

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

I served as Medical Officer of the *USS Russell*, a World War II destroyer, from 1943 to 1945. After almost two years in the Pacific, during which my ship was engaged in eight major engagements, I received orders to return to the States. I arrived in San Francisco in early May, 1945 and boarded a DC3 to the east coast on my final leg home. Although it was a commercial airliner, almost all the passengers were military. When we were over Omaha, the plane captain announced that Germany had surrendered. The news was expected, so the celebration didn't last long. Most of us expected to be back in the Pacific to the war we had left.

We approached New York at dusk and the plane captain announced that he would fly over the Statue of Liberty. He said that we might not be able to see it in the darkness that was coming on, because the light in Liberty's torch had been blacked out since the start of the war. We all crowded to the windows hoping to catch a glimpse of the statue. The next few moments were a once-in-a-lifetime experience. As we gazed down in the gloom, the statue first appeared as a dark mass. From the torch in Lady Liberty's raised hand, a tiny lamp began to glow. At first it seemed no brighter than a match. Gradually it became brighter and brighter — like a huge white flower opening until it lit up the sky. The Statue of Liberty torch, dark through the years of the war, was turned on again. It was V-E Day, Victory in Europe.

If there's a point to this story it's this: To those of us returning from the battlefield, the Statue of Liberty that we crawled over each other in our anxiety to see was a symbol that stood for why we had gone to war. So many of our friends, comrades, and loved ones, had died protecting that symbol, assuring that the torch in Liberty's hand would remain bright to light up our lives, our country, our world, our planet.