

When You Knew Enough to Survive

by Harry Zirkelbach 07-11-2011

You were 23, had years of school. Most recently six months,
three at the Mine Warfare School, Yorktown Virginia,
then a second three, Mine Disposal School, Navy Yard, Washington D.C.

You have studied the Explosive Ordnance of the World at war,
Army and Navy, land and under sea.
If something could explode, it was studied.

Then suddenly, the real world, where from day-to-day there were no explosives.
Could you meet the challenge of suddenly, face to face with an explosive problem?
When would those tests come?

On Oahu, some refresher training, preparation for the final assault on Japan.
Boredom develops from waiting, not know any schedule, except the O-Club hours.

Suddenly, Victory in Europe, then three months later Victory in Japan.

And you have not seen anything that could go boom, burst ear drums, shake the earth
since being treated to the detonation of a German One ton bomb at Stump Neck, Va,
There the class of 20, prepared the detonation, hunkered down behind thick dirt walls,
Listened to "Fire in the Hole" were shocked to have the earth jump under their feet,
while overhead the whining of shrapnel from the bomb body pieces screamed slithering
overhead, eager to maim, kill, destroy, frighten, etch the brain with subdued terror.

Now, we won! The cry, "Let's go home." more common than "Hooray".
Some in the military, part of the arsenal of the world,
were equally prepared for disarmament, in an orderly fashion.
The longest serving would be discharged first on a "point" system, all thought fair.

That recent class of Mine Disposal School would return sometime in 1946.
Meanwhile, there remained work to be done, throughout the Pacific, and in Japan.

The small Mobile Explosive Investigation Unit #4, in Oahu began assigning those with
few discharge points to duties requested by the Fleet on the basis of, who is next.
One plum assignment, Study of the Japanese Defenses in Truck Atoll fell to me.
The tour of Truck, looking into what the Japanese military had done to repel any assault
then prepare a formal report. This took two months, the group veterans of the Regular
Services, and a few "specialists" in electronics, intelligence, explosives, language.

A wonderful assignment. And the Truk Atoll, a series of islands inside this 20 mile diameter reef. It had been considered impregnable, but one Carrier Raid mid June 1944, destroyed ships and aircraft there. That Bastion was then bypassed permanently.

Any big news? The Japanese garrison was scarcely resupplied the remaining months of war, reduced to growing food in garden plots for survival.

On return to Oahu. I had celebrated New Years day 1946 in Guam, flown back year early that morning to Eniwetok, landing in 1945 for a second welcome of the 1946 New Years celebration.

I could only believe, life was interesting in the peace time Navy.