

Witnessing General MacArthur and the Armistice in Tokyo Bay in 1945

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While I may not have realized the enormity of the event at the time, as a young seaman aboard the heavy cruiser USS SAINT PAUL which was moored close to the Battleship MISSOURI in Tokyo Bay. I witnessed the signing of the World War II armistice with General MacArthur.

Let me tell you how my story started in the service about 70 years ago, and re-started in 1996 when Supervisor Linda Puglisi and Councilman Mike Mongero (a fellow WWII veteran) formed the Veterans Council of Courtland (NY), with veterans from Van Cortlandville, Verplanck, Montrose and the surrounding areas. When they asked us to relate our stories of being in the military service that is when I first started to tell of my experiences in WWII.

I entered the Navy at age 18 and after completing gunnery school at the naval base in Newport, RI in 1944. I was assigned to the heavy cruiser USS SAINT PAUL out of Boston Harbor. While aboard I soon learned that four of my fellow shipmates were also from the Peekskill area: Charles Adams, Jack Barnes, William Knapp and Robert Gilmore.

While we all came home from the war safe and sound, I am the only one of the five of us surviving today. After our shakedown cruise, we sailed through the Panama Canal into the Pacific Ocean. When we arrived at Pearl Harbor I could see the devastation of the Japanese attacks of December 7, 1941 that still remained, including the hulk of the famous ARIZONA. We picked up supplies in the Marshall Islands and headed for Iwo Jima. But, before we got there that horrific battle was over and our American Marines had raised the American flag atop Mount Suribachi. We were diverted and assigned to Admiral "Bull" Halsey's Third Fleet.

On July 29, 1945 we saw action with night bombardment from our big guns onto important Japanese industrial areas. We encountered kamikaze fighter planes. From our gun positions we could see them diving at us on their suicide runs. We took down two of these enemy planes and one hit the destroyer next to us with a huge explosion that rocked our ship to the rims.

At mid-day on August 9, 1945 we successfully bombarded a key Japanese steel manufacturing complex during which more than 25 enemy planes—some aimed at our ship—were shot down by our planes and gunships.

A short time later we were ordered by our flagship to finish emptying our guns and "cease fire!"

We got the great news that the war was over. I was happy to be alive and proud to say that American military history record books show that our ship—the USS SAINT PAUL—had fired the last salvo of WWII at the Japanese coastline.

On September 2, 1945 we sailed into Tokyo Bay and joined a vast armada of American and allied war vessels. We were told to remain at our battle stations as we anchored about 100 yards from the battleship USS MISSOURI. Our captain announced that we were about to witness an event that we would never forget. We could see Japanese military and civilian emissaries boarding the battleship and bowing to American admirals and generals—one of whom was General Douglas MacArthur, with his crumpled hat and corncob pipe!

We could see them on deck signing what we were told later was the Armistice ending World War II. I had witnessed history but didn't really realize it at the time.

One other gripping memory I have of that day, and the next few days after the surrender, was seeing all the hundreds of white flags dotting the hillsides and shorelines that the Japanese were ordered to display at their gun positions and shoreline batteries from which they did not get a chance to fire on us as we had entered Tokyo Bay.

If the surrender had not happened when it did, we would have been destroyed by their hidden fire power ... and I would not be here to tell you my story. After the surrender our captain sent us ashore to pick up and confiscate some of the Japanese weapons and equipment that their soldiers threw down and left behind.

I brought back a Japanese rifle, helmet and gas mask that I later donated to our veteran's committee and which are on display with other artifacts of the war at our Town Hall.

God Bless America and our veterans who fought for our

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