



Courtesy

The U.S.S. Curtiss, which Ionia native, Gordon Delamarter, served aboard and recorded the first hydrogen bomb dropping.

## Ionia man saw, recorded history

By HOLLY SETTER  
*Sentinel-Standard writer*

**IONIA** — Gordon Delamarter penned history, although the official history books don't reflect it.

As the Quartermaster aboard the U.S.S. Curtiss in 1952, the Ionia man recorded the Navy's first hydrogen bomb test in the vessel's ship's log.

"It was an experience that you can't explain the magnitude of," Delamarter said. "Our position was between 30 and 35 miles away (from the test site), but it was just like it was happening in your front yard."

The fireball from the test was three miles across, and so bright that only a select few of the crew members were actually allowed to see it.

"We had to wear dark glasses that were tinted so dark that you

could look at the sun and barely see it," he said. "But it was just like daylight when the bomb went off. I could feel heat through the bulkhead. The fireball itself was like a sun rising — the cloud rose to over ten miles and eventually covered a 100-mile distance."

The sound of the explosion, a deafening boom, trailed the light and heat of the blast by about three minutes. Delamarter said he could see the shockwave coming at the ship before it hit.

Despite the size of the explosion, Delamarter said the test was highly confidential.

He said there were two versions of the ship's log kept on the boat — one for even and one for odd days, both maintained by the 20 quartermasters aboard the ship.

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The official log, however, was written by the ship's officers.

He said when he requested an official copy of the log, his carefully recorded entry had been glossed over.

"Anyone reading it (the log) wouldn't know that anything had happened that day," he said. "I knew the exact day and hour of the test, so I knew that it happened. But it was kept really quiet."

Two days later, Delamarter found himself in the middle of the crater created by the blast. The captain had sent him and two other sailors out to gauge the depth and damage done to the lagoon floor.

"It was kind of eerie," he said. "I went across not knowing what size the hole was, with just a compass and a Fathometer (to measure depth) and while out there, it occurred to me that if I had been there 55 hour earlier, I would be there anymore."

In addition to the hydrogen bomb test, Delamarter witnessed 12 atomic bomb tests.

The U.S.S. Curtis, used as a sea plane tender during WWII, had been retrofitted as a floating bomb test lab. The state rooms where Navy pilots had laid their heads were occupied by roughly two dozen scientists who were supervising the tests.

Other rooms were climate controlled to allow the transportation of the equipment needed to assemble the test bombs.

Shower heads pumped sea water over the entire deck of the ship, washing away radioactive fallout.

Despite the stress and secrecy, Delamarter said his time aboard the U.S.S. Curtiss was a bit like a vacation.

"I was living topside, in kind of a luxury type living at the time, right behind the captain's quarters," he said. "We weren't under attack as during the war years."