 miles without much trouble.