

ABOARD THE USS KITKUN BAY, CVE-71
Lingayen Gulf, Philippine Islands
A first-person narrative of Jack L. Bacastow

Two unexploded Japanese bombs were lodged in the USS Kitkun Bay, CVE-71, as a result of a January 8, 1945, suicide plane attack in Lingayen Gulf, Philippine Islands.

One bomb was found in the number 3 boiler, the other in the machine shop where it also penetrated the top of a fuel tank. Both bombs weighted close to 500 pounds and had their nose and tail fuzes sheared off on impact.

In this narrative, I will address the removal of the bomb from the machine shop. I do not recall the specific details of the removal of the bomb from the number 3 boiler. Lt. (jg) Stambaugh (V-2 Division Ordnance Officer), can give a better account than me.

The bomb disposal crew consisted of (names listed left to right back row first and then front row left to right in accompanying photo): Ensign Morris, VC-91 Ordnance Officer, Lt. (jg) Walter E. Baker, USN and Lt. (jg) William J. Mich (both bomb disposal experts of Mobile Investigation Unit #1 from Navy ship YP-421), Lt. (jg) Armstrong A. Stambaugh (V-2 Division Ordnance Officer who was in charge of V-2 Ordnance men during the bomb removal operation), H.P. Harriman AOM 3c, Jack L. Bacastow AOM 2c and R.F. Seals AOM 3c. The disposal crew was wearing rubber boots due to the fuel oil that had accumulated in the machine shop.

I recall that prior to the bomb disposal crew going below decks to the machine shop, the rest of the ship's crew members were ordered to go as far forward or aft as possible, just in case an explosion happened during the removal operation.

When we got down to the bomb in the machine shop, Lt. (jg) Baker said he was surprised the bomb had not gone off on impact, even though the fuzes were sheared off, since the explosive used by the Japanese was very sensitive.

We carefully placed the bomb on a steel stretcher made by the ship fitters. The bomb was carried to the large hole in the port side of the ship where the suicide plane had entered. The bottom of the hole was just above the surface of the water, the ship having been rolled to starboard by shifting ballast. We slid the bomb into the water where it went to the bottom of Leyte Gulf just of Tacloban, Leyte, Philippine Islands, where the disposal operation took place in mid-January 1945. I think we were all glad to see the bomb disappear in the water; I know I was!

Jack L. Bacastow
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