

World War Two Memories of Robert F. Walmsley, Jr.

I am a June birthday boy. I graduated from The Choate School in 1944. As such, I enlisted in the Navy rather than be drafted into the Army. I had sailed since childhood and figured I would rather be Navy.

I was immediately sent to Samson Boot Camp. After a one week leave, I reported back to Samson and then immediately rode a Pullman train car to California, where I wound up in San Diego and in amphibious training.

After that training, I was assigned to the U.S.S. LaGrange, APA124.

We proceeded to do further drills of loading and unloading LCVPs. Until December 30, 1944. On that day we were asked to move back from the dock at Long Beach, CA so that a ship could come in in front of us.

That ship was the battleship New York where my cousin was Gunnery Officer. I Was able to convince one the officers to let me go to the New York to have a few words with my cousin and the next day on December 31, 1944 the La Grange left for the Pacific.

After traversing the Pacific, my assignment at sea was the fore deck, to observe for "anything". My buddy from boot camp was assigned to the bridge to receive communications from other parts of the ship. I started chatting with him over the line, and we talked about where we wanted to go to college after the war. The officer on deck Eph Williams, a 1944 day wonder, who had just graduated college and received his commission, had just graduated from Williams College. He told me that I could be court-martialled for-discussing personal garbage on the line. Because I had stated that one of the colleges that I was considering was Williams, he had the epiphany to assign me to the ship post office. Which meant that when we arrived in port, I was the first to go ashore to pick up the mail. Which was better than being court martialled .

After various island stops we proceeded to Leyte Gulf which is in the Philippines. Where we proceeded to pick up the 306th infantry regiment. This regiment is part of the 77th Division. We then proceeded , in convoy , with other ships to Karamo Retto. These are islands off of Nara, Okinawa. These islands, with submarine nets, became an off shore harbor and were taken by the US a week before the actual invasion of Okinawa.

In addition to being the mailman, I was a landing craft driver. Each craft had a group of three guys who took turns driving the boat. The others made sure the front went up and down.

Our island to attack was named Tokashiki. However, it was decided that the sea was too rough to attempt a landing there. So instead two landing craft, which I was one of, with an exploratory group, went to Kubeshima, another island instead. The zeroes (airplanes) were coming to attack and so the LaGrange pulled out and we were told to either go ashore and dig a foxhole or stay on the boat near to the shore. We elected to stay with the boat.

And lo and behold, the tide went out and we were left high and dry at the beach without reinforcements. The next day the LaGrange came back and the troops invaded Tokashiki and we, when the tide turned, returned to the ship and were given the next shift off.

We then had a front row seat for the invasion of Okinawa. Later on we and several other ships, went to the other side of Okinawa and did a fake invasion with no troops, to relieve the pressure of our forces on Okinawa.

We then proceeded to go back to the Karama Retto and pick up our troops for the invasion of Ie Shima. One of our passengers we picked up was Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent.

The scheduled invasion of Ie Shima was for April 16, 1944. When we arrived for the assault, there was the Battleship New York, blasting away at the beaches and I hoped that my cousin would not shoot me in the bombardment.

Two days later Ernie Pyle went ashore and was killed inland.

Part of the job of the landing craft driver is to get the troops to shore and then high tail it back to the LaGrange to reload.

We left our troops there at Ie Shima and we were ordered to return to the U.S. where the ship was put in dry dock and the bottom scrapped and painted. I, to this day, do not understand why this was done at that time since this was a brand new ship and seemed to be in good order and in better shape than other ships.

We were in the US for two weeks in Oakland, CA in which everyone was granted leave of one week. I used my week to travel to New York City to visit my widowed mother and make my way back to Oakland. During the two weeks the ship proceeded to load up with heavy weather gear for the landings anticipated in Japan.

We then proceeded back to Okinawa where we anchored in Buckner Bay. We then got news that a new bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on the 6th of August, 1945. We heard this news from both the US radio and Tokyo Rose. We listened to both and added the two together and divided by two and figured there was some truth in both.

We asked for the surrender of Japan which was refused. On August 9, 1945 the US dropped a second bomb on the city of Nagasaki and Japan acknowledged defeat. That night every ship in the harbor exploded with gunfire in celebration, why some weren't killed I don't understand. It was the most awesome 4th of July style celebration I have ever witnessed.

On the 13 of August 1945 while we were at anchor in Buckner Bay, I and a friend were holed up on an LCVP on the starboard side of the ship when we heard a plane flying low. The Japanese manned plane crashed into our port side with a 500 pound bomb attached to it. We jumped out of our LCVP and raced for our general quarters position when we heard another plane approaching. This Japanese plane was also carrying a 500 pound bomb and it too proceeded to slam into the La Grange near the same area as the other plane. 21 Sailors died and 89 were wounded.

They were able to do field repairs and headed back to San Francisco where the ship was decommissioned. We were then given leave and I was told to report to the Brooklyn Navy Yard which was a mile from where my mother lived.

Since I did not have enough points to be discharged, I was ordered to report to Key West in Florida where I was assigned to a destroyer that went out to sea while an American controlled German Uboat fired acoustic torpedoes at us and we attempted all manner of things to disrupt the acoustic torpedo. None of which worked. On the weekend we chugged up to Charleston, SC went in to dry dock, changed the screws on the destroyer, sailed back to Key West and started the chase of the U boat all over again.

In June of 1946 after 2 years, two days and 2.5 hours I finally had enough points to be discharged and get back to going to Williams College.