

Thomas F. Coon
13 Margaret Court
Dumont, NJ 07628

November 20, 1993

Librarian,
Navy Memorial of Washington, D.C.,
East Carolina University,
Greenville,
North Carolina

Dear Sir:

You already have on file the historical book of the U.S.S. Waukesha (AKA 84) which chronicled its role during WW II. It was present at Okinawa during the devastating Kamakazi air attacks.

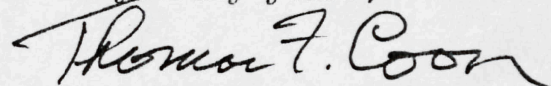
With the dropping of two atomic bombs, the Waukesha was rushed to Guam for loading troops and cargo. The Waukesha, along with 5 APAs, then put the first troops ashore in Japan immediately prior to the surrender.

Admiral Halsey and his Third Fleet escorted our small amphibious group to Japan for the assault-type landing at Yokosuka Naval Base. The AKA 84 immediately thereafter proceeded to Saipan, loaded, and then put the first troops ashore (via Naval forces) at Nagasaki.

The Executive Officer of the ship (later the C.O.), Cdr. Robert Baker, already furnished you with a copy of the historical book for your records. I since authored a followup which details the history of the Waukesha from the time I went aboard the ship in Hawaii through the two historical landings at Yokosuka Naval Base and Nagasaki.

As part of our ship reunion in St. Augustine, Florida, from October 22nd until October 25, 1993, a copy of my article was distributed to all attendees at the reunion. The article is forwarded to your library for inclusion in your files.

Very truly yours,



THOMAS F. COON
Lieut., USNR (Ret.)
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THE WAUKESHA, HIROSHIMA, NAGASAKI AND THE ATOMIC BOMB

By

Thomas F. Coon

America has long been enchanted by guessing games. Dr. Joyce Brothers, the prominent psychologist, became famous on a TV guessing game. Open your daily newspaper and there is a well publicized opportunity to engage in - you guessed it - a guessing game. Any police officer on the beat will tell you what you may not have already guessed - the trillion dollar champion guessing game, through the dubious beneficence of the Exclusionary Rule, is American's criminal justice system.

There is another guessing game that makes me bridle. It's the second-guessing of our military leaders, long dead, in the light of a lot of post-garnered information, or unmitigated liberal bias.

One of the old second guessing chestnuts is whether we should have dropped the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A gentlemen, writing recently in a letter to the editor of the New York Post, recommended that America should apologize to Japan for having dropped the bombs. I demur.

He quoted some distinguished gentlemen such as General Dwight Eisenhower, Admiral William Leahy, Paul Nitze and Edward Teller as having made various commentaries indicating some wonderings or misgivings over our having taken the action we did. In later life, we all ruminate about many of our actions. Oft times, we recall incorrectly. We frequently reconstruct events

the way we wish they had been. Indeed, we ruminate - sometimes accurately and sometimes inaccurately.

Let's take a short narrative trip down the road with a ship and an individual who had a small, peripheral but rather intimate association with the incidents of Hiroshima-Nagasaki. When I enlisted in the Navy in June of 1942, I was assigned as a V-4 yeoman to the 3ND District Intelligence Office. Very fortunately, I was able to finish my college courses nights and get my BS degree from New York University. I was later transferred to the 15ND District Intelligence Office. I spent ten months there, then got the bug and requested a Commission. By virtue of having the college degree, I got the Commission.

Since there were more than enough Intelligence Officers kicking about, I went ^{to} indoctrination school in Tucson, Arizona Amphibious school in Coronado, California and then headed for Hawaii for assignment to the AKA 84 (Waukesha). The Waukesha was converted to an attack cargo ship at the Todd-Erie Shipyard in Brooklyn and commissioned at the old Brooklyn Navy Yard. Lieut. Cmdr. John S. Herold, USNR, was put in command.

He had not had the rather comfortable billets I had. On the APA 15 (Biddle), he participated in the occupation of Iceland, and the invasions of Sicily, Tarawa, Kwajalein and Saipan. He took part in the recapture of Guam and the liberation of the Philippines (Leyte Gulf). The Executive office and later C.O. (after I left the ship) was the Lieutenant Robert Baker. He too had seen extensive action all over the Pacific.

The Waukesha passed through the Panama Canal and proceeded to Hawaii where I joined the crew as a boat officer. I was constantly seasick. They therefore made me one of the ship's assistant division officers. I continued to get seasick with the raising of the anchor, but gradually improved -- not to a degree that I ventured into post-war cruises without considerable trepidation.

On May 11, 1945, we got underway with Okinawa as our ultimate destination. Our cargo consisted primarily of radar gear, harbor defense equipment and beer. The beer turned out to be a wonderful medium of exchange on future occasions. More than one Japanese was introduced to the American market place via good old stateside beer. William M. Wall, a Motor Mechanic and later a successful North Carolina contractor, commented on the anomaly that every time the Waukesha loaded general cargo, a large amount of it was indeed beer. This was deemed to be an incredible stroke of good fortune for the crew. Wall evidenced amazement at the unbelievable hiding places throughout the Waukesha. "Whoever designed the landing crafts (LCMs and LCVPs)," Wall suggested, "must have had accurate dimensions for a case of beer in mind when he created the floatation tanks because they provided a perfect fit for the cases of beer." Allegedly, more than one landing craft had a pronounced list when placed into the water. While on watch one night, while at anchor, a young sailor ran up to me and exclaimed, "One of the boats, tied to the stern, is sinking." I had him quickly rouse out a Warrant Boatswain to

take care of the problem. My personal, quiet, introspective suspicion was that it was not beyond the realm of probability that it was sinking from a shift of cargo - illicit beer cargo.

After a brief stopover at Eniwetok, we headed for Ulithi Atoll in the western Carolines. During World War II, mention of Ulithi meant nothing to people back in America. It was one of the war's unbelievably well kept secrets. For approximately a year or more, it was described as a "home, grocery store and arsenal for Navy men in the Pacific." The series of flat, tropical islands were 4,000 miles closer to the war than Pearl Harbor. Captured without opposition by the 321st Regiment of the 81st Infantry Division, military experts were aghast that the Japanese had so easily let it go.

Ulithi's 112 square mile anchorage could hold nearly 1,000 ships of the fleet. Neither Guam nor Pearl Harbor could do so. Ulithi, with all the ships, was an awesome sight to behold. The Navy put its legendary Seabees to work and converted it into a vast service station able to handle entire fleets. They could operate almost indefinitely at monumental distances from their main land bases. The Ulithi Atoll was able to supply the entire Pacific fleet operating in that arena with bombs, beans, bullets, repairs, drydock facilities and the recreation island of Mogmog.

No sailor will ever forget Mogmog. Thousands daily went ashore there where they could swim, play basketball and softball, drink beer (enlisted men) and blended whiskey (officers). I recall a long, thatched bar for officers.

Lieutenant Commanders and up had their own exclusive bar and Admirals had their lounge where they could sit on chairs and imbibe - generally about 20 Admirals at any one time.

Crap games were serious business. I saw men play right through the typical short-duration rains as dollar bills became soaking wet and men's uniforms the same. The hot sun would suddenly come out and rapidly dry the dollar bills and uniforms. The bills would become crisp again in short order. If one had a call of nature, he need travel only a short distance to locate one of a multitude of funnels stuck into the earth. They functioned as improvised urinals.

By the end of the day, men sometimes drank to excess. They hadn't had a real "liberty" in many months. As the liberty boats came alongside the ship, the O.D. would holler out, "All of you men who are able, come aboard by way of the gangway." Those men would file up the gangway. The O.D. would then order a boatswain mate to put a hook on the LCVP and hoist it aboard - inert remaining bodies and all. It was just like the liberty party returning to the ship in Mr. Roberts.

I went to Mass at Ulithi. It took the LCVP almost an hour to get to the ship where Mass was being held. Ulithi's water taxi service which ran between ships and shore was the largest ever. There were 400 small boats manned by 1000 coxswains. I've never seen such an accumulation of ships and small boats during my lifetime.

There was no elation on July 10, 1945 when the Waukesha joined a 16 ship convoy and churned in the direction of Okinawa - land of the dreaded Kamikazes. We encountered burned-out ships limping back to Ulithi as we proceeded to our destination.

On July 14th, we arrived in Buckner Bay of Okinawa. The Okinawa city of Naha lay before us in total destruction. Japanese Kamikaze nuisance raids took place every night and kept us constantly at general quarters. With the raids, our small boats made smoke in an endeavor to protect the ship. The shore batteries fired at the Kamikazes, as did all the ships, and casualties from friendly fire had to take place. The ridiculous alternative would have been to not fire at all. It reminds one of a recent war in which the media carried the friendly fire problem to a degree of inanity.

I'm sure every crew member will concur that one of life's most terrifying experiences was riding out a typhoon at sea. With a typhoon, all ships hauled anchor and headed for open sea. Ships would be bashed against each other if they were to remain in the bay. We had to cease unloading operations on two occasions and flee to open sea.

There we encountered 100 foot high waves. The stern of the ship would come out of the water at the crest of the wave and the propeller would spin freely out of the water. This shuddered the ship unmercifully, so much so that it felt as if it was coming apart at the seams. As the ship alternately pitched and then rolled, drawers in the wardroom would fly open and spew

knives and forks and spoons all over the deck - and then thunderously, and, with a clatter, slam closed. It would interminably continue the cycle. Cargo and other objects broke loose on the deck. It jarred the nerves, in competition with the frightening noise of the propeller. And then there were the terrifying winds as only a typhoon can engender terror. It succeeded with me.

It succeeded with many ships and sailors as it flipped over large fighting ships. It was the famous typhoon chillingly described by Herman Wouk in his fine book, The Caine Mutiny. At one point while our ship was at Buckner Bay, our Captain Herold elected to move the ship to another anchorage. The APA that took our place was hit by a Kamikaze and 39 men were killed. We were appreciatively happy to leave Okinawa reportedly en route to lovely Pearl Harbor, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and all the good things associated with that island paradise. One did not have to dwell upon the sunken ships.

Unknown to most people of the world, the second atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. We had sidled into Ulithi for a stopover and recreation on August 10th. Our future was immediately changed. We could all forget Hawaii. Our orders were modified predicated upon the sudden turn of events. Japan was on the threshold of surrendering. It was then learned by the world that the imminent surrender was the result of two devastating atomic bombs having been delivered on their mainland.

Our orders to proceed to Pearl Harbor were changed by the peace feelers. Our ship was hurried to Guam's Apra Harbor. In record time, the ship loaded and embarked Marines of the 14th Regiment. On August 15, 1945, the Japanese accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. On the same day, the Waukesha steamed out to rendezvous with Admiral Halsey and his entire Third Fleet. Our AKA, along with APAs 138, 125, 156, 172 and 203 formed a convoy, transporting troops to Japan.

Approximately 30 miles from Japan, we met the entire Third Fleet and stayed with them from there in. Ships blotted out the horizon. Battleships stayed close to the convoy because we had 10,000 men on board as well as their equipment. The battleship Iowa was ahead of us and the cruiser San Diego was behind us.

I recall our anchoring at Sagami Wan, along with the rest of the fleet. Mine sweepers cleaned the harbor, while Aircraft Carriers remained at sea. In the background was Mt. Fujiyama with the Third Fleet in the foreground. It was an awesome symbolization of the defeat of Japan.

On the 30th of August, the race to get the men and supplies onto the Japanese shore began. The Japanese were required to put white flags on all gun emplacements. Every man who took part in this operation did so with bated breath. The prevailing feeling was that the Japanese were really not going to surrender - it was thought to be another monumental act of duplicity. It was reassuring, however, to have our task group

led into Tokyo Bay by the cruiser San Diego and the battleship Iowa.

We commenced the same type of amphibious operation as had been employed throughout the Pacific war at Guadalcanal, Saipan, Tarawa, Guam, Bougainville, Palau and others. This time, however, our target beach was the Yokosuka Naval Base. My apprehensions abruptly subsided when men began returning to the ship, with many souvenirs and a spirit of elation that the war was indeed over. Morris Wonder, a Motor Mechanic and member of one of our boat crews, stated the people he saw saluted - and asked for cigarettes. We were still a "supplier" nation in those days.

We speedily did our job of debarking troops and materials and just as quickly hauled anchor and set sail for sea. On September 1st, the convoy left Tokyo Bay. We passed the battleship Missouri where the formal surrender ceremonies would take place on September 2nd. The Missouri had been designated to be the site of the surrender ceremonies. This was very fitting for President Harry S. Truman who was as readily identified with the state of Missouri as the Mighty Moe. The Missouri had sailed majestically into Tokyo Bay on August 27th. Our boss in the Pacific, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, represented the U.S. Navy in signing the surrender documents. General Douglas MacArthur did the same for the Army.

The Waukesha sped to Saipan where we arrived on September 5th. We again began a frantic loading operation for

another trip to Japan. We embarked the 2nd Marine Division. Our new destination was to what was now a historic Nagasaki. It had capriciously found its way into historical prominence through the medium of the second atomic bomb.

Initially, we anchored approximately ten miles from shore and began unloading troops via the ship's boats. Mines had to be swept from the harbor. Parenthetically, two of our Ensigns, George Glover and Stuart Smith, went ashore for charts, etc., tied with our subsequent docking. They necessarily stayed over night and slept on the ground. Our crew had not been warned about radiation. Indeed, none of the ships had been. More about Ensigns Glover and Smith presently. Moving in to dock at Dejima Wharf on the 24th of September, we unloaded the remainder of the troops and cargo. Nagasaki was a city of melancholy and devastation. Many ships were sunk in the harbor and the remains of buildings were twisted and tangled in utter desolation.

As our ship plied its way toward its docking place, I observed little Japanese boys and girls gazing enraptured at our passing ships. Frightened mothers ran out of houses, swept up the little children and quickly darted back into the houses. Reportedly, there were some rapes, therefore giving concern for one's physical well being. However, as fine testimony to the fundamental rectitude of America and its military leaders, I recall a speedy dispatch to all ships from a Marine General who lamented that some American personnel had acted grossly improperly. If my recollection is correct, the General's order

was that no "swabby" venture beyond four or five blocks from the Custom House with Court Martial as the penalty for violation. He was concerned for the well being and proper treatment of the vanquished.

Another wonderful, unanticipated derivative of the order was to keep military personnel away from wandering freely about, thereby coming into contact with contamination and thereby possibly shortening lives. Ensign George Glover died as a very young man, I'm told, from some form of cancer, Ensign Stuart Smith, I know, has had his life ravaged through bouts with cancer - evaluated as service connected.

At this point in time, the nation has the Defence Nuclear Agency which is conducting a major research program to identify Department of Defense personnel who took part in the atmospheric nuclear testing program conducted from 1945 to 1962, and the occupation forces of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They are endeavoring to recover and reconstruct the details of personnel involvement in these activities. Public Law 100-321 has also been enacted. Some diseases are presumed to be service-connected for certain veterans who were assigned to a radiation risk activity. Fundamentally, the Veterans Administration pays disability compensation to veterans suffering from radiation-caused diseases and to their survivors under one of four circumstances:

- (1) Veterans who while on active duty incur a radiogenic disease.

- (2) Veterans who within one year of military discharge become 10% or more disabled by a radiogenic cancer.
- (3) Veterans who were exposed to ionizing radiation in service and who five or more years later (except leukemia and bone cancer which may develop at any time) develop a disease determined to be related to the radiation exposure.
- (4) Veterans who participated in a nuclear test, served with the occupation forces of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan, between August 1945 and July 1946, or were similarly exposed to radiation while a prisoner of war of Japan and who within 40 years of exposure (30 years for leukemia) develop any of 13 types of cancer prescribed by the Radiation-Exposed Veterans Compensation Act of 1988.

Peter Brandel, a sharp radarman on the Waukesha and a bank Vice President in later life, is our linchpin in all our reunions. He also garners current information on the cancer problem. It's a genuine concern of crew members because DNA research focuses a good deal upon the offspring of crew members who were exposed from the aspect of deleterious effects it might have on them.

After Nagasaki, the Waukesha had further assignments to Japan, Okinawa and China. I took the opportunity to go ashore for duty at the Philippines, after Nagasaki. Ships in the fleet had to cut the numbers in their crews. Ensign Glover accompanied me ashore. Motivation, on my part? I had continuing periodic sea sickness. I sometimes get seasick just thinking about seasickness. I was reluctant to go on cruises in the post-war until I was convinced the seasick pills actually worked. They did. Significantly, too, the sea pathway to Bermuda or the Bahamas is not like the harrowing Pacific in the vicinity of Okinawa, Japan and China.

Unknown to me, I could have frequently visited the Waukesha in the post-war while I was a Special Agent with the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor. My good friend Eddie Luckenback acquired the ship from the War Shipping Administration. It was in and out of Brooklyn with the Luckenback Steamship Line. I undoubtedly walked past it on more than one occasion.

Harkening back to my opening paragraphs about guessing games, an objective and fair analysis of history should place President Truman and America in good stead. The analysis must be made with a playing field and players of vintage World War II. Germany was in a bitter race with America to perfect an atomic weapon. Procrastination had no place in time schedules. One nation's procrastination could be another's opportunity to sprint to the finish line. Is there any doubt that Germany or Japan

would have used it to its optimum advantage if either nation got into position to do so first?

The need for creation of the bomb and the logic of its use were extensively debated at the time by deliberative compassionate men. Lieut. General Leslie R. Groves, the man in charge of the Manhattan project, stated his view. He said, the nation was "trying to perfect a weapon that, however repugnant it might be to us as human beings, could nevertheless save untold numbers of American lives." It was a pragmatic but realistic approach. It represented the feeling of the nation - beyond a doubt. They accomplished their mission. The deliberative, contemplative Secretary of War, Secretary Henry L. Stimson, succinctly said the Manhattan project existed, "to bring the war to a successful end more quickly than otherwise would be the case to save American lives."

The modern debate often revolves around whether we should have conducted a demonstration of its power for all the world to see, and then deliver an ultimatum to Japan, or should we use the bomb (as we did) without warning? It was difficult for General Groves to understand how anyone could ignore the importance of the surprise effect on the Japanese people and their government. They were planning to fight to the final man. Groves held that the overwhelming surprise of the bomb was the essence of our whole program. From the inception, the program had been conducted in an environment of security that had never ever before been achieved by this nation.

The President, the Secretary of War, the military, the scientists, and all those involved in the decision making process were participating on the playing field then prevailing. Modern day second-guessers demean and derogate their performances.

In the whole process, however, one man had to make the ultimate decision - President Harry S. Truman. He had the courage, for it took the epitome of courage and wisdom, to make his decision. Thank God for Harry! If it were not for him, many of us would have never seen the Golden Gate Bridge again - on the way home to a long and happy life thereafter. Recall that our military experts anticipated about a million deaths if we had been required to carry out an invasion. Many of us have understandably become weary with the endless self-flagellation when dealing with this subject by liberal nitwits.

Thomas F. Coon

THOMAS F. COON

Thomas F. Coon is a former Supervisory Special Agent with the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Waterfront Commission of N.Y. Harbor. He retired as director of the Bergen County Police and Fire Academy (NJ).

Canton, Ohio
10 March 1993

Dear Sir:

The enclosed publication is submitted herewith for your consideration as a bit of first-hand reporting on two historical events (operations) of World War II. This book was put together by the officers and men of U.S.S. WAUKESHA (AKA-84) during three reunions (1987 - 1990) and after 42 years separation.

Although WAUKESHA was in commission for only 18 months, this ship participated in two (2) of the most significant operations in the war against Japan: First, The landing on and seizure of the YOKOSUKA Naval Base, Tokyo Bay, 28 August 1945 as part of the Amphibious Force of Admiral Halsey's THIRD Fleet with the 4th Marine Regiment, reinforced, 6th Marine Division out of Guam. this was the first assault on the Japanese homeland. See Attachment II. Second, The occupation of NAGASAKI, Kyushu, 28 September 1945 as part of the FIFTH Fleet Amphibious Force under Admiral SPRUANCE, with the 2nd Marine Division embarked out of Saipan. These were the first U.S. Forces to enter NAGASAKI after the "A" bomb of 9 Aug. 1945. See Attachment III.

Special credit for putting this book together is due Morris J. Wonder, a young enlisted man, just out of High School and a member of the original crew upon commissioning in Feb. 1945. He is now a successful farmer in Tiffin, Ohio. The Book is dedicated to Peter A. Brandel, another young enlisted man (Radarman 3/c) just out of high school and member of the original crew. After more than 40 years he brought the Waukesha shipmates together to renew old friendships and acquaintances. He is now a successful banker in New York City.

The original crew consisted of 437 enlisted men and 48 officers. Most were Reserves enlisted right out of High School (ages 18-19) and Reserve Officers right out of college (ages 22-23). Except for the Captain, Exec, Department Heads and a handful of Senior Petty Officers, none had any previous sea duty. See Attachment I. They all did their jobs well and could always be depended upon to get the job done. It was my privilege to serve as their Executive Officer, upon commissioning, and then as Commanding Officer, relieving Captain John S. Herold upon his release from service in October 1945.

We hope to hear from you and would be pleased to know if you will consider this book a meaningful addition to your collection and that you will find an appropriate place for it in your library.

Most Sincerely,

Robert W. Baker
Commander, U.S. Navy (Ret)



THOMAS F. COON

RESUME

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Retired Director, Bergen County (NJ) Police and Fire Academy
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Member of Police Advisory Board, Bergen Community College (NJ)
Author of approximately 300 articles on police science, internal
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Political publicist for candidates ranging as high as U.S. Senate
Former member of Executive Board, CYO (Bergen County, NJ)
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