

## ALFRED JURGENSMEYER

### KILLED IN ACTION – WORLD WAR II

Alfred Jurgensmeyer was the youngest of seven children born to Sam and Mary (Luetkemeyer) Jurgensmeyer. Alfred wanted to volunteer for service in the U.S. Navy in World War II, but he was not old enough to join on his own because he was only 17. Sam had to sign for him. After training, Alfred was assigned to serve at sea on the cruiser USS Indianapolis.

By July 1945, the war in Europe had already been won and veterans of the European Theater were coming home. But the war with Japan was still raging. The Allies were preparing for the invasion of Japan, unless the Imperial government could be persuaded to surrender in the face of America's new super weapon, the atomic bomb. The USS Indianapolis was sent on a secret mission to deliver the atomic bomb to Tinian Island where it would be loaded on a B-29 bomber bound for Japan. After that mission was accomplished, cruiser sailed on towards the Philippines without a destroyer escort. By a stroke of bad luck, it crossed the path of a Japanese submarine shortly after midnight on July 30, 1945. The submarine attacked with torpedoes. The first torpedo damaged the bow. The second struck amidships near the fuel tanks and powder magazine. A terrific explosion split the keel, and the ship sank in only 12 minutes.

1,196 sailors were on board. About nine hundred made it into the water. The rest went down with the ship. Life rafts went down with the ship, so most of the men had nothing but their Kapok life jackets for flotation. They had no food or water. The sinking had been so sudden that no distress signal was sent. The Navy did not know the ship had been sunk.

Shark attacks began the morning of the first day and continued through the second and on into the third. A Navy plane on submarine patrol discovered the men by accident on the fourth day.

By the time help arrived on the fifth day, only 317 remained alive. Alfred was not among the living. His family was told he went down with the ship and didn't suffer. Years later, a shipmate told a writer that Alfred made it off the ship and into the water but died before rescue arrived. The Navy kept the sinking of the Indianapolis secret for two weeks until it was announced the same day that Japan surrendered.

**Americans in World War II.** World War II began in September 1939 when the German army attacked Poland and Britain and France declared war. The United States was brought into the war on the Allied side with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941. America mobilized, and 16 million Americans were either drafted or volunteered for service during the war: 405,000 were killed, 671,000 wounded.

**Naval Service.** 3.5 million American served in the U.S. Navy in WW II between Pearl Harbor and VJ Day, Aug. 15, 1945. 63,000 U.S. sailors died. Alfred Jurgensmeyer was one of them.

*Rev. 2/2/22. Please send any comments, additions, or corrections to the Post 545 historian, Dale C. Doerhoff, at [dalecdoerhoff@gmail.com](mailto:dalecdoerhoff@gmail.com).*