War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: LaFayette, Ohio
Age: Not given

I was inducted into the Navy on June 21, 1943. After training at the Great Lakes Naval Training School, I was assigned to the *U.S.S. Starlight*, a C-2 cargo ship that had been converted to a troop transport. D-Day in Europe found us on the way to Pearl Harbor. I would not return home again until the war was over. My job was in the engine room, where I was the throttleman. It was a hot job, but I enjoyed it. We were able to smoke and the Navy supplied us with cigarettes for five cents a pack. I was called the "old man" because I was 21 and most of the crew was younger. It still amazes me that boys were able to operate that large ship. When we were transporting troops, we sometimes had 3,000 men on board. They had to eat standing up.

At Pearl Harbor, we saw the terrible destruction the Japs had made on our fleet. After picking up more men and supplies, we sailed for Guam as part of the invasion force. We then went on to Leyte and then to the invasion of the Philippines. As we unloaded Army reinforcements, our ship was under attack by Kamikazes during the eight hours it took to unload men and equipment. We shot down two Jap planes and never took a hit.

I can recall seeing those Marines and Army boys with their heavy packs scramble down the nets and try to get into the amphibious boats for beach landings. Sometimes they miss-timed the jump in rough seas or were let out in water too deep and just disappeared under the waves. By the time we were ordered to Okinawa, the crew was well seasoned and we sustained no casualties, in spite of the large scale air attacks. When the fleet was traveling through the islands at night with no lights and radio silence, it was a wonder they didn't run into each other.

Being in the engine room, I was somewhat insulated from the action and never really thought I was in harm's way. It must be true that young men think they are invincible, because everyone knew that if we were torpedoed, there was no way anyone in the engine room would survive.

The ship returned to San Francisco for repairs. We knew the U.S. would eventually invade Japan and half of our crew was replaced by new men fresh from boot camp. We were not looking forward to that. But, on August 15, 1945, a week after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the captain reported that the crew "quietly heard the news of Japan's surrender." Finally, I was able to go home.

My wife Wanda and I were married on the same day I took my physical for the Navy – October 2, 1942 – and she waited patiently for me to return. When I did come home, I had planned to take it easy for a while. One morning, I woke up and asked Wanda why she was still home. Much to my surprise, she replied, "I quit my job!" So, my vacation was over and I returned to work at Westinghouse. We were married for 68 years before her death in 2010.

At one point in my life, I owned and operated a Pure Oil gas station in LaFayette. I was thankful for my fireman's training in the Navy when I found myself on the volunteer fire department. The grain elevator had caught fire and I happened to be the only fireman in town to put it out. I grabbed my nephew and the two of us were able to put the fire out.

I made some good friends while in the service, visiting some many years later. I loved the sea and to this day still love the salty air. I never thought much about being in the war except to wonder why I was one of the lucky ones to return home. The other day, I was wearing my WWII veteran's hat and a young boy saluted me. That made me very proud of my service.