

This is a navy photo of my ship, the USS LST 884 taken at Okinawa on April Fool's day, April 1, 1945. I did not know this picture existed for well over 50 years. The logs show the kamikaze struck us at 5:50 AM and the abandon order came at 5:57. This picture was taken during that seven minute window because none of the over 400 troops and crew is in the ocean. We were five miles from shore and I was rescued by a navy tug boat about an hour later and then transferred to a large troop ship. We were nearly struck again by another kamikaze while on that ship but it fell just short. We could see the slumped over pilot.

Actually, our naval maneuver was to fake a landing at the southeast side of Okinawa, draw Japanese troops to "fight" us, then the true landing forces would land on the west side. It worked as the 5th Marine division, which included my brother Leo, landed with little or no resistance.

When we boarded this ship at Saipan to sail to Okinawa some of us were given a cot to sleep on in the tank deck that was very uncomfortable. They asked for volunteers to serve mess duty and as an incentive, the two volunteers would be given regular bunks in another, more livable part of the ship. Bruno, a Marine boxer from New York (who later was my best man) and I volunteered, and we peeled potatoes for three weeks.

The kamikaze crashed through our relatively flimsy hull, missing my compartment by less than 100 feet, continued through a sleeping section and ended up in the tank deck. It ignited gasoline and all Marines were burned to death.

One other piece of good fortune concerns the accuracy of our Coast Guard gunners. This kamikaze carried two-250 pound bombs, the kind that had to be detonated manually. Those bombs did not explode because our gunners had shot the pilot dead before he could pull the trigger. I owe my life to those Coasties.

Following the war I got caught up in the business of making a living and starting two businesses, the last one being the Corn Crib Nursery in Coal Valley. I basically forgot about the war, married, had seven children and was busy in life. It was in 1999 that I saw a call for volunteers to ante up \$2,100 plus air fare to join a crew to help sail an old discarded LST from Greece. With my wife passing away 15 years earlier, I was free to go. I had to study for six months and pass two exams to be a crew member but it was fun and in 2000 I flew to Greece. A total of 56 men were eventually involved in the repairs and nine of them, all older men, have died but we were successful in returning the USS LST 325 to its rightful home for Americans to visit.

George White