



my brush with history

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During my three years of active duty during World War II, I spent a year and a half in the Pacific Theatre of Operations on seven different LCTs. Our LCT Flotilla 6 supported the 1st Marine Division in the Solomon Islands, and we left from Tulagi in April 1945, steaming north in convoy, on a 3,600 mile, 36 day trip to the Mariana Islands. We stopped at the islands of Tarawa and Eniwetok to replenish our ships with fuel, water and food during our trip north.

When we reached Guam our Flotilla was divided into two groups, my LCT being assigned to Saipan and Tinian in the Northern Marianas. While on Guam I was the Executive Officer on two LCTs and the skipper on three others. During the latter part of July 1945, my LCT had been spending a great deal of time operating out of Tinian, shuttling between the beach and ships in the anchorage. Both Saipan and Tinian had large air fields from which the giant B-29's of the 20th Air Force took off for their bombing missions over Japan. Tinian was not a large island, and was located several miles south of Saipan.

Early one morning, while our LCT was anchored near the beach awaiting an assignment, we saw the cruiser USS Indianapolis, CA-35, drop anchor off the Tinian harbor entrance. Since there were no berthing facilities for such a large ship, and the harbor was relatively shallow, our LCT and another one working out of Tinian were directed to load/unload the Indianapolis at its anchorage.

After loading our LCT with eight-inch shells, food, and other supplies, we proceeded to the Indianapolis. We off-loaded our cargo and took on expended shells, empty crates, bags of mail, and other cargo which we delivered to the beach.

At that time we knew nothing of the Indianapolis' mission, but it seemed curious that it stopped at Tinian. The larger island of Guam, only 200

miles away, where huge stockpiles of supplies and repair facilities were available, seemed a more logical port for the cruiser. It was also strange, and disappointing, that we were denied permission to board the Indianapolis. It was customary and almost routine, when we serviced capital ships (battleships, carriers, cruisers, etc.), that the OOD would give permission for our crew to tour the main decks.

The other LCT was also loaded from the Indianapolis, and proceeded to the dock with its cargo. It wasn't until some days later, while talking to the C.O. of the other LCT, that we learned they had carried the cargo (contents unknown) from the cruiser to Tinian. The cargo, apparently highly classified, was heavily guarded.

Weeks later, after the two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the story of the Indianapolis' mission (delivery of the bomb material to Tinian), as well as its later sinking off the Philippines on July 30, became known. We who had taken part in the loading--unloading operation of the Indianapolis, realized that we had somehow been a part of the most historic event of World War II. Hiroshima was bombed on August 6, Nagasaki on August 9, and Japan offered to surrender on August 10.

In the half-century following the use of the A-bombs, much has been said about the decision to drop the bombs. Some have argued that it should not have been done, that it was unnecessary, that the Japanese could have been convinced to surrender unconditionally. Some have even suggested that Japan was ready to surrender, and that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki almost made them change their minds and fight on.

In my opinion, and I think in the opinion of anyone who has any first-hand knowledge of the Pacific War, there was no reasonable alternative. In their defense