

An Easter Remembered

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April 1, 1945 — Easter Sunday, April Fool's Day, and most important at the moment, "D-Day at Okinawa.

LST 884 had come a long way since being built in Pittsburgh— Panama, Pearl Harbor, Marshall Islands, D-Day plus two weeks at Iwo Jima, Saipan for repairs and now D-Day minus one at Okinawa, We were carrying a crew of 109 sailors, including myself, and about three hundred marines. Our tank deck was loaded with amtraks, amphibious ducks and other equipment needed to secure a beach-head. In addition we were carrying tons and tons of ammunition.

At about 6pm our skipper received orders to move up in the convoy of some 30 to 35 ships to position near the center of the pack. The next morning, April 1, at about 5:30 and after a night of very little sleep and a lot of prayers the alarm sounded for General Quarters. We knew it was NOT a drill.

Within 10 minutes we were informed over the public address system that a number of enemy planes were spotted on our radar screens. Soon we were firing everything we had in an effort to form a blanket of anti-aircraft fire as protection against enemy planes.

Suddenly, someone shouted "plane coming in at 9:00". It was a Japanese dive bomber. At about 100 yards we hit the plane, but it kept coming. When it hit us on the port side, just above water line, all our ammo seemed to explode at once.

Within minutes word was passed to abandon ship. The fire was out of control and more ammo was exploding within the tank deck. We were in the East China Sea. We made every effort to locate the wounded and put them on life rafts, while we who were not wounded held onto lines attached to the rafts. We were in shark infested waters and at the same time concerned about being strafed by enemy planes overhead. Some two or three hours later it appeared that the last group was lifted from the water. This was the group I was with.

Soon afterward, I was talking with another sailor on the ship that had pulled us from the sea and learned he was from my hometown, Charleston, West Virginia. He arrived home well before I did and went immediately to my home and told my parents what had happened and assured them I was unhurt and doing well. His deed was appreciated.

Every Easter, I think about those who never came back, and I wonder about the son of one of my teammates who was born while his father was at sea — a son who never got to see his father.

NOTE: During the Fall of the year 2001, while I was trying to locate some of my old shipmates from LST 884, as luck would have it, I found the "son who never got to see his dad" in Dallas, Texas. This was a real shock to me but a happy one. His name is Stuart Flockencier and he was 57 years old at that time. I invited him to attend our reunion which was to be in Mobile that fall. That turned out to be the most exciting moment of my life.

After we lost our ship the crew was sent back to Pearl Harbor for re-assignment, but before we split up for our new assignments we took up a collection and purchased a \$1000 War Bond to be delivered to his mother and indicated we would like for that to be used for Stuart's education when that time arrived. Stuart wanted to tell us that he did, indeed, use that bond as intended and that it got him a BS Degree in Engineering from Michigan State University. He thanked us many times for that bond. What a great story. Stuart has not missed a reunion since.