

My name is Enrico (Chick) Cessarini. GM 3/c 2nd Div USS South Dakota.
The year is 1945

The South Dakota was in the Pacific attached to the Third Fleet. Word was passed this day to stand by and prepare to take on ammunition. The ship came alongside, tied up, and the operation of passing ammo had begun. I was on watch in the lower handling room of Turret 2 at the time. It wasn't too long after they started passing these cans of smokeless powder down to upper starboard magazine, I heard a loud explosion in the turret. I got on the intercom and tried to reach someone in the upper turret but didn't get a response. Since I was alone, scared, and did not know what had happened, I didn't know what to do. The first thing that came to mind was if there was an explosion in the ammo room maybe I should turn on the sprinkler system and prevent a major disaster. So that's what I decided to do, on my way to the sprinkler I happened to be passing by the hatch that led to the lower starboard magazine. Something made me stop. I took my key, opened the lock, then the hatch and to my surprise I saw all these sailors running toward the open hatch and me. They were a bunch of scared sailors. They looked like they were in shock. When the last sailor came through the hatch, I secured it, looked around to see if anyone was around to let me know what had happened. There was no one. They had all run topside. So I was alone again, still don't know what the hell had happened. I ran over to the sprinkler, turned on the valve, and flooded the magazine. I ran over to the portside and did the same. I flooded them also. It's been 55 years now and I'm still haunted by the question I keep asking myself about the things that happened that day. Questions like when I heard the explosion what made me stay down in that handling room? Why didn't I say the hell with this and run up the ladder? What if I had turned on the sprinkler and flooded the magazine before I opened the hatch? What a scary thought that is. And another question, what made me stop and tin lock that hatch so those sailors could escape? There's only one way I can answer these questions all I say are these three words. THANK YOU GOD.