ForeWord Reviews
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HISTORY

Pacific LST 791: A Gallant Hard Working Breed
Stephen C. Stripe
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Wars are not won by fighting men alone. Those who carry and deliver the tools of combat to ports and beaches play a role as vital as any front-line soldier, sailor, or marine. The same is true of ships: For every battleship and aircraft carrier there are a score or more of vessels whose crews make it possible for the warships to do the fighting.

Pacific LST 791 is the story of one such workhorse of a ship: *Landing Ship Tank 791* and her crew of US Coast Guard officers and enlisted personnel, among whom was one Max Stripe, the author's father. Like its namesake, there is far more to this slender volume than meets the eye. Stephen C. Stripe has done yeoman's service in tracking down the log book, letters, photographs, and other memorabilia collected by the ship's crew, and he has spoken with veterans who served with his father aboard *LST 791* in the final campaign of World War II.

Stripe's book pays homage to his father and his father's comrades, and to all who served aboard similar support ships during the war. These vessels carried men, tanks, and supplies across the vast Pacific at an annoyingly lethargic nine knots an hour, a speed which caused their crews to dub them "Large Slow Target." Stripe recounts the boredom of this service, a life which his late father recalled as being one of "constant scraping and painting."

The heart of the book, however, focuses on the nearly three months the ship and its crew served in Okinawa. Their fleet was under constant threat of attack by Japanese suicide boats, submarines, and the dreaded Kamikaze aircraft—one of which the gunners aboard *LST 791* shot down just moments before it would have struck a nearby hospital ship.

Stripe's writing is clean, clear, and workmanlike. It is a solid piece of history, if at times a bit dry. The book is sprinkled with many personal and often amusing anecdotes taken from diaries, letters, and interviews. One of these is a priceless letter his father sent home, written on the ship's Christmas Day dinner menu. That letter, reproduced in the book along with dozens of other images, speaks volumes, both in its emotional content and as a document attesting to the logistical miracle that these men performed in bringing roast turkey across the world in wartime.

No military force in the history of war had ever been supplied so well and so plentifully as the American military in World War II—and Stripe's father and his shipmates contributed to that achievement.

"These men did a job—not very glamorous," Stripe notes in his conclusion, "but they delivered the goods, fighting to defend their ships and cargo and even dying if necessary in the process. This story is in their honor and memory."

Stripe has done a thorough and laudable job of keeping that memory alive. In the process, he honors his father and his shipmates—all part of a "gallant, hard working breed."

Mark McLaughlin