

COMMENTARY

# Bill Malcom's WWII experience

**DICK KRUG**

*Editor's note: The following article comes from interviews with residents at the Concord Deaconess and has been put into a book titled "Memories of World War II."*

I started college in September 1941, but since it was obvious that we were going to be involved in the war, I joined the Naval ROTC. We were kept in college to get our degree and a commission, and left early in 1944 to join my ship in the Mediterranean. The ship was an attack transport, the Elizabeth C. Stanton, covered with landing craft with the role of putting troops on beaches.

I joined the ship, in Mers-El-Kabir, the port for Oran and the harbor to which the French fleet had retreated. The French fleet was sunk by the British because it was not clear whether they were sympathetic to the Germans. We were in Naples when Rome was taken, and managed to hitchhike there with a friend. We were picked up by a British officer who turned out to be an American who had gone to Harvard, and was in the same club that I was. The nice thing about that was that he equipped us with a bottle of Scotch from the British liquor ration.

We heard that the Pope was having an audience for Allied personnel and we went to see this famous person. It was not crowded, and he was most impressive when we shook hands, talked for a few minutes and received his blessing. My friend had his coat blessed, and when we were outside of St. Peter's, I asked him why he had his coat blessed. He looked around a bit furtively and pulled out his half empty bottle of Scotch! In the Pacific in 1945 after an overhaul in New York, we made landings in the fighting at Okinawa.

I periodically had watch in the middle of the night. The watch officer was third in command, and since our captain through seniority, was in acting command of our group of six attack transports and five destroyers, I, at the age of 23, had the responsibility for telling destroyers and ships what to do when neither the captain or Exec was on the bridge, (which was usually the case). I don't think the top admirals of a carrier task force, for instance, were aware of the very junior status of our watch officer (me!) when we had to maneuver by them one night!

The atomic bombs fell when we were headed west back across the Pacific again with Marines for the coming invasion of Japan. The reaction on board was an explosion of jubilation as might be expected, but also tremendous thanksgiving as well. The toll for the invasion was expected to be very great, and the atomic bombs saved huge casualties for the Japanese as well as for us.

It took a while to realize how much responsibility I had at such a young age, not only during the war, but when we decommissioned in New York. I was First Lieutenant, which meant I was responsible for all the Navy gear and turning it over to the Port Authorities. A 500-foot ship can carry a lot of equipment! Incidentally, the ship returned to the Moore-Macormack Lines where she set a record a year later for bringing the largest shipment of tapioca in history into the U.S.!

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