

Homecoming, 1946

By: Van Christo

The U.S.S. Chaffee/DE 230, the ship on which I served during World War II was anchored in Bunckner Bay, Okinawa, when it was announced over the PA System that the Japanese had surrendered. The sounds of Hooray! sounded everywhere on the ship-above and below decks.

For me, personally, there was a moment of disbelief since the realization of the war's end would mean going back to America and the eventual discharge from the Navy. I was going home!

As I lay on my bunk that same evening, I recalled the events that led up to the Japanese surrender—the dropping by the U.S. of two atomic bombs—one on Hiroshima and the other on Nagasaki some months before.

I was standing watch as a Quartermaster Petty Officer in the Chaffee's Pilot House when Ken Bowden, a radioman in the Radio Shack just below the Pilot House, rushed by me and up the three steps to the bridge to hand the Captain, A.C. Jones, the message that an American bomber had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima that caused massive, unbelievable destruction by a single bomb. As the Captain read the message aloud on the Bridge, everyone was quiet. There were no cheers—just awed silence.

Although during “boot camp” training days, to inspire hatred and to cause us to view the Japanese as our enemy, recruits were shown classified films showing atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Chinese and others, my shipmates just couldn't comprehend the meaning of an atomic bomb.

We didn't really understand and someone volunteered, “ I think it's a radio bomb. A radio bomb? What the Hell is that?”, someone wondered aloud. A radio bomb sounded ominous to me.

Nonetheless, the two atomic bombs did, in fact, herald the end of the war a few months later with the announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies.

My ship was in Leyte Gulf in the Philippines when we received orders to depart for Pearl Harbor, and then, on to San Francisco, where I and some eligible shipmates would receive orders to go to a Receiving Station- the Fargo Building in Boston to be processed for discharge from the Navy. I remember going underway from Mindanao in the Southern Philippines en route to Pearl Harbor.

Although I was a Quartermaster Petty Officer involved in navigation duties, I was a qualified signalman and stood watch in that capacity on the bridge since a couple of signalmen had already left the ship for the States. However, standing signal watch on the Bridge was a bit of a lark for me since there were no assigned duties other than to receive signal light messages from any other ship along the way, whereas, my Quartermaster duties required four hourly postings in the Ship's

log in my QM station in the pilot House-such as logging the ship's course, time, date, speed, cloud and ocean conditions and others. Also, because the War was over, the ship was lighted at night, unlike war time conditions when everything was darkened above decks. Now all compartment hatches above decks were illuminated creating a festive atmosphere.

Upon entering Pearl Harbor, we cruised in silence as we witnessed the sunken Navy Battleships and other vessels bombed by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. It was a sorrowful time for all of us as we personally witnessed the massive destruction caused by the attack. We were also aware that thousands had died and many were still in the harbor.

Nevertheless, after we tied up, most of the crew were given liberty on shore. With several of my shipmates, we headed to a recommended restaurant where we all ordered steaks with all the trimmings along with drinks, drinks, drinks.

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