

# They Took Our Place!

It was December 23rd 1943 and I had my 17th Birthday. World War II was still going strong and several of my friends had joined the Navy. I felt the urge to join also. Since I was only 17 I couldn't join without my parents permission and they weren't about to



give it. There was nothing to do except keep after them to sign the papers. Finally after 3 months they gave in and signed. On March 9th 1944 I left Richmond, Virginia on my way to Great Lakes Naval Training Station, located just north of Chicago, Illinois, to start my Basic Training (Boot Camp). After 7 weeks of training and 7 days leave at home I was assigned to Quartermaster School for 4 weeks training. In the Navy a Quartermaster assists the Captain in navigating the ship, using the Sun, Moon and Stars. He also stands "Wheel House" watches when underway. Upon completion of the Quartermaster School I was assigned to the LST 1031, an Amphibious craft. LST that stands for "Landing Ship-Tank". Of course it also stands for "Large Slow Target", It was not so large though, about 250 feet long and 75 feet wide and it only drew 16 feet of water, we compared it to a flat bottom bathtub. But it was slow, top speed about 16 knots. For you "Land Lubbers" a knot equals a mile and a quarter. The 1031 was being built in Boston, Mass. at the Charleston Navy Yard.

The crew of 120 men, including 10 Officers started assembling there in July, 1944. We went to work outfitting the ship and left the Navy Yard bound for Norfolk, Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay. After a two week "Shake-down", we determined the ship was ready for service. We left Norfolk heading for San Diego, California by way of the Panama Canal.

After a few days in San Diego we left for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. We spent five months, making runs to the various islands, transporting men and supplies. One day

orders came, we were to leave Pearl Harbor with a convoy of ships. We had no way of knowing where we were headed. Our ship was loaded with ammunition, both on the Tank Deck and on the Main Deck. We were ready to go when orders came for us to go to the other side of the island to practice "beaching" in preparation for an invasion. The LST is the ship that has bow doors that open and a ramp that comes down allowing the cargo on the Tank Deck to be unloaded. In an Invasion the ship is rammed up on the beach and unloaded.

During our practice beaching and while we were on the beach the surf bounced the ship up and down, bouncing it on a reef. After we got off the beach and were heading back to Pearl Harbor our engines started running hot because the shaft to the propellers got bent while on the beach. We were ordered to go into Dry Dock. The order is never put a ship in Dry Dock without unloading all ammunition. Our load of ammunition was transferred to the LST 808, which took our place in the convoy and left Pearl Harbor with the other ships. I had a friend that I went to school with back home who was on the LST 399. As the convoy left the harbor I saw the 399 leaving with them.

After our ship was repaired we were assigned to another convoy that was scheduled to leave later. When we got to Guam and was heading into port we passed the 399 going out of the harbor. With Semaphore signaling I got the attention of the Signalman on the Bridge and asked him where they had been. He signaled back that they had been to the invasion of Iwo Jima. I asked him if he knew about the LST 808. He said the 808 had taken three direct bomb hits and the ship was blown into three pieces and laying on the beach. He did not know anything about the crew. Later when we went to Iwo Jima we saw the wreckage of the 808. We were sure there was a large number of casualties. We didn't understand why them instead of us, but God knew and his plan was worked out. We only knew that they took our place.

by James Pearman Brooks



History of LST-1031. She was laid down on 27 May 1944 at the Boston Navy Yard; launched on 25 June 1944; sponsored by Mrs. Priscilla A. Daudelin; and commissioned on 25 July 1944, Lt. C. W. Price in command.

During World War II, LST-1031 was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific theater and participated in the assault and occupation of Okinawa in May and June 1945. She returned to the United States and was decommissioned on 18 December 1945 and struck from the Navy list on 8 January 1946. On 23 October 1947, the ship was sold to the Boston Metals Corp., of Baltimore, Md., for scrapping.

LST-1031 earned one battle star for World War II service.



Carrying their meager belongings, Japanese civilians trudge into the cargo deck of LST-1031 scheduled to take them up the Okinawa coast to a refugee camp, circa late 1945.

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