Sometimes a Near-Run Thing

U.S. Navy Duty Afloat in the Cold War

Remembrances of Richard Dale Gano of a U.S. Navy career 1965-1989

I was influenced to serve in the Navy by my parents' life of service in that organization and being very aware of their experiences at Pearl Harbor at the very beginning of World War II and the sense of duty instilled in them that day. Through them, I was closely associated with the Sea Service from birth. I was actually born into the arms of the US Navy at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland just outside the District of Columbia on June first 1947, a baby boomer. My father (Hubert Dale Gano of Mattoon, IL), known to all as Dale, was stationed at the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics (BUAIR as he called it) helping to shepherd the jet engine into the Navy's post World War II air fleet.

Mom and Dad were married in Hawaii on July 30th, 1941, a little over five months before the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and just hours after she disembarked from the SS Lurlene (we have her landing permit). At the time, my father was an Aviation Machinist Mate Second Class in the U.S. Navy stationed on Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor, and they lived in nearby Pearl City.

My mother (Margaret Ellen Johnson of Kewanee, IL) had earlier received my dad's proposal of marriage by letter in Washington D.C. where she was working at the time. She made her way across country by train to San Francisco, buying a five-dollar dress to get married in while visiting her mother in her hometown of Kewanee, IL. In San Francisco, she boarded the Matson liner SS Lurline for the voyage to Honolulu. In later years, Mom told us kids that she knew she was sailing into an uncertain situation because everybody knew our country would sooner or later be at war with Japan, but like many others, she never expected the war would begin literally over her head as she and her new husband awoke on December 7, 1941, to the sounds of Japanese attack aircraft overhead. It was a defining experience in both their lives and greatly interested me.

Dad went on to serve a thirty-year career in the Navy retiring as a Commander aviation specialist in early 1969, a few months before I graduated from the US Naval Academy (USNA) in Annapolis, MD. World War II had ensured that capable and ambitious people in the Navy were quickly promoted, and before the war was over, he was promoted to the rank of Ensign, Limited Duty Officer (LDO), known in the US military as a mustang officer. LDOs specialize in a certain field, aviation maintenance and repair in Dad's case, and typically are not eligible for command like Line Officers – Dad served mostly ashore at Naval Aviation Repair Facilities with two stints at sea in aviation related jobs. To me, these seagoing tours were the most interesting jobs he had. As a child, I remember going aboard the converted World War II era Tank Landing Ship (known as an LST – large slow target in Navy slang) where he served as head of the aircraft engine repair department. Whenever he had weekend duty when the ship was in its homeport of Naples, Italy where we lived at the time, the family would have lunch and watch the movie in the wardroom preceded by a reel of the Victory At Sea series, my favorite part.

A couple of years later Dad was the air group maintenance officer for Carrier Air Group 17 aboard the aircraft carrier USS Franklin D Roosevelt (CV-42) during a nine-month deployment to the Mediterranean while our family of Mom, my three siblings, and I lived in Orange Park, FL. He brought home a huge collection of slides to show us of his travels and adventures, and I will always remember the exotic smell of his cruise box when he opened it upon his return – a mixture of aviation jet fuel, paint, and other shipboard smells.

Being both a Navy Junior and an avid reader of U.S. Navy history since I was in about the seventh grade, I probably had some idea of what it meant to be a part of the organization – at least I understood it could get you killed. Stories of PT-boat and destroyer warfare in World War II (especially the exploits of Commodore Arleigh Burke and his Little Beaver squadron, DESRON

23) and expeditions to the far corners of the earth captured my imagination and made me want to be a part of something bigger than myself. At one point in my ensuing twenty-four years in the U.S. Navy, I would actually be assigned to a destroyer, the "greyhounds" of the sea, in the descendent DESRON 23, the Little Beavers. I envisioned that serving aboard a hard-steaming destroyer must surely rank right up there with the camaraderie and esprit de corps one experienced in a horse cavalry outfit in days of yore, but having also read Nicholas Monserrat's *The Cruel Sea*, I also knew of the possible hazards and discomfort associated with small warships at sea - that only whetted my appetite for the adventure.

While cruising in every major and numerous minor oceans and seas of the world from the southern tip of South America to the seas off Petropavlovsk on the Soviet Russian Kamchatka Peninsula and through both the Suez and Panama Canals, I would go on to serve aboard six different ships including three destroyer-types shelling enemy positions; racing to assigned task force screening stations at flank speed with black smoke pouring from the funnels while listening to the screams of forced draft blowers feeding hungry boilers; shoot the biggest guns in the world at world-record ranges and accuracy; challenge Cold War enemy ships and aircraft face to face; meet European royalty and other heads of state as well as to converse with island chiefs on grass mats on palm-fringed Pacific atolls; dodge icebergs while viewing the Aurora Borealis from the deck of a battleship; transit some of the rarest and most beautiful parts of the earth including the Chilean Waterway and the Straits of Magellan; roll from beam to beam in raging typhoons; rescue thousands of refugees in the chaos of the fall of Vietnam; stand endless bridge and combat information center watches in calm and storm witnessing unforgettable sunrises and sunsets; and have the honor and awesome responsibility of command at sea.

What follows is largely a dispassionate recollection of chronological facts, but rest assured, on occasion plenty of adrenaline flowed on many a day at sea as I shouldered responsibilities far, far in excess of anything anybody my age in civilian life ashore could possibly imagine. A lot of ink has been used to describe how much America owes her veterans and how as young men we wrote the country a "blank check payable with our lives" for the honor of defending our way of life – maybe a bit over dramatically stated in my particular case, but there was the occasional near-run thing to keep me from getting overconfident. Regardless, I was always honored and gratified to be serving my country and felt a deep sense of duty and pleasure every time I put on my uniform, often wearing some of my father's old insignia of rank.

So, what, you may ask is a near-run thing? One definition is, "a narrow escape, an event (especially a battle or other struggle) which might easily have had a different outcome." In my Navy career I sometimes experienced this very phenomenon, and the reader will begin to see why I chose this title.

One of the last things I accomplished as a "civilian" before departing the family home in Pensacola, to which we had just return from three years in Norfolk, headed for Annapolis was to complete the requirements for my private pilot's license by flying a solo cross-country flight to Panama City from Pensacola. My flight training had come as a partial payment for a part-time job I had taken in the fall of 1964 as a flight line attendant at the general Aviation terminal (run by Piedmont General Aviation) at the Norfolk, VA airport. I was attending my senior year at Maury High School in Norfolk at the time, and the job was created by Piedmont to be filled by two deserving Civil Air Patrol Cadets, my friend Les Carter and later fellow naval officer and me. Dad had been transferred from Norfolk back to his final (twilight) Navy assignment in Pensacola at the end my final year of high school in 1965, and I had not had time to complete my final flying requirements for my private pilot's license; thus, I had to finish off in Pensacola just before departing for Annapolis at the end of June. A lot of my aviation navigation training was useful in preparing me for shipboard navigation training at USNA and for the continuing navigational responsibilities I had in the Fleet.

One day, while under the wing of a small airplane draining fuel from its tanks, I looked up the see my two sisters approaching me across the apron with an envelope. It was addressed to me from

USNA, and they had jumped to the hopeful conclusion that it was an acceptance of my application for admittance. I quickly opened it to discover it was only notification that I had passed the very thorough physical examination I had undergone some weeks previously at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. While I was pleased to find this the case, it would be weeks later when my parents received a telegram from Senator Everette McKinley Dirksen's (R-Illinois) that he was able to offer me an alternate appointment to USNA. This meant that he had given his primary nomination to another, but another appointment was available to him probably as a result of horse trading with another member of Congress. Anyway, I was IN!

An interesting coincidence in my life is associated high school. Commodore Mathew Fontaine Maury, my high school's namesake (where I graduated 24 of about 600), was the first person to make a comprehensive study of the world's ocean currents and became the first oceanographer of the Navy. In 1970, five years after graduating from the high school named after him, I earned a Master of Science degree in oceanography at the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA.

USNA Years 1965-69

Although brought up in a Navy family, I officially joined the Navy in late June 1965 as a member of the United States Naval Academy Class of 1969. My family had seen me off aboard an Eastern Airlines Electra turbo-prop airliner in Pensacola a day earlier. I was given the unambiguous farewell of, "We'll see you at Christmas," because to arrive home before that would have meant I had been booted out of the Academy for some reason. I think my parents were placing a lot of hope and pride in my potential and progress to date. My father was frequently heard to say how the "ring knocker" from the Naval Academy and other college educated officers were the recipients of all the good things the Navy had to offer in the way of responsibility and advancement, and now I am sure he felt his son was going to get that same opportunity in life. I was wearing a year-old light gray suit and carrying my father's soft-sided Navy leather briefcase with a few personal items – we had been told to bring no extra clothing and $300 for our first uniforms – US military officer pay for all their uniforms as well as their food.

And indeed, I did not see my family again until Christmas because in those years with my brother Jim and younger sister Kathy still at home, money was never plentiful for long-distance travel, and I had no authority to travel home, even if I had been given the leave time. So contact was by letter and a very infrequent collect phone call from a cramped phone booth down in the main hallway of Bancroft Hall near Officer of the Day's office. Imagine today's youth being so cut off from kith and kin! I expect cell phones and email are everywhere in USNA's monstrous barracks building, Bancroft Hall today.

Writing over fifty years later, I do not remember how I got from whatever airport I landed at in the Washington, D.C. area (probably Baltimore Washington International) to the Naval Academy, but with all the prospective Midshipmen coming from all over the country, there was probably a Navy van or bus waiting. At the Academy, I went to an assembly point in the field house for new arrivals where I was assigned to a volunteered guest room in a private home outside the gate for my first night in Annapolis. Not having been officially sworn in, we could not spend the night on Navy property.

So, I trudged out the gate carrying my father's old briefcase and found the private address nearby, right against the outer wall of the Academy. There were soon-to-be other prospective classmates in the house as well. The people who owned these homes were all long-time USNA supporters, alumni, or just plain entrepreneurs of long-standing relations with the Academy. The houses were often full of the female dates (called "drags" in Academy slang) during the academic year weekends and were thus called "drag houses."

I think it was the next day that my official induction into the U.S. Navy began in earnest as a Fourth-Class Midshipman (Plebe). We were taken into the massive Bancroft Hall (the largest single dormitory in the world), known ever after as "Mother B" where all 4,500-odd Midshipmen lived. Bancroft Hall contains some 1,700 rooms, 4.8 miles of corridors, and 33 acres of floor space, and a mess hall (King Hall) big enough to feed the entire Brigade of Midshipmen in one sitting. We entered via Mitscher Hall at the rear of the building, oddly a place I remember entering maybe one other time in my four years at USNA. After checking in, we were formed up in small groups under the supervision of an upperclassman and marched off to various locations throughout Mother B to collect a few essentials, including working uniforms, and haircuts.

We were quickly shown our rooms and told to get to work stenciling and stowing our clothing and getting into uniform. At some point, we were told to place our now-sweaty civilian clothes into our suitcases or whatever personal carrying case we had arrived with, stick our home address on them and place them in the mail. Except for two weeks during Christmas vacation, I would not wear civilian clothing for the next year. My mother later recalled her shock at getting that briefcase in the mail with the sweat-stained gray suit, which never fit me again.

Soon we were informed that we as Plebes were never to walk in Mother B. Instead, we were instructed to "chop" down the center of the halls (passageways in Navy-speak) at a "brace" or "braced up." Chopping was performed by double timing (a jogging sort of run) while the braced position required the chin to be tucked in tightly with the forearms level and pumping with the eyes straight ahead. It was not long before the leather-soled chukka boots we wore gave me a severe case of shin splints. It became a persistent agony to put that horrible shoe wear on and pound down the hard tiled hallways. It was such a relief whenever I was allowed to wear tennis shoes.

I was assigned to the 30th Platoon (to be integrated into 30th Company at the end of Plebe Summer) composed of about 36 Plebes, with a rotating cadre of two Second Class Midshipmen overseeing us all summer. I was assigned to a room on the second floor of the second wing with a view of the verdant green area of the campus (known as the yard) and its walkways including the impressive chapel where we could spy gawking tourists. My roommate was Craig Bathgate, a breezy surfer kind of kid from California to whom everything was "bitchin'" be it good, bad or

whatever. Craig went into the nuclear submarine community after graduation, commanded a nuclear-powered sub, and died of cancer around 2015.

In the late afternoon, we were all assembled (mustered, as the Navy calls it) in Mother B's Tecumseh Court for our official swearing in. As I was planning, even at that point, on a career as a Naval Officer, I knew this was a momentous occasion and I am sure I was full of pride and some anxiety about my chances of completing the four-year program at USNA.

Following is an excerpt from the USNA 1969 class history:

> The United States Naval Academy Class of 1969 took the midshipman oath of office in Tecumseh Court on 30 June 1965. 92% of us were in the top 40% of our high school class, and 46% were president or a senior officer of our class. 72% of us were varsity athletes, one third were members of service clubs, and 11% were Eagle Scouts. 19% of us had some college preparation work. Every state, the District of Columbia and six foreign countries were represented in our class. 86 of us were sons of USNA graduates. Of 5,718 applicants, 1,297 had been selected for our class. But our class consisted of 1,321 men that summer, including those 1,297 new admissions, 17 men turned back from 1968, and 7 ex-midshipmen who were re-admitted into our class. We added 9 more men who were turned back during our time at the Academy, and two of the ex-midshipmen re-admitted to our class were advanced to the classes of 1967 and 1968. Thus, our maximum possible class size was 1,328. On June 4, 1969, we graduated 879 men during the summer of 1969, including 764 men who entered the Navy as ensigns and 105 new second lieutenants in the U.S. Marine Corps. Five foreign graduates returned to their countries for service and five men were not physically qualified for commissions.

I remember thinking, "Holy cow, I am a minnow swimming with sharks," because I didn't fit this wonderful description so well into the august assemblage just described. How would I fare against such competition? My company (30th) numbered 38 Plebes when we first checked in to our rooms. Twenty-four of us graduated four years later for a 63% success rate, a bit less than the overall class success rate.

When it was all over, 66% of those who took the oath with me to support and defend the Constitution of the United States in Tecumseh Court that warm June evening graduated four years later. At the beginning of Plebe Summer Rear Admiral Draper Kauffman, who was just reporting for duty as Superintendent of USNA, got up in front of us and said that in the past at such assemblages the incoming class was told to look at the man to his left and right and that one of us three would not make it through the Academy. To much applause, he said our class would break that rule and that we would all get through. Of course, he was wrong – our dropout rate almost exactly proved the rule, and no matter what the academy did, this 34% attrition had and would continue to be the norm for some time. In more recent years, there has been a lot of effort put into reducing the attrition. Things like an academic center where tutoring is readily available and programs to better prepare candidates for admission through understanding just what they are getting involved with.

What I can say to summarize Plebe Summer and the following academic year is that it was a trying experience to which I adapted without too much trauma as the upperclassmen harassed us to shape us into an acceptable version of a Midshipman. By the time this first year was over, I knew I was going to be just fine at the Academy and would probably be commissioned in three more long years.

In the muggy Maryland summer heat, we were dressed for most of each day in either gym shorts with tee shirts for strenuous work or "white works" for pretty much everything else. White works were a marvelous outfit made of medium-weight white cotton duck cloth and comprised of a pullover jumper with vee-neck and sailor flap collar on the back and a pair of button-up fly trousers with integral drawstrings serving as belt. We wore a white tee shirt with a blue neck-ring

and a blue ring on each sleeve on it under the pullover. For meal formations and parades, we upgraded the uniform with a sailor's black kerchief knotted at the bottom of the vee-neck and doffed our "Dixie Cup" sailor hats with blue ring for the combination cap (white covered billed hat with gold braid and midshipman insignia of gold anchor). Rolling and tying that kerchief was a task, and once you got it right, you did everything possible to keep it that way. I think some people never washed or untied the things for four years. The uniforms were washed in bulk and flattened out (not ironed) and sent back to the owner. They could be slept in, and nobody knew the difference. Footwear that summer, other than tennis shoes for working out, normally consisted of the aforementioned leather-soled chukka boots (also called boon dockers), which were a laced black shoe, which came up to just over the ankles. Traction while chopping (Plebes were never allowed to walk) on the linoleum tiles of Mother B was difficult in boon dockers, and we quickly learned to slide around corners (now called drifting by street racers) with abandon.

After our busy first day with the cadre of upperclassmen escorting us from stop to stop, lights-out was at 10 PM, and reveille was scheduled for 0600 the next morning. I think we talked a bit in the darkness before falling asleep.

Surprise! At 0530 we were rudely awakened by the several upperclassmen yelling for us to get out into the hallway and stand at attention next to our doors. This was a show of force on their part, and the accommodating natures they had demonstrated the day before were all gone and replaced by cursing and scowls at the low life, worthless Plebes in front of them. After a brief roll call, we were given three minutes to get back into our rooms to dress in gym clothes and then be back in the hallway at attention.

The activities of the ensuing half hour were to be repeated many, many times with some variation over the next year before every meal. We ran until our legs hurt and cramped, jumped, did pushups until our arms shook, squatted, crawled, and just generally were worn to a sweaty mass of humanity until almost 0600 when we were told to get back into our rooms to shower and dress in the uniform of the day for breakfast formation. Once or twice that summer, an upperclassman named O'Brien took us out of Bancroft Hall for a fast-paced running binge in the pre-dawn darkness that probably wound around the Yard (what we called the campus) for five miles or more. For non-cross country runners it was puke city.

From wherever we formed up at the three daily meal formations, we were marched down to the huge 4,500-man mess hall (King Hall) where we sat at 12-man tables with upperclassmen at one end of the table and Plebes ranged about the rest of the chairs. There we were subjected to a cacophony of clattering serving plates and dishes and continuous shouting of orders and questions from our menacing superiors while seated at a brace on the first four inches of the chair, eyes straight ahead (in the boat). It was difficult to get enough to eat at any meal that summer, and I lost a fair amount of weight. A picture taken late in the summer of some Civil Air Patrol friends from Norfolk presenting me a pair of CAP wings (acknowledging my successful completion of private pilot training) shows a gaunt Rich in tropical white long uniform accepting a plaque. I appreciated the gesture, but unfortunately, it was a distraction from my ever-pressing duty of keeping up with the Plebe Summer rat race.

Activities during the day consisted of athletics, sailing instruction, signaling, knot-tying, rifle and pistol range time, close order drill with our nine-pound M-1 Garand rifles and fixed bayonets, and mass assemblies after supper where we'd sing Navy songs and get briefings of one sort or another. Our initial training in the manual of arms with the M-1 was conducted by Marine drill instructors brought up from Marine boot camp. They were very impressive men with a no-nonsense approach to getting us quickly trained so they could get back to their primary duty of training Marines. Our upperclassmen chaperones could have quite easily accomplished this task, but I think the Navy wanted us Plebes to witness just a taste of what impressive people Marine DIs were.

By the end of the summer, we had lost a hundred or so people who had realized they were not cut out to endure a Plebe Year at USNA. The fact that the military draft was on and that there was a war starting up in Vietnam was not lost on any of us, and I for one did not want to end up back out on the street subject to being drafted into the US Army and ending up dead in the mud of Vietnam.

All summer long, our thinly manned cadre of upperclassmen warned us that we might be able to get away with slacking off unnoticed here and there during Plebe Summer, but that when the rest of the Brigade of Midshipmen returned for the academic year, the ratio would be reversed, and the real pressure would be on. At our last evening formation of the summer, the upperclassmen had all of us who had acquired no demerits raise our hands. We were thereupon given five demerits (always given in units of five) as "protection" against being singled out by the returning brigade for extra attention. With no demerits, I felt like I was being killed with kindness.

The next day, as the Brigade returned, we were moved to our new rooms within the 30th company area. No longer would we get to gaze out our window at the green trees and tourists walking by. Now we looked out from our third-story window at the gray granite sides and windows of a large quadrangle above the flat tar roof of the first floor. Craig and I also acquired a third roommate, Steve Shumlas from New Jersey. Although he made it to graduation and an apparently successful Navy career, Craig incurred the wrath of the upperclassmen through some sort of foul up or other. Steve was a no-nonsense Polack from New Jersey who did not enjoy the unwanted attention brought to our room by Craig's foul-ups and roundly cursed him on a regular basis. On the other hand, he appreciated that Craig was given attention he himself did not get.

What we all wished to do that first year was to become invisible to the upperclassmen. The best way to do that was to perform well at whatever activity was forced upon you and hope that the attentions of our tormentors would be directed elsewhere. I never wished bad fortune upon another classmate, but I found myself relieved whenever somebody else screwed up and I was left alone. Steve took to unflatteringly calling Craig our "shit deflector."

Upon the return of the rest of the Brigade of Midshipmen at the end of the summer, the just-returned upperclassmen of our company eyed us before our first formation with them like vultures would fresh meat. We no longer outnumbered our cadre of Second Classmen 18 to 1. Rather, we were now outnumbered at a ratio of about three to one. The upper classes were not allowed to harass us until the evening meal formation that September day. When that moment arrived, the world around us rose up in an angry roar of upperclassmen yelling in our faces. They were angry that they had to return from relative freedom of summer cruises and leaves, angry that we were so inept, angry that we simply existed! What an unhappy bunch it seemed.

Not knowing where we were to stand within the company formation, we were initially all lined up next to each other (as if for protection in numbers) where the three platoons of 30th company normally formed. We were quickly manhandled into our new permanent positions within each of the three squads of the three platoons interspersed (by height) with the second-year men (Third Classmen known as Youngsters) and third year men (known simply as Second Classmen) with the First Classmen (Firsties) in the leadership positions of Squad Leader, Platoon Leader, Company Commander and company staff. Even the small comfort associated with the proximity of a fellow Plebe had been roughly removed – we were now on our own. As we marched off to dinner, the position of each Plebe was clearly discernable from the twin puddles of sweat, which had dripped from our knuckles onto the bricks of the terrace where our company formed up.

Mealtime for Plebes was a stressful time because of our extended exposure to the upperclassmen while we were trying to get enough calories to make it through to the next meal. For one half hour before every meal, Plebes were subject to a particularly nasty tradition known as the "come-around." Usually given as a punishment by a Firstie or a Second Class to Plebes for some actual or imagined infraction, a come-around could consist of physical exercise, rapid uniform changes into and out of the many uniforms we possessed, professional instruction or all

of the above combined into a totally physically and mentally exhausting torture session. All questions directed to the Plebe at a come-around or during the following meal had to be answered correctly or with the response, “I’ll find out, sir!” Under no circumstance could a Plebe respond with, “I don’t know.” This practice became so ingrained that a number of years passed before I would ever tell any officer senior to me that I simply did not know something. My usual response was that while I might not have the answer at that moment, I would quickly find and provide the information.

All questions for which the Plebe responded that he would find out the information had to be answered at the next come-around or at the next meal. Woe unto the Plebe who could not remember the questions directed at him during the chaos of come-arounds and meals. Failure in this area would usually incur the dreaded, “Come-around!” from the offended upperclassman, and the ensuing come-around would indeed be a rough one. We would do things like placing wadded up pieces of napkin in our laps during the meal to keep count of the questions directed at us so that after the upperclassmen had departed, we could take stock and check with each other if we had forgotten what a particular wad of napkin represented.

We were taught early about the value of teamwork and that one was NEVER to “bilge” (to embarrass or speak ill of) our classmates. If an upperclassman mistook you for the perpetrator of some misdeed on the part of a classmate, you took the heat and did not reveal that a mistake had been made. This attitude carried over into the Fleet where you did not tell a mistaken senior officer that some mistake was not your fault, even it wasn’t.

As the last ten minutes before every meal formation arrived, a Plebe in every company area in Mother B began a chant as loudly as he could yell. It consisted of the information that the meal was 10 minutes away, the menu for the meal, and the name of the OOD, and probably several other miscellaneous bits of information I have forgotten. The call was repeated at five minutes, and I think the last one was at one minute. The last call ended with, “Time, tide, and formation wait for no man!” as the Plebe charged off the join the formation. Time, tide, and formation – what a strong influence over me that concept would carry down the years.

During the academic year, the entire brigade marched into the dining hall (King Hall) at the rear of Mother B through several entrances, and each man stood behind his assigned chair until a prayer was said and “seats” ordered by the Brigade Commander. Each table seated twelve men, about the size of a squad, usually with two Firsties seated at the head of the table and two Second Class at the foot. Several Youngsters filled in some or all the four chairs along one long side of the table, and Plebes filled in the rest of the places. There were two rows of tables placed end-on to the central passageway. A series of bells were rung throughout the duration of the meal signifying when each class might exit the hall with Firsties going first.

As we sat, with Plebes braced up perched on the first four inches of their chairs, stewards rapidly rolled out dozens of tall metal warming carts laden with the trays of food. These stewards were enlisted Filipinos (recruited and trained in the Philippines) who lived in a barrack building along the seawall behind Mother B. In previous years they had lived in big white barracks ships tied to the seawall along the Severn River. The ships were still there when I arrived, and I think they were towed away to Vietnam within a year of my arrival.

The stewards quickly unloaded the trays to the waiting hands of the closest Plebe at each of the several tables they served. The trays were quickly passed by the other Plebes to the head of the table for the Firsties to load up their plates and then back to the foot of the table for the Second Class who then handed them off to the Youngsters. Plebes divided whatever was left, and then held up the trays above their heads in hopes of finding a sympathetic steward to load it with some seconds. Seconds were essential if Plebes were to get a full belly, but they still had to be offered to the upperclassmen first. If steaks were served, the Plebes immediately dumped the entire tray of twelve steaks onto plates in order to get the empty tray aloft signaling for more. I can recall one time one of the Plebes said something derogatory to the steward about his speed in getting

the trays restocked, and the Filipino said, “You watch you mouth, Meedsheepmon!” Yes, even the lowliest steward in the Navy could tell a Plebe where to get off.

While all this was going on, the upperclassmen, usually the Firsties and Second Class, peppered the Plebes with professional questions, insults, demands for answers to previous questions, or other conversational gambits to which the Plebes had to attend most closely. Plebes had to know the menus for the next two meals, the news of the day from the Washington Post, who the officers of the watch were for the day, and a myriad of quotes and trivia from our small book of Plebe knowledge, “Reef Points,” like the fact that the bronze doors of the chapel were inscribed with the Latin “non sibi, sed patriae,” meaning “not for self, but for country”. Not for self – how serious was that, and what would it come to mean in the years ahead? With such subtlety and occasional brutal bluntness, it was thus inculcated into us that this whole thing was not about us but rather something a whole lot more important.

One other unique feature of the mess hall was the incredible food fight that occurred at the last breakfast meal before Christmas leave. I think there was one every year I was there, even though we were warned in no uncertain terms that we’d be punished if one happened. I remember that Steve Shumlas and I as Firsties were sitting at the head of our table that last breakfast before Christmas watching the stern-looking Officer-of-the-Day in his dress blues and sword with accompanying Plebe “mate” pacing the main passageway between the rows of tables. We noticed that nobody was leaving as the various class bells rang out, and the OOD and his mate began drawing closer the one of the exits.

Eventually, I spied a single piece of toast sailing high over the central aisle probably a football field’s distance away, and I knew “it was on.” In a split second, the air was filled with everything that could be thrown. Not wanting our blue woolen working uniforms all messed up, Steve and I dived under the table as powered doughnuts and even full gallon cartons of milk rained down on those at our table who chose to fight. In a couple of minutes, it was all over, and we two escaped unharmed and unsoiled.

Academics during the first year are reportedly not as challenging as in the last four years supposedly to allow the Plebe to acclimate, withstand the harshness Plebe Year. I do not know that such was true, but after the first grading period, I was awarded “stars” which were a small golden star worn over the anchors we wore on our blue dress and working uniforms to signify a GPA of 3.4 or better. This very much impressed my supervising upperclassmen because that sort of academic achievement by a Plebe living under the pressure, they were exerting outside the classroom was notable. Suddenly, the pressure was eased, almost like a bully who has been hit back by the tormented. I went on to wear stars often and occasionally tutored Steve company classmates who had difficulty, especially in calculus.

Personal incompatibilities required some adjustment of roommates from time to time, generally at semester break and across the summers, and few people remained roommates for more than a year or two, but Steve and I, being pretty much opposite personalities in many ways, stuck it out to the end. “Better the devil you know than the one you don’t.” During our Youngster (second) year we were by ourselves with an outside view until Jon Hine’s roommates could not stand him any longer, and he was foisted off on us.

Jon was a jolly oddball who had been largely raised by his mother in Italy, meaning his growing up experiences had nothing in common with the average American kid. The upperclassmen had made his life hell during Plebe Year, much as they had in Craig Bathgate’s case, but he had endured. Steve hated him and just fumed the whole semester we had Jon with us. I liked and still do like Jon, and I think Steve is now OK with him too.

Early in Plebe year, I made the acquaintance of Oliver North of the class of ’68 whom I thought to be rather boorish and who lived across the hall from Craig, Steve, and me. Ollie later went on to infamy as the Marine Lieutenant Colonel with a White House office who ran interference for the

Reagan administration in the IRAN-CONTRA scandal. Unlike the accepted norm for Youngsters to help the Plebes or at least leave them alone, Ollie took delight in harassing us as we sweated at “come arounds” under the supervision of the Firsties and Second Class. He liked to sport Marine Corp athletic clothing when he exercised with combat boots – what a jerk. After managing to retire and kept his retirement pay from the Corps, he went on to a cheesy career as a TV military commentator for Fox News.

During that first year, I enrolled as a crewmember aboard the Fifth Battalion Yard Patrol (YP) craft in a voluntary, extra-curricular program known then as the YP Squadron. It operated after class daily in the first part of the Fall semester and the last part of the Spring semester when the weather was not so brutal on the Chesapeake Bay. This program meant that I was not available for the usual after-hours intramural sports program in the spring and fall. As each of the 36 companies fiercely competed each year for points toward the “Color Company” competition, in part through the sports program, my “desertion” to the YP Squadron was not greeted with enthusiasm by my superiors. I did end up on the company field ball team during the colder months when the YPs did not operate, and that sport was considered one of the roughest sports at the Academy because the football players chose it as a means to stay fit when their football season was over.

I loved being on the water in the twin-screw, 80-foot-long fiberglass craft and spent all four years at the Academy in this program in the fall and spring sessions eventually rising to the position of Squadron Commodore. I had always wanted to be a “destroyerman” and found these craft and the duties I performed in them excellent preparation for Fleet duty. We practiced formation steaming along with all the associated flag and code drills, precision navigation, and underway replenishment – all the same things that midshipmen had to do on those same boats during the formal class work of YP “labs.” Sometimes we attacked each other with fire hoses. I clipped the masthead from the internal Navy publication “DESTROYERMAN” and glued it to my name placard which we inserted into a holder on the outside of the door of our room. In 2017 during a visit to Steve and Alice Shumlas, he handed me my name placard with the masthead still glued to it - I had never given a thought to removing it that wonderful day in June 1969 when we left USNA.

Most midshipmen professed to hate the formal YP classes where a commissioned officer was aboard and grading each man under the stressful conditions of hurried operations. However, we in the YP Squadron were not being graded, and we got to perform duties aboard the boats that midshipmen of our grade did not get to do in the formal classes. When YP classes started each year, the officer-in-charge of each boat always asked which Midshipmen in the class of twenty or so aboard was a YP Squadron member so he would know whom to place in the critical positions like helmsman and conning officer. There were six YPs in the Squadron, one for each battalion in the brigade of midshipmen with around twenty men per boat.

We would take a weekend or two during each of the two YP annual operating periods to run the boats to a “destination” such as a yacht club somewhere on the Chesapeake Bay, down to Norfolk, or up to Philadelphia during Army-Navy game weekend. On one of the trips to Philadelphia, we were given a tour of the mothballed IOWA-class battleships moored there. The ship we toured was USS IOWA, a ship with which I would later become intimately familiar. In my last year, I was assigned by the Naval Science Department (the YP Squadron supervisory authority) as the Squadron Commander. As a consequence, I was awarded the Seamanship Award for the Class of 1969 upon graduation.

The most memorable trip was one we attempted to New York in the spring of 1966. I was a Plebe assigned to a watch in the engine room control booth down in the engine room where on the other side of the glass were four Detroit 6V71 diesel engines driving our two props. My duty there was to answer the engine order telegraph commands for ahead, neutral, or reverse of the propellers and the appropriate revolutions for each increment within the range such as Ahead i/3 or 2/3, or whatever. When we exited the C&D Canal and entered Delaware Bay and then the Atlantic, things started getting rough, and I remember coming up on deck to find that we could only make out any of the other YPs when they rose up on top of the huge waves. My watch relief, a company and classmate of mine named Dave Hurley, and I ended up sick in the booth sharing a wastebasket to barf into. Neither of us was well enough to climb the ladder up to the main deck, but we still managed to get up and answer the engine order telegraph from the bridge directing what we should be doing with the engines. This went on for hours and hours with the engine orders gradually dying off to just ahead 1/3 or stop on one engine at a time. Feeling the motion somewhat eased, I climbed up to the pilothouse to find only one Youngster on watch because we were now anchored behind a breakwater at Lewes, Delaware to which place we had retreated from the storm. This guy was just sending the occasional engine command to us to keep the strain off the anchor chain. I told him we didn’t want to stay there all night in that noisy booth answering his dopey signals. I think we just went to bed.

It may have been on that trip when we elected to go up the Delaware River to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard or another of several trips we took there in the YPs that we were running the river one dark and moonless night using our rarely effective radars as well as the terrestrial navigation lights to figure out where we were. We were following navigation range lights (a low light closest to the observer with a higher rear light much farther way, much like a gun sight). If the two lights were aligned vertically, the YP was in the channel, but there are many background lights in that part of the world due to the surrounding civilization making the ranges somewhat difficult to pick out at night. We would cruise along watching for the next turn in the river channel to be indicated by the next set of range lights (displayed on the chart) beginning to align themselves. We were the lead of six YPs, and I was intently studying the range ahead when it suddenly winked out, hmm. We were perplexed until we realized there was only one good explanation, and that was a ship coming our way and that we were both following the range with us looking ahead and him looking astern! All the background lighting made it hard to see the oncoming ship’s (many times our size) navigation lights, and the radar was doing its usual poor job of seeing anything. We quickly grabbed the primary tactical (PRITAC) radio microphone and warned the following five YPs as we quickly got to the far right of the channel. This was in the days before marine VHF radios were on all vessel with everybody guarding channel 16.

Sometime during Plebe year, I received a letter from a high school girl friend who I had dated during my senior year at Maury High in Norfolk. We renewed our acquaintance, and I went to see

her at Trinity College in DC and spent one weekend with her family in Alexandria (her dad was a USNA grad and naval aviator captain who later commanded the carrier USS Intrepid). We continued to date early into my Second-Class year but eventually ended up realizing there was no future for us due to dramatically differing views on the Vietnam War as well as general political and religious views in general. We stayed in distant touch, and I stopped in to see her and her family for brief friendly chats in DC and California as I passed through those areas enroute to various training assignments with the last visit being in 1972. My peripatetic career was no fit place for any sort of steady relationship, and any efforts I made in that direction were fruitless for years – it became simpler to ignore the idea altogether until 1977. In the first four years in the Fleet, I was in no one physical location or abode for more than four months.

At the end of that first year, we suddenly became Youngsters and were entitled to wear the thin diagonal stripe denoting such on our shoulder boards and the left sleeve of our dress blue uniforms. I have group photo of us proud 30th Company Youngsters at the beginning of our second academic year. We were now twenty-eight in number, down from our original thirty-eight.

We would lose four more of our number due to academic failure before we were all done. I think these losses hardened our psyches to some degree as friend fell by the wayside in a usually slow-motion failure to keep up mode. Usually, we were so wrapped up in our own struggle to maintain a continued presence at USNA to offer much help to those amongst us who were drowning. Being one of the highest academic scoring members in my company I was sought out for a bit of tutoring here and there, usually in calculus, and I tried my best to help and usually achieved an even better understanding of the subject as I taught others.

For my Youngster Cruise, I was assigned to the USS *Belknap* (CG 26), a new guided missile cruiser, which along with a number of other ships picked us up at Annapolis. We cruised to the Puerto Rican operating area and conducted gunnery and missile exercises and visited St Thomas before returning to Norfolk. My duties during this 6–8-week cruise were to simply live the life of an enlisted man performing simple duties as instructed. We steered the ship, stood lookout, cleaned boiler exteriors, shined brass, and generally got the idea of what life at sea for an enlisted man was all about. One evening while in port at Naval Station Norfolk, I given a note inviting me to dine with my parents who were visiting their former neighbors from Orange Park, FL days, the naval base commander. Needless to say, I had no problems getting out of sailor-like duties when summoned by such important personages. In 1975 the *Belknap* was involved in a nighttime collision with the carrier John F Kennedy in which 8 Belknap sailors lost their lives.

After we were picked up off the Academy, Belknap proceeded to Norfolk and then to the Puerto Rican operation area where we participated in various exercises and incidentally qualified to the Navy Expeditionary medal as part of the Cuban Missile Blockade force, still officially in existence since 1961. We had a brief stay in St Thomas where I bought a decorative comb and mirror as a gift for my mother, typical sailor, I guess. Eventually we ended up back in Norfolk where I remember spending part of one evening along with everybody else in our 40-man berthing compartment looking for one of our classmates who was drunk and missing. We feared he may have fallen overboard, but he was eventually found singing in the 5" gun mount which happened to be pretty soundproof. A couple weeks leave at home in Pensacola after the summer cruise was followed by my return to Annapolis for the commencement of Youngster Year.

Youngster year at USNA was a far cry from the woes of Plebe year, and I was able to concentrate on my studies and did well – I was now into the "getting through this place" mode. The USNA staff and I shared a common goal, to get me educated and trained and out the door as a Navy Ensign. I am proud of having been chosen to attend and subsequently graduate from USNA. It helped shape me and prepared me well for my Navy career and life in general, but I have no abiding love for the place. Anybody who remembers those years with any fondness of heart simply suffers from a lack of accurate memory. USNA was utilitarian and gray and all male. At the time, we used to say USNA was a helluva place to be from, but it was a helluva place to BE. I once had a USNA class of '68 shipmate who joined the Glee Club and remembers so fondly his time at USNA and traveling about with the group singing his heart out. My close acquaintances and I never seemed to have that much fun.

That same year, I became knowledgeable of the Academy's preferential treatment of varsity athletes in general and football players when I was (probably mistakenly) assigned to a "jock" English class. While not a small person, I was struck the first day in this class by how much larger every person in the class was than I. The professor was a pudgy civilian with a clear liking for these crew (who knew rowers were such giants?) and football athletes. He would let them get away with all sorts of academic slothfulness like not being prepared for class and sleeping in class. Class preparation and participation in every "normal" class at USNA was vital to passing, while in this class, sleeping was OK. I got an "A" without even trying very hard, something I didn't usually attain in "bull" classes. I was ashamed for the Academy and quite disillusioned. The training tables with their better food and lack of usual USNA table discipline were a bad enough insult to the average Midshipman who was just trying to survive and graduate, but this was really a stain on the honor of the place.

The Navy of those days was a very large organization, and I only served with a USNA classmate twice in my twenty years of commissioned service; so getting chummy with USNA classmates, much less even seeing many, was not something that could happen in the normal course of a career. In 1979, Steve Shumlas talked me into attending the tenth class reunion only because I happened to be stationed in Washington DC at the time. I have not gone back since except to show my wife Mary the place in 2005 when we attended a wedding in DC.

Marching in the Wednesday afternoon dress parades of fall and spring was a tiresome activity that few escaped. We called the activity "p-raid," and I never remember hearing a positive word about it during my time there. As if adding insult to injury, the Wednesday p-raid was preceded by the essentially identical Monday practice p-raid. Sailors have little use for marching and the accompanying carrying of rifles on shoulders, and I was certainly no exception. It always seemed that I had a last period-of-the-day class those days which required a lot of hustle and bustle on my part to get back to my room to dress in my parade uniform which included laced leggings to keep the lower pant legs tight to the shin in order to prevent tripping while on the march with the nine-pound M1 Garand rifle with fixed bayonet. When we wore the woolen Navy-blue trousers in cold weather those leggings were an agony, and I could hardly wait to get them off for a good shin scratch after the p-raid. I was happy to be chosen as a platoon commander during First Class year which meant I carried a sword instead of the nine-pound rifle.

During my four years at USNA, all outside formations for the two companies I was in were conducted in the slightly yellow brick paved Tecumseh Court, the impressive expanse open to view by tourists of which there were always a few. As a child I watched the short-lived (1957-58) TV series "Men of Annapolis" which opened and ended with a view of this same formation marching into the various entrances off the court. We formed there for lunch and dinner formation as well as p-raid formations. We always tried to look our best and marched as smartly as possible there. Other companies formed up outside on other areas of Mother B because we could not all fit in T-Court. The Brigade was composed of two regiments of three battalions apiece with each battalion composed of six companies. Each company was composed of three platoons of about 30 midshipmen.

For p-raids our thirty-six approximately 120-man companies formed up and marched off to Worden Field about a half mile distant with a drum section of the fife and drum corps or the Navy band attached to the academy playing to help keep us all in step. At Worden Field we formed in our battalions and regiments behind the brigade commander facing the grandstand. While trying not to faint in hot weather we would go through the manual of arms as we shifted our rifles around and eventually came to the "present arms" position requiring us to hold our rifles vertically in front of us with the hilt of the bayonet just about eye level for the gun salute to the VIP guest. Then we listened to the amplified voice of the guest speaker and would often hear the presentation of a medal for valor in combat to a veteran of the ongoing Vietnam War. Finally, the band would strike up a series of jaunty Sousa marches, and we would march off to take our turn passing in review in front of the crowded stands. With the exception of the Color Company (winner of the previous year's competition for best company), the companies marched off the field in numerical order. Being in 30th Company for my first two years meant a relatively long wait for our turn while being in 6th Company my last two years meant a relatively short wait, but I always thanked my lucky stars that I was never in 36th Company!

At the end of Youngster year, we all advanced to Midshipmen Second Class, and departed on the summer's scheduled activities which included indoctrination stints of a few weeks each at the New London Submarine School, Naval Air Training Command in Pensacola, and Little Creek, VA for Marine Corps indoctrination. These three training periods were just time spent treading water for me, as my decision had been made long since to join the surface Navy in destroyers and cruisers. The training in Pensacola did have the benefit of being close to home for a few extra weeks, and we entertained a few of my classmates at home and pool that summer.

During our several weeks in Pensacola, we had to live at NAS Pensacola in some crummy old World War II era barracks, although I was allowed to spend weekend nights at home. We marched to the mess hall for meals when we were not off at Ellyson Field for helicopter indoctrination, Saufley Field for primary flight training indoctrination, or Whiting Field for secondary flight training indoctrination. Before we headed off to these various places, we received training in the hyperbaric chamber where got to experience hypoxia and the Dilbert Dunker where we were strapped into a mock cockpit, slid down a rail into a swimming pool and flipped over. There a diver waited in case we were unable to un-strap ourselves and exit. This

was the same indoor pool Mom had brought us kids to on winter weekends to wear off some of our energies.

Already aware that I did not enjoy aerobatic maneuvers, I was not enthusiastic about the flight we would get in a T-28 Trojan trainer at Whiting Field. This radial engine propeller plane had something close to the performance characteristics of a World War II fighter plane; so it was no plane-Jane trainer. The instructor pilots all enjoyed yanking their Midshipmen students all over the sky with the usual resulting airsickness.

I dutifully climbed into the back seat under the bubble canopy, and off we roared into the skies over Pensacola Beach. The pilot executed a loop (oh, my stomach!) and pulled out with enough Gs to make me almost pass out. He executed another maneuver or two, and I was please to inform him over the intercom that I was feeling OK. He shushed me saying he had a “chip light” which meant that a magnet in the engine had collected a metal chip for the engine’s internals, not a good thing. From there on it was a nice straight and level gliding flight downhill to Whiting where the fire trucks raced alongside us as we uneventfully landed – this was all just fine with me as this “near-run thing” got me out of that airplane all the faster.

Next up was several weeks of Marine indoctrination at Little Creek, VA where I remember a humorous afternoon which was a bit symbolic of what was going on in our society with regard to the dissent over the ongoing Vietnam conflict resulting in an unfortunate divide between the American people and the people their leader sent to fight that war. We had made an amphibious landing out at Virginia Beach in old Mark V amphibious tractors after spending a night or two on amphibious ships, and we were headed back to our crummy barracks at Little Creek Amphibious Base. We were all dressed as Marines and carrying M-1 Garand rifles (which we had used to shoot up a lot of blank cartridges that day), and we were hot and dirty and just generally tired of being “Marines.”

Our non-air-conditioned Navy gray school bus with all the windows down pulled to a stop at a traffic light in the right lane of a four-lane highway. Alongside us was a convertible and standing on the median taunting us about being killers or whatever was a “hippy” dressed in raggedy, tie-dyed counter-culture clothing. A commotion suddenly broke out a few seats behind me as one of my classmates started yelling at this creature while struggling against his seatmate’s feigned attempts to restrain him. He rose to his feet while leveling his M-1 rifle out of the window at the hippy. As the other classmate made a show of trying to stop him yelling, “Oh God, don’t do it!” the loud crack of the blank round in the M-1 went off right over the top of the convertible, and the “dude” in the median grabbed his torso thinking he’d been shot. A split second later he realized he was OK, and the bus erupted with our laughter as we began to move through the now green traffic light.

Now the simple act of possessing blank rounds after the landing was a violation because we had been required to turn in all unfired rounds before leaving the beachhead. But of course, a number of crazies neglected to do so. As soon as we got back to the barracks area, the place erupted with gunfire as these nuts chased each other around - obviously quite a few folks had not turned in their ammo. It was quite amusing as a staff car with an officer inside it, called to the area to quell the disturbance, cruised through the area only to be greeted by a crescendo of blank gunfire from the barracks windows. I didn’t have any ammo and was worried we were all going to suffer, but nothing ever came of it.

Back at USNA, it had been rumored that an on-again off-again program of company switching starting at the beginning the third year would be implemented, and sure enough, it happened to our class. For my classmates and me in 30th company, it meant uprooting from our familiar haunts of the second floor of the fourth wing and resettling amongst stranger First Class, Youngsters, and, of course, new Plebes in the sixth company on the fourth floor of the first wing. Now we had two more floors to climb umpteen times a day!

Second class year for me was a repeat of the emphasis of Youngster year, but the course work was more difficult (no more “jock” classes for me). Looking ahead at the next two long years, I began to wonder if I’d ever get out of Annapolis. It was a depressingly bleak prospect to me, but I turned to the task at hand with a will to make myself forget about how much longer I would be there. I remained busy with the YP Squadron, field ball, and academics.

Once brief break occurred in the Fall as our class participated in the traditional exchange weekend with the other two service academies. This program carried out over a number of weeks saw groups of Midshipmen and Cadets travel in mid-week to one of the other two academies to live with their counterparts participating in their routine activities until returning to their home academy on Sunday. I remember some who were anxious to go to the Air Force Academy in Colorado because of its newness and presumed lax discipline, but I wanted to go to West Point to see and feel the history of the place and see how Cadets lived. My overall take-away impression was of grayness, gray skies of New York in the Fall, gray uniforms, gray stone walls, and even gray people. The Cadets I roomed with were housed in an old two-story barracks in a several-person room. At night they opened the sash windows, as seemed to be custom and slept under very thick comforters. At six AM a cannon went off nearby and an Army enlisted group played a bugle and drum to summon the Cadets to formation; five minutes of this noise went on at the end of which all of us had to be standing shivering out in the courtyard to be counted before release back into our rooms to perform morning ablutions. I remember some Cadets at the initial formation clothed in only a rough semblance of uniforms. By contrast, at USNA a bell rings for a few seconds in each company area and one person in each room is required to stand at the door in bathrobe until the company reveille Midshipman walked by to receive the “we are all up” report from each room. What a difference! Breakfast then proceeded in similar manner to how we did it at USNA with the exception that we were formed up outside in the chill because there was no “inside.” Rainy conditions must have been bad. I believe the Cadets now live in more modern buildings with interior passages to the mess hall.

The couple of classes at USMA were not remarkable, but I did attend an evening presentation of the recent Battle of Khe Sanh in Vietnam with a three-dimensional terrain model. It made me glad not to be a ground pounder.

As odd as it may seem, given the antipathy we all felt about our cloistered existence at USNA, we were all relieved to return to Mother B from West Point where we slept behind closed windows in winter and did not get blown awake by cannons and bugles.

At the end of our third academic year my class advanced to Midshipmen First Class and embarked upon our first-class cruise intended to teach us to perform the duties of junior officers afloat. I was lucky and got accepted for a spot on the western Pacific (WESTPAC) cruise, which meant that I would likely be seeing combat off Vietnam. I was a bit depressed to find that I had been assigned to USS MUANA KEA (AE 22) an ammunition ship instead of a destroyer, ominously enough, named after a Hawaiian volcano, meaning I would not be seeing direct action. As it turned out, it was a most exciting and rewarding cruise of eight weeks.

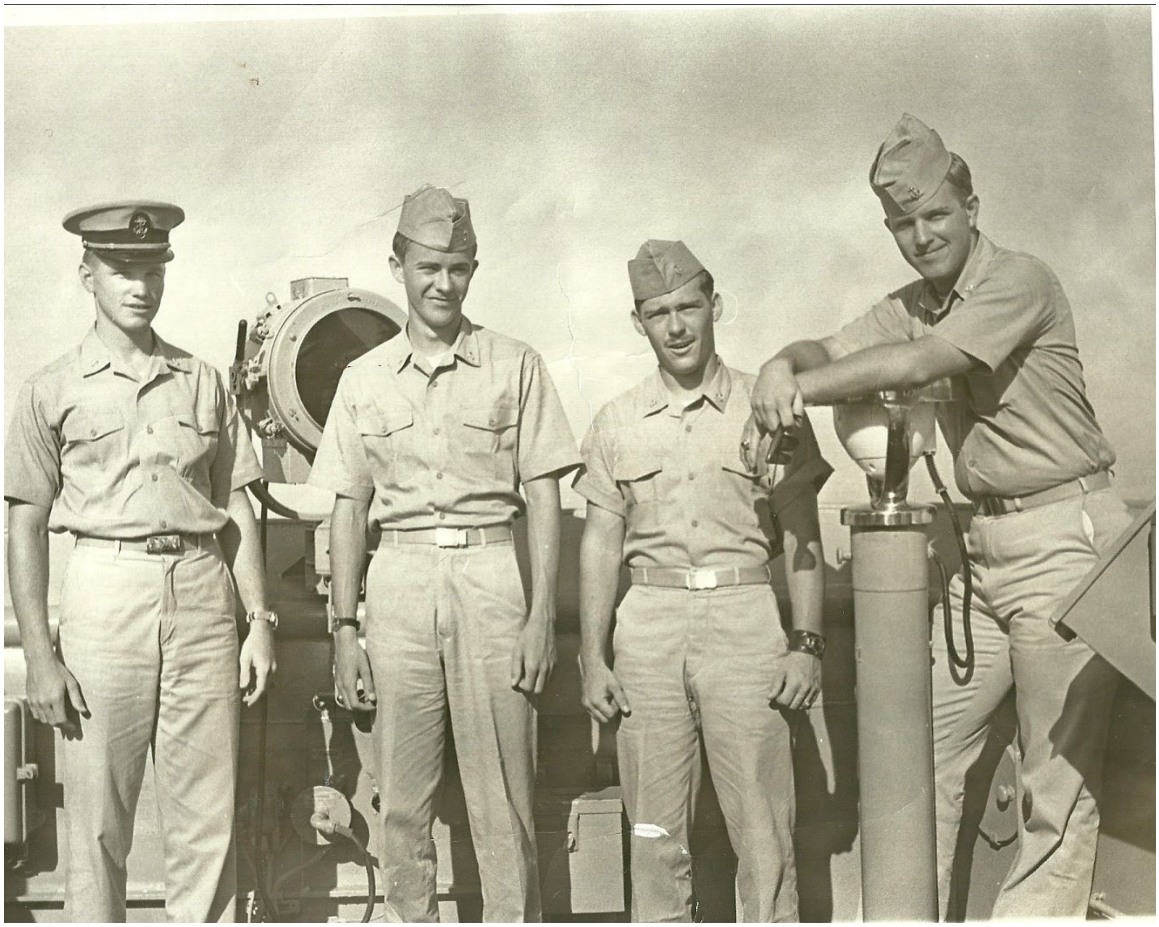
The 54-hour plane ride from Baltimore-Washington International (BWI) Airport to the ship in the Far East was nothing short of epic. Dressed in our tropical khaki (long) dress uniforms (no longer worn in the Navy), which included a long-sleeved shirt, tie and light weight khaki coat, we hop-scotched from BWI to San Diego (where we picked up a few NROTC midshipmen) then Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco and on to Hawaii before a night landing and refueling at Wake Island and finally to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. At Clark, the four of us USNA midshipmen assigned to the MUANA KEA were told we would fly to Hong Kong (a great break) to pick up the ship where it was due to arrive shortly. We boarded an old twin radial engine C-47 and were dropped off at Manila airport to board a Japan Airlines jet for Hong Kong. It was interesting to be aboard a plane where nobody spoke English and the food was quite foreign.

In Hong Kong, we were met by a Navy representative who got us out to the “station ship,” an old World War II destroyer escort, where we could shed our sweat-soaked uniforms and get a shower. The next day we were shuttled out to the MUANA KEA where we started our duties as junior officers in a ship. We four were berthed in sickbay, which promptly became known as “the cave” because we always kept the lights out so we could sleep when off watch. The ship, being an ammunition ship, was anchored miles away from the busy harbor front making for a long boat ride to the fleet landing.

One of the first things we were given to do while the ship was in Hong Kong was to perform shore patrol duty in the infamous Wan Chai bar district made even more notorious in movies like “The World of Susie Wong.” While on duty from about noon to well after the midnight expiration of liberty, we were each teamed up with a pair of petty officers from the ship to patrol the many bars and take care of any sailors who became boisterous or too drunk or both. We learned that the ship was taking advantage of a loophole in the Seventh Fleet Regulations to fulfill its quota of officers assigned to Shore Patrol. The regulations, which prohibited inexperienced Ensigns from being assigned to Shore Patrol, said nothing about Midshipmen. I am sure that the lieutenants and lieutenants junior-grade on the ship enjoyed that! Hong Kong, with just a couple of Navy ships in at a time, was never too dangerous, but we faced a more hazardous evening later on when assigned shore patrol in Subic Bay, Philippines, where thousands of sailors roamed the shabby bar town of Olongapo just outside the base gates. In return for our work ashore, the captain rewarded us at sea with added responsibilities that few if any other Midshipmen were given that summer.

As we departed Hong Kong for the “line” in the Tonkin Gulf a few days later, Captain Sellers, a likeable and loose styled naval aviator, called us to the flying bridge to observe him using a “trick wheel” to steer the ship. This was a device like the remote controls for a child’s car/truck toy. He made it clear that we would be given lots of responsibility and that he wanted us to help spare his officers some of their onerous workload. This included having us stand Junior Officer-of-the-Deck (JOOD) leading up to solo watches as the sole officer on the bridge, the officer-of-the-Deck (OOD). MUANA KEA’s job was to carry and transfer ammunition of all types to the fleet steaming in the Tonkin Gulf off Vietnam’s eastern coast, and we would be doing a lot of it.

I am on the left in the photo of us four USNA midshipmen on Mauna Kea’s bridge.



A day or so after leaving Hong Kong, we were on station at night to rearm a carrier. I have a vivid memory of watching the bow of the old Essex class carrier with its small white hull number “14”, indicating she was USS *Ticonderoga*, painted forward on the bow slide by in the moonlight with only the hiss of her bow wave audible on the calm water as it passed by our bridge 120 feet away as the carrier settled into position to receive many bombs that night.

Any transfer of fuel, supplies, and ammunition between ships at sea was known to us by the acronym UNREP (underway replenishment), nowadays called RAS (replenishment at sea), and its methods and conduct would become very important to me over the years as I was intimately involved in it hundreds of times. UNREP can be carried out via VERTREP (vertical replenishment) by helicopters lowering loads to the deck using slings on by CONREP (connected replenishment) using various rigs to connect two ships by wires while running parallel to each other at a distance of about 120 feet. Outside of combat, UNREP is one of the most potentially dangerous operations at sea, and over the course of my career, I witnessed some extremely hazardous events during UNREP, but thanks to the personnel safety measures we practiced and ruthlessly enforced, I never saw a man hurt during one.

Mauna Kea usually employed CONREP to rearm the fleet, and there were a couple methods used for sending cargo across. For lighter loads like five-inch gun ammunition for destroyers which are not equipped with cargo winches, the heavy main transfer wire was held under constant tension by an automatic tensioning device called a STREAM (standard tensioned replenishment alongside method) winch along which a trolley with cargo hook suspended underneath was run back and forth. To pull the trolley either way, a dual sheave device called a Traveling SURF (standard UNREP fixture) which incorporated a light continuous wire run through the two sheaves was pulled across and connected to the receiving ship. Once this thing was attached to the other ship, we could tighten up the previously drooping light wire so that by

alternately pulling on one winch and slacking on another we shuttled the trolley with hook and cargo slung underneath back and forth between the ships with great rapidity (see figure below from a Navy technical manual).

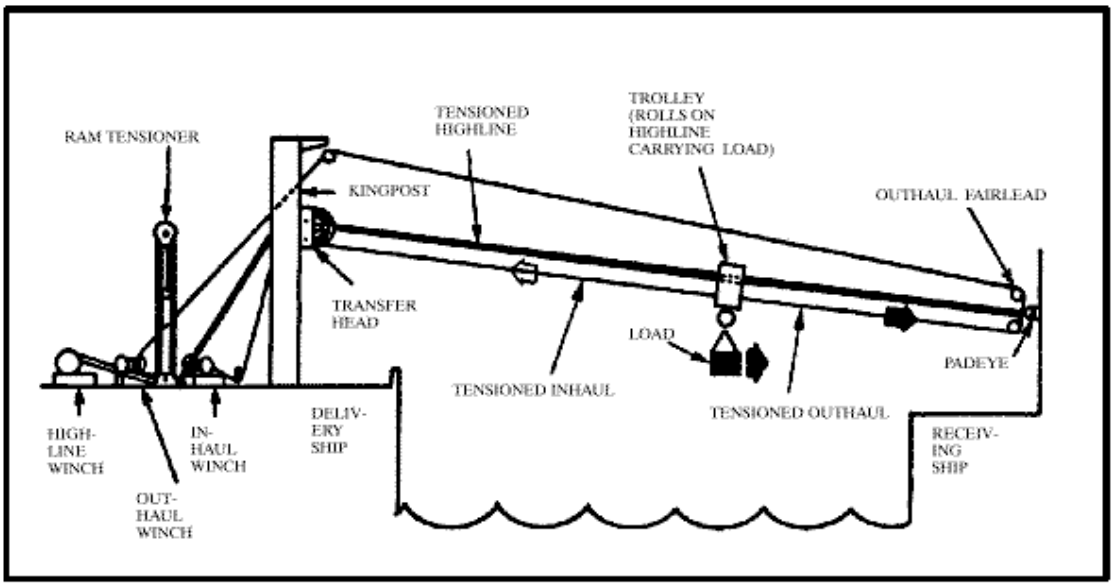


Figure 571–3–1. Missile/Cargo STREAM Rig (All-Tensioned Wires)

For heavy cargo like bombs where both ships had cargo winches, we used what was called the Burton rig whereby the cargo hook was attached to a cable run through a pulley high up in both ships. The winch operators on both sides controlled the cargo with the delivery ship winch operator first lifting the cargo high above his own deck before the signal was sent via a colored paddle in the hands of a deck signal man for the winch operator on the other ship to begin taking in on his side while our operator began to pay out wire.

During this time, which was a few months after the Tet Offensive of 1968, heavy combat action seemed to be occurring everywhere, and we had a lot of bombs to deliver to the carriers and 5- and even 8-inch ammunition to the destroyers and cruisers on the gun line close inshore. While rearming a destroyer (DD in Navy parlance) close inshore off the demilitarized zone (DMZ) one day, we could see bombs falling off of aircraft, bombs we had very likely delivered within the last day or two to the carriers on Yankee Station. This particular DD was commanded by a man whose last name was Mohammed, and had not shown up to the rendezvous out at sea; so Captain Sellers elected to go looking for it. We steamed toward land until the DD hove into view and was anchored just shelling the heck out of some target inland. The Captain Sellers had the signal men send a flashing light signal to the DD alluding to our ship's and the DD's captain's names and taking license with a Muslim legend saying, "The mountain has come to Mohammed." The DD promptly finished its fire mission and upped anchor and headed on over to get a bunch of gun ammo.

DDs were a lot of fun to watch as they rapidly steamed up alongside to take on their ammo. Our usual underway replenishment speed was 12 knots, and the DDs used a dashing method of approach (later outlawed) where they came in at a full bell (20 knots or more) and then ordered all engines back full as their bows passed our stern. Calling for all engines ahead two thirds with

turns for 12 knots at exactly the right moment would land them directly alongside us at our plodding replenishment speed, and the shot lines rang out fore and aft on the *Mauna Kea* to send over the thin high line messengers.

Since we always had explosives on deck ready to transfer, we always shot the messenger lines, and our gunners were pretty good at it. The orange-colored light shot line was in turn tied to a series of lines of ever-increasing size until the heavy steel wire cable "high line" was dragged across by a 25-man crew on the destroyer. The twine-sized messenger was tied to the back end of a projectile shaped like a large plastic tube with a soft rubber front end, which had an aluminum rod attached to its rear end. The rod was run down the barrel of a short-barreled shot line gun. A blank brass propelling cartridge about the size of a .410 shotgun shell was inserted into the breech (which broke open just like a single-shot shotgun), and, after warning the personnel on the other ship to take cover, the gunner aimed for a spot eight to ten feet above the deck of the receiving ship while his assistant held the shot line spool which was machine-coiled around a hollow core about six inches long. When the gunner fired, the line flew out of the center of the spool chasing after the plastic projectile. The assistant carefully judged the flight of the projectile and squeezed the outside of the coil of line to stop the line from exiting the coil. If he did it just right, the projectile stopped above the receiving vessel's deck and landed right where a crewman could grab it. Then the receiving ship's deck crew would begin to pull the ever-increasing sized lines across by hand until they had the heavy wire in hand and could attach it to a strong point at which time our winch operator could tension the rig raising the wire out of the water until the wire was taut.

One time, as a destroyer was making its approach, the gunner had inserted his propelling cartridge and had cocked the gun with the rubber projectile in the gun's barrel with the barrel pointed up for safety. I was watching from the bridge as the gunner accidentally fired the shot line straight up. The crack of the shot got everybody's attention and sent people on the destroyer scrambling for cover as the projectile soared toward the heavens while the assistant gunner just stood there dumbfounded. Up and up went the projectile, and, as the destroyer rapidly steamed forward, the projectile reached apogee and plummeted down to land right smack on the destroyer's forecastle in front of the forward gun mount, exactly where it needed to be. Serendipity definitely struck that day.

On another hot sunny day, as we were sending a pallet of six 500-pound bombs across to a carrier with a Burton rig when the winch operators got a bit out of synch and let the cargo dip too far down, and the pallet hit the water. With us going 12 knots, there was an almighty large splash followed by the wooden pallet being kicked backwards like a child on a swing. Only in this case the load went full circle up and over the wires. Everybody on both ships held their breath as the wooden pallet broke under the stress, and six bombs were flung into the air. There were no fuses in these bombs (they were fused as they were placed on the aircraft), but nobody was interested in finding out what would happen if one impacted a ship. Luckily the bombs landed one after another in a rapid series of "splooshes" aligned with our course through the water into the crystal clear emerald-green waters of the Tonkin Gulf. It was a near-run thing.

One bright day, the 24th of June to be exact, as I was standing watch as OOD, the captain came to the bridge with a Western Union telegram for me. Western Union had an arrangement with the military for their messages to be transmitted over military communications systems, and this was the ONLY way that friends and family could get time-sensitive information to people on ships at sea. Such messages were given directly to the captain by the radio room watch, and it was his duty to hand it to the recipient. They often contained bad news from home. But this telegram was from my brother-in-law David Neisius announcing the birth of my elder sister's first child, my parents' first grandchild, Randy, but the wording in this missive was a bit ambiguous and may have caused the captain to wonder about my own marital status because it said simply that a baby boy was born and that mother and child were well, signed, David. Marriage for Midshipmen was strictly prohibited and a dismissal offense, but the captain was a cool customer and simply handed me the piece of paper and walked away. Later, thinking he may have been under the wrong impression, I told him of my relationship to this child.

It was an exciting time, and we four midshipmen were given full responsibility for the ship as officers-of-the-deck (OOD) during our watches. Other than that, we pretty much slept in the cave. On nights when we were in closer to shore, aircraft-deployed parachute flares lighted up the land and mountains farther inland stretching north and south of us as far as the eye could see just like a string of streetlights. Since this was the aftermath of the infamous Tet Offensive, we were on high alert, dropping lots of ordinance all over South Vietnam.

One day, while I was on watch as OOD, the ship was ordered by the aircraft carrier we were approaching and scheduled to rearm to come to station astern of her and then to make the approach settling into replenishment station about 120 feet abeam of her, just as the destroyers and cruisers had been doing when coming alongside us. We were usually the ship that got "approached" by cruisers and destroyers and sometimes carriers while we simply maintained course and speed, but this carrier skipper had other things to do; so we were ordered to make the approach on him. The carrier was busy launching aircraft and did not want to have to turn around to come to us. I had already seen us make approaches and had done some in the YPs at Annapolis, but I had not conned a ship to a position alongside before. I was also busily involved in calling the captain to alert him that we were soon to be in the replenishment mode and informing the rest of the ship through the internal speaker system called the 1MC that replenishment stations were to be manned. I maneuvered the ship to what is called the waiting station 1,000 yards astern and had the "R" flag raised halfway up the port side (the side we would have to the carrier). With "romeo at the dip" and the ship in waiting station, the carrier knew we were manned and ready to come alongside.

As word came up to the bridge that all stations were manned, the carrier ordered us from waiting station a thousand yards astern to station alongside by raising his romeo flag from the dip to the closed up, fully raised, position. These communications were backed up by radio, the handset for which was in my right hand, as I communicated to the distant helmsman and lee helmsman (the guy who operated the engine order telegraph) with another handset in my left hand. I was way out on the port bridge wing on a minimally manned bridge (the only officer on watch), and I had no hands left; so when it was necessary to take a bearing to the carrier to help me adjust course, I ended up using my elbows to move the bearing circle atop the pelorus. At this time while wondering when the captain would come up and have me relieved by an officer, I heard the voice of the executive officer (XO) as he spoke to the captain up and behind me on the flying bridge. Up to this point I had had no idea they were up there. The XO said, "Captain, do you think he needs some help?" To which our free-spirited aviator captain said, "Nah, he's doin' fine." I ordered romeo closed up indicating we were headed in, and I conned the ship right on in alongside, something that on a DD in later years we always accomplished with numerous officers and senior enlisted personnel on the bridge doing various parts of the job I performed that day all by myself.

I returned to the Academy with an OOD letter of qualification from Captain Sellers, a Vietnam Service Ribbon as well as a Meritorious Unit Commendation ribbon the MUANA KEA earned for delivering more ammunition than any other ammo ship in the theater of operations. It was a good cruise, and I was proud of my contributions to the war effort.

While on leave at home in Pensacola that summer of 1968, I placed an ad in the Pensacola News Journal asking if anyone had a used Jeep to sell. I had briefly driven a family friend's really old Jeep years earlier and feel in love with the idea of Jeeping. To make a long story short, we got a call from a gentleman who had a 1966 CJ5 Jeep with a V-6 cyclone engine in it that his wife had bought him new as a Christmas gift. He never used it and wanted rid of it. Dad and I went out to Gulf Breeze and picked it up for $2,100. I paid Dad back a bit at a time until he cancelled the remainder of the debt at my graduation.

Speaking of money, Mom and Dad were required to send me to the Naval Academy with $300 as initial outfitting money. I guess the Navy figured that if I fell by the wayside in the first weeks of Plebe Summer they would be at no loss for the uniforms and food they had given me. Our official

pay as Midshipmen was set at one half an Ensign's pay, but we saw very little cash as the bulk of the money went to pay for uniforms, laundry, books, haircuts, and food – officers always pay for their food afloat and ashore. I remember my first two-week pay was five dollars. By the time we neared graduation, the take-home was up to 20-50 dollars every two weeks. Midshipmen who desired to live a higher-level lifestyle needed money from home, but I didn't know anybody directly who got money from home. It was an impoverished life we led.

I drove the Jeep to Boston from Pensacola so I could leave it with my sister Jean and brother-in-law David. From there, I could quickly drive it down to USNA after Spring Break, at which time we would be allowed to have personal vehicles in the Annapolis area and on campus.

During the last year at the Academy, the first classmen filled the executive positions within the brigade of midshipmen from brigade commander to squad leader. As a non-member of the "in-crowd," I was never high in the peer reviews conducted annually and thus did not attain high rank within the brigade as a first classman. Possibly, my disinterested attitude over the whole idea had some impact – high rank within the brigade meant lots of your time taken up with those duties eating up study and free time. Academy peer rank had less impact on class standing than did academic grades, and zero impact on your later Naval career, so I viewed it as an unwanted burden. In the end, I was made the second (of three platoons in the company) platoon commander, the second from lowest command rank within the brigade but at least I didn't have to carry a nine-pound M-1 rife with fixed bayonet while marching in p-raids. Instead, I carried my father's Navy sword, which he had given me for one Christmas after having it inscribed with my name on the blade opposite his. In later years, after my retirement from the Navy, this family sword went to my nephew Randy Neisius, sister Jean's son (the child born while I was aboard the *Mauna Kea* off Vietnam) a 1990 USNA graduate, and it rested on my father's casket at his funeral service in 2003.

As a platoon commander, I was thus in the direct line of fire when the annual platoon marching competition came around in the spring of 1969. This marching completion was an important part of overall Color Company competition, but our company was not in the running for top honors; so, my platoon's standing amongst the 108 platoons was not going to enhance our company's reputation or its overall standing. Color Company competition was a zero-sum game; either you were Color Company, or you weren't – there was no runner up award. And did I say earlier that I had little interest in marching? There were certain periods of the days leading up to the big day of march competition allotted to the platoon commanders to assemble their platoon and practice, practice, practice, and the more dedicated platoon commanders would assemble at other times to practice even more. There were numerous commands ranging from column and flanking movements to echelons left and right and the manual of arms which the platoon comprised of members of the classes of 69, 70,71, and 72 had to execute as one man. While the commands did not have to be ordered in any specific order, all had to be executed at one time or another during our minutes in the spotlight.

Anyway, I got my guys out there during the allotted times for practice, but I cannot say we practiced, practiced, practiced rather we pract…. Did I say I didn't much care about marching? In the end I think I may have forgotten one or two commands and we ended up at bout number 106 of 108 platoons – at least we weren't last. I along with the rest of the world quickly forgot that mess as the biggest event in my life so far grew nearer by the day. They would have done far better to have given the platoon over to a third-year Midshipman with something to prove for the duration of the competition, but there was no way I wanted to carry a heavy rifle instead of my father's light sword on p-raid days.

While I yearned to start my career afloat with an assignment to a destroyer, my high class standing (as a direct result of my dedication to my studies and not peer ranking or marching) gave me an opportunity to participate in a program known as the Immediate Graduate Education Program (IGEP). Attendance was possible at any number of graduate schools, and I chose the Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey, California, partly because I would be with military folks

in an atmosphere known to me. The Vietnam War was raging, and I often felt uncomfortable in the presence of critical civilians who didn't understand the need to fight that war.

On Service Selection Night at USNA in February 1969, four months before graduation, I went down to Memorial Hall when my class standing was called and found myself confronted with a series of large easels containing strips of paper with the possible service selections available to graduating Midshipmen. There was an easel with strips for Naval Aviation training (if you had taken and passed the flight physical), one with Marine Corps officer training, a number with destroyers, cruisers, and other auxiliary vessels and the IGEP board. If you were low in class standing and wanted to fly, you would likely be disappointed when your number was called, and you arrived to find all the aviator strips pulled. This was where the rubber met the road; this was where four years of goofing off academically or working hard paid their respective dividends.

Prior to service selection night, my high standing in the class had attracted the attention of the nuclear power community (chiefly submarines and one aircraft carrier), and I was directed to an interview with the one submarine officer the Silent Service could afford to have assigned to the academy. I told the officer, as I did on two other occasions later in my naval career, that I was NOT interested.

In theory, I could have chucked the IGEP for which I had pre-qualified and "run away to sea," but I merely wandered over the IGEP easel (after salivating over the destroyer board) and told the officer there of my selection. Groan! Another year of academics, yuck! The big advantage here was that in the IGEP I would be completing my master's degree in oceanography in a single year because we did not have to spend the extra year those returning to school after several years in the Fleet had to endure in undergraduate catch-up courses. Because I had only minored in oceanography at USNA, I did end up having to take one or two more courses that the other four USNA 69 IGEP students didn't have to, but I was OK with that – my undergraduate time at USNA had been just that much easier.

Graduation from USNA was arguably the best day of my life. I did well academically graduating with a 3.37 grade point average and 96th in the class standing of 879 graduates. The top ten percent of the class proceeded to the podium in the football stadium that June day to individually receive their diplomas. Below that distinguished group, which I missed by less than ten men, the man with the highest class standing in his company went to the podium to receive his diploma from the Secretary of the Navy as the representative for his company while the rest of the company merely stood up to be recognized after having passed their diplomas to each other from a stand alongside my center aisle chair. I was proud to have my name called out so my family could cheer from the grandstands, the son of Great Depression era parents who had struggled to make their way in life, surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor and other vicissitudes of Navy life along the way. I was as proud of them as I was of myself.

After my family had left right after graduation, I was walking across Tecumseh Court heading to my room to change out of my dress while uniform and get packed up to leave, I was stopped by my company classmate Scott Wiggett and introduced to his parents as the guy who got him through the academy thanks to some timely tutoring, I had given him in some arcane academic subject matter. I must say I was deeply touched and honored. I never saw him again.

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 1969-70

FREE at last! Well, sort of free anyway. My family all stood around while my Ensign shoulder boards were placed on my uniform, and I donned my officer's hat with appropriate gold braid and insignia. After the family departed, I was left to pack my Jeep (everybody else had a sporty car like a Camaro, Firebird, or Corvette) and head for Washington DC to attend a classmate's wedding before returning to Annapolis a day later to attend my roommate Steve and Alice Shumlas' wedding. On graduation day, while walking across Tecumseh Court in the center of Bancroft Hall, a classmate I had tutored in calculus and probably some other arcane mathematics

course accosted me and introduced me to his proud parents as the guy who got him through the Academy.

After the military wedding duties and after a few weeks at home in Pensacola, I set off alone in my Jeep for California. I remember the renewed exhilaration of complete freedom and anticipation as I drove off from Pensacola – I was finally on my own with no obligations until school started in a few weeks. I-10 had not yet been completed; so, I drove a varied route in my un-air conditioned, soft-top Jeep often on two-lane highways like Route 66. I visited classmate Bill Frentzel at his parents' home in San Antonio and passed through Odessa and El Paso in Texas marveling at the size and flatness of the lone star state before going a bit north to Las Cruces, NM and thence west to Albuquerque. If I saw a sign pointing down some rutted road to an old cavalry post, I'd veer off and go see what there was to see. I slept in 6-dollar-a-night motels and under overpasses in my pup tent never getting too far in a day in my ten-gallons-of-gas-tank Jeep.

While in Albuquerque, I visited a cousin of my mother's. Before I reached their house, I visited a gun shop and noticed a well-used 30-30 carbine I wanted to buy, but being a non-resident, I would have to wait around a few days for it. Mom's cousin graciously went down to the store with me to buy the gun for me. With the Colt 1911 .45 automatic I had been totting around for a couple of years, I was now well armed.

Eventually, I ended up in Los Angeles and visited my old high school girlfriend and her family for a few hours before heading north along the wildly scenic coast highway to Monterey via Big Sur.

In Monterey, I found that there were no rooms in the BOQ and that for the first time in my life I would have to find my own quarters and feed myself. I ended up running into Glenn Whaley, a USNA classmate in the same predicament, and we decided to share a 150-dollar a month two-bedroom apartment two blocks outside the NPS gate. I remember my first two-week paycheck was $96, and I thought I was doing well. We took turns going to the commissary at Fort Ord, an Army training base about ten miles north of Monterey - we called it "the cure" (for marriage) because we had to maneuver our carts around all the Army wives and their noisy brats. Army kids have always been called brats, and Navy kids were referred to in those days as Navy Juniors.

Another inconvenience was that all students at NPS were required to wear civilian clothing, coat and tie. I had been wearing little but uniforms for four years and had no real civilian clothing. Sure, I had a couple of shirts and a pair of trousers or two, but they didn't count for much.

While in Monterey, I got used to the idea of having a lot of freedom compared to the monastic existence I had experienced at Annapolis. Several of us USNA "IGEPers" started hunting in the Coast Range during deer season. I enjoyed running the Jeep up into the area around Fort Hunter Liggett Military Reservation and Los Padres National Forest, whether we were hunting or not. Sometimes, after hours of running along dirt roads, I'd come to a promontory with a majestic view of the Pacific and the Coast Highway. After another hour or so working down the defiles to westward, I would roll my dusty Jeep out onto the Coast Highway from a side road at places like Big Sur or the awesome Bixby Canyon Bridge and head on home to Monterey. And there was always the fascinating Monterey shore with its famous tide pools where John Stainbeck's Doc had conducted his marine research, and the constant roar of the Pacific crashing into the rocks, a sound I frequently heard in my apartment.

In February 1970, Mike Malone, a USNA classmate, and I were driving along one of the narrow-paved roads on Hunter Liggett Military Reservation in the early hours before dawn to get to a good site for the day's hunt. It was absolutely black out, and the Jeep's headlights gave us a view directly ahead into the inky dark. I was going too fast as the road made a tight turn to the left, which I tried to follow. I remember the seemingly slow-motion roll of the Jeep as the lights

continued to shine on the road as it revolved in my windshield. Last thing I remembered was the upside-down road.

I awoke to complete dark and silence in the ditch on the right side of the road. As consciousness fully returned, I heard a dripping noise and turned my head to see the bulky dark shape of the Jeep sitting a few yards down the road, upright on the pavement, facing in the opposite direction of our travel! All I could think was, “Please, God, don’t let that be Mike’s blood and guts dripping onto the pavement.” Then I saw him lying unconscious on his back in the road. I hurt a bit as I rose to go to his aid and was relieved beyond measure when he groggily came to. I walked him over to the Jeep, its coolant the source of the dripping noise, and sat him in the passenger seat while I scrambled around in the dark collecting spare gas cans (ouch, that hurt to lift with my right arm), rifles, and bullets.

I noticed that the windshield and soft-top of the Jeep had been sheared off at about driver and passenger mid-chest level. There was no roll bar on this Jeep, and we had not been wearing seat belts. In retrospect, seat belts would have killed us. My guess has always been that after I blackout out, the Jeep continued to roll so rapidly that it didn’t just go belly up on top of us and that Mike had left the vehicle to be deposited on the road as the top was sheared off over him while I was along for the ride a bit longer and was thrown into the ditch. The Jeep miraculously missed me and bounced over me, hit the embankment and then bounced back toward the road (maybe over me again) continuing end over end until it came to rest on all four-wheel (with all four axles broken). This had been a near-run thing, indeed!

We didn’t have too long to wait before some pig hunters came along in their open Jeep. They stuffed us aboard and hurried off to the base dispensary (no hospital in this remote area) where the Army medics spent a lot of time examining Mike’s only wound, a cut on his head. The medics were most concerned about a concussion. He has never remembered anything about the accident. I sat in my heavy, but now multi-holed USNA wool parka, holding my right arm close to my body. After an hour or so, they decided to look at me, and when I stood to go over to be examined, my lap area was thoroughly soaked in my blood because my right elbow had been rubbed raw. My right collarbone was also broken.

We were eventually handed into an ambulance and taken about 75 miles up the San Joaquin Valley and then across to the coast to the base hospital at Fort Ord. With Mike on the gurney and me sitting in the front passenger seat, the driver ran the rotating red light atop the vehicle but not the siren, and I was grateful as the vehicles ahead of us obediently pulled over to let us pass. They released me that afternoon with a bandaged elbow and a figure-eight brace across my back and under both shoulders to hold my broken collarbone in place. I was back in class the next day, which was Monday, and Mike was released a day later. The only good thing about the brace was that it gave me an excuse to not wear a tie for a few weeks. One day, after I was pretty well healed but still not wearing a tie, the Oceanography Curricular Officer, a Lieutenant Commander, who was sort of in charge of us ensigns, accosted me in the hall outside his office and gently reminded me it was about time to get back into the “uniform of the day.” Phooey.

Sometime after the wreck, I went back to Hunter Liggett and retrieved our weapons (minus all the ammo the MPs had shot out of them) and, after seeing the wreck, sold the Jeep as junk to the tow truck operator. Then I bought a 1966 MG Midget, which I used for transportation until I deployed to Westpac on my first ship.

USS HENRY B WILSON (DDG-7) 1970-72

After graduation from NPS in June 1970, I drove my MG south along the length of the scenic ocean highway and through Los Angeles to San Diego for six weeks of Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer school and a couple of weeks of nuclear weapons handling schooling so I would know how to handle, store, and shoot the rocket-propelled nuclear depth charge with which all modern US Navy destroyers were fitted.

In September of that year, I finally reported to my first sea-going assignment in (naval personnel serve IN ships, not ON them) *USS HENRY B Wilson* (DDG 7), the Hammerin' Hank to her crew, which was in the middle of a six-month long overhaul in Long Beach Naval Shipyard. The ship was named after Admiral Henry Braid Wilson who had an enviable career before, during, and after World War I and presided as Superintendent of USNA during its transition from a training school to a university.

My assignment to the WILSON was the result of a lucky break. The son of old family friends, LT Ed Froelich, was assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel (universally known as BUPERS), and early on my mother had suggested that I might write him a note about where I wanted to go after graduation from NPS. Early in our year at NPS we Ensigns had all been directed to submit Officer Preference Cards to our respective curricular offices to be forwarded as a group to BUPERS. At the time, for new officers going to sea, the prime assignment was to a guided missile destroyer home-ported out of San Diego, and that was exactly what I put at the top of my list of three choices. Just before we all got our orders to sea, I learned from Ed that no preference cards from anybody at NPS had been received, and since he had passed my letter to my detailer at BUPERS, I got my first choice. The other guys got all sorts of odd assignments including old World War II ships because the assignment officer had nothing else to go on.

I found *Wilson* in a dry dock swarming with shipyard workers and swathed in cables and hoses carrying water, power, steam, and compressed air in every direction. This was really an awful

time to be reporting aboard from a comfort point of view because I was living aboard the ship. From an operational perspective, it was an excellent time because all of the ship's training to get back into shape to deploy lay ahead, and I would be right there working up as a member of the team. By now, thanks to the demands of the war in Vietnam, I had been promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade, but I had no Fleet experience as an officer.

Wilson was a sleek, relatively new sleek killer in the first third of her expected operational life. The current issue of Janes Fighting Ships, the bible for ship identification for all navies, said the Charles F Adams class destroyers were pound-for-pound the most heavily armed ships in the world. They were the first ships ever built from the keel up as missile destroyers. Wilson carried forty surface-to-air missiles in a twin-armed launcher aft, which was controlled by two missile directors and the long-range search radar. The main guns were two automatic 5"/54 dual purpose cannon capable of hurling 75-pound projectiles at the rate of thirty a minute at ranges up to 20,000 yards. The anti-submarine suite, later to come under my direction, included the SQS-23 sonar, which provided range and bearing of submerged contacts to the MK 116 fire control system which in turn directed the placement of anti-submarine rockets (ASROC) from the eight-cell ASROC launcher amidships or torpedoes from either of the triple tubes mounted under the bridge wings. Her four 1200-pounds per square inch boilers powering twin screws gave her a Ferrari-like power plant capable of pushing her 4,500-ton 437-foot-long hull to over 30 knots. Twin rudders added to her agility. The ship was a joy to maneuver as the conning officer – it was love at first sight.

When I reported on board, I was informed that the ASW Officer slot I had expected to assume was currently occupied and that I would be assigned as Navigator, and, since I was new to the Fleet (despite achieving the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade in June that year), I would work under the tutelage of the Operations Officer. Captain Chuck Farnham told me that my first job was to get the rather worn bridge back into topnotch shape as the proper show place of the ship. The place needed tiling, painting, and lagging, and none of it had been planned for accomplishment by the shipyard. It was up to my five quartermasters (headed by Quartermaster First Class MacLemore) and me.

I had not the least idea about how to proceed, but with QM1 MacLemore's help and some ingenuity we managed to get the bridge into acceptable condition before we were floated out of the dry dock. I spent some time on my knees with my men cutting and gluing linoleum tiles during this time. By the time we were done, I was intimately familiar with every switch and instrument on the bridge, knowledge that would come in extremely handy later.

Your record as a Midshipman at USNA is not a part of your officer's service record after graduation. All new officers start in the Fleet with a clean slate. So besides my graduate degree, Captain Farnham probably had no idea I had been navigating up and down and all around Chesapeake Bay in USNA YPs for four years. That was probably a good thing because he thus could not expect a lot out me the first time we got underway from the shipyard for sea trials. Naturally, it was foggy, requiring my navigation team and me to forego the usually very accurate visual bearings to objects ashore in favor of the slower and less accurate radar fixes. I don't think we did the best job that was ever done navigating a warship out of a harbor, and the captain probably relied more on the navigating team in Combat Information Center for recommendations than on my bridge team that day, but the channel was short. I remember him telling me that every once in a while, he wanted to hear me tell him what the set and drift of the ship was, but that took a bit more time and skill to produce than we had that day. Things would improve, and I had his confidence by the time I was shifted to the ASW Officer billet some months later.

We had two sea trials lasting a day or so each before we were sent back to our permanent homeport of San Diego. My regular underway watch station was as Junior Officer-of-the-Deck (JOOD), and my watch boss was the OOD, a saturnine USNA graduate several years senior to me, who was also our Engineering Officer. He tended to bully me rather than lead me to understand my duties, which were mainly to do with running the lookouts, watching the helmsman

and engine telegraph operator, as well as making sure the Boatswain's Mate-of-the-Watch passed all announcements correctly on the 1MC (ship-wide announcing system).

During one of our sea trials, our squadron commodore (a full Captain in charge of a squadron of six to eight destroyers and called the Squad Dog) was aboard and we had a few hours of slack time. Captain Farnham wanted to get a man overboard drill conducted to shake out the organizational cobwebs after six months in the yard. It was also a good time to check out the ship handling skills of his conning officers.

At the appointed moment, he had the man overboard dummy, affectionately known as Oscar throughout the Navy (probably because the "O" for Oscar flag is hoisted when a ship has a man overboard) tossed over the side. Many things happen aboard ship when we have a man go over the side. The cry of alarm goes up, six blasts are sounded on the ship's foghorn, the word is passed on the 1MC, all hands go to muster so we can find out who went overboard, the engines are ordered to flank speed, the rudder is thrown over in a hard turn to get back to the man who is hopefully marked by a floating smoke flare thrown over from the bridge, the recovery team assembles on the forecastle, and the conning officer, now in the spotlight, must place the ship alongside the man (or Oscar) in the water within heaving line distance of the recovery team. Overshooting the man in the water and ending up with him well aft near the main condenser cooling intakes or farther aft near the screws is considered bad form.

As it happened, I was on watch as JOOD that day when the captain initiated the man overboard drill, and my nemesis, the Engineering Officer had the conn as OOD. He blew the drill big time leaving poor Oscar well astern as he failed to take way off the ship soon enough after completing the turn-around to go to his "rescue." As we sailed merrily on by Oscar, the captain told the now embarrassed OOD to order up flank speed again and to turn the conning of the ship over to me for another try. I quickly assumed the conn but mentioned that I had never performed such a maneuver with a steam ship before. Left unsaid was the fact that I HAD done it countless times in a USNA diesel-powered YP as part of my extra-curricular activities in the YP Squadron. Hopefully, it was going to turn out to be a matter of scale. Naturally, I had intently watched the OOD mess his approach up and figured out when to take off power and when to start backing down to slow the ship to a stop.

I went ahead with all the old familiar rudder and engine commands and brought the ship around like the 4500-ton sports car she was and slammed smartly to a stop with Oscar at spitting distance from the rescue party. I was leaning over the bridge wing looking at Oscar with wonderment and relief when I felt the commodore (my captain's boss) pounding me on the back in hearty congratulation and telling the captain what a fine ship handler he had in me. My ship had indeed come in, so to speak, and my star had risen. That one display of skill and very possibly some luck placed me at the top of the list for conning officers, and I was thereafter called upon any time there was a delicate or demanding ship-handling maneuver at hand. I was never graded below any of my contemporaries in semi-annual officer fitness reports either.

The ship followed along with the usual demanding training schedule for the next six months until we were ready for deployment to the Western Pacific, for all time called Westpac by US Navy sailors. One of the more arduous periods in a ship's life cycle is a six-week period known as Refresher Training (REFTRA) where the ship is required to moor to a buoy so as to stress the engineering plant and personnel to provide hotel services to the ship 24/7. Our buoy was near the training command, and we were daily invaded daily by all sorts of senior enlisted personnel and officers from that place who watch every move the crew makes during demanding drills of ever-increasingly complexity. Of course, we were adjudged woefully inadequate during week one and re-adjudged as sound of ship and spirit by week six thanks to the efforts of our harassing trainers. We shot guns, and missiles, torpedoes, and anti-submarine rockets, and practiced underway replenishment and anchoring and all manner of other shipboard evolutions until we were pronounced ready for the "Final Battle Problem" by the training command. That fun-filled

day started before sunrise with General Quarters and getting underway from our buoy to fight our way out of port while threading a simulated minefield, a big challenge to my navigation team.

I came up onto the bridge early before getting underway on the morning of our final battle problem during REFTRA and discovered our Operations Officer (and OOD for getting underway) had been busy with his white grease pencil writing all of the need-to-know information from the REFTRA operations order onto my pilothouse windows. All thirteen of them were filled with data making them almost impossible to see through. That Hank Levien, he had a plan!

It was during REFTRA that my USNA classmate and our Gunnery Officer, John Blaue, had a close call or maybe even a near-run thing. His Chief Gunner's Mate got drunked up and had an argument of some sort over a woman while ashore on liberty. He apparently came to the conclusion that another man needed to die. He came back aboard the ship after taps and went straight down to the berthing spaces where he took the keys to the small arms locker from the duty gunner's mate where he availed himself of .45 caliber pistol. Returning the keys to their rightful place without telling the kid what he had done, the chief headed out to get into a fight with the other man and luckily did not use the pistol on him but came out second best in the fight ending up in Balboa Naval Hospital where he somehow concealed the weapon. The next day he called John, his division officer what he had done. John immediately headed over there and retrieved the gun and got it back into the small arms locker with none the wiser. John couldn't afford to lose his chief just before deployment and didn't tell anybody above him in the chain of command. Thus, we take care of our own.

As the navigator, I was on the bridge for all the harbor entrances and exits. As the selected Junior Officer-of-the Deck for GQ (General Quarters, i.e., battle stations) and for one of the normal steaming watch section, I was on the bridge for those duties as well. It would be fair to say that I lived on the bridge for six straight weeks, and the experience was to serve me well into the future.

During this period, I also got to know a little bit more about San Diego than I had learned the previous summer during my ASW and nuclear weapons training. Shipmate Chris Rafferty and I took a furnished apartment in La Jolla and proceeded to have a fine time whenever we were ashore. I fell in love with the city and its environs. It was also during the period after refresher training that I was shifted from Navigator to ASW Officer.

For a short period of time after being moved up to the ASW Officer billet, I retained the responsibilities as Navigator while we awaited another officer to arrive on board to assume navigation duties. We were off San Diego one day tracking a training submarine when I suddenly heard the captain's irritated voice over the general announcing system saying, "Navigator to the bridge!" Anytime that peremptory command was uttered, usually by the Boatswain's Mate of the Watch, whoever it was from the captain on down, knew that some very serious condition existed which only he could resolve and would break his neck getting to the bridge ASAP. So, there I was about five decks below the bridge level in sonar control watching the target sub on the screen when the call came. My heart jumped into my throat, and I materialized on the bridge in front of Captain Farnham in about 20 seconds breathing heavily. The first thing I ascertained was that some rocks had not suddenly risen from the depths to impale us, and then I tried to understand what the problem was. It seems that the lowly quartermaster (QM) I had on watch to monitor the ship's position and keep the deck log which recorded all rudder orders and course and speed changes had been ignoring his duty to also plot the ship's position using those course and speed changes as a basis for his plot. This was many years before GPS and the immediate positional knowledge it imparts, and the ship was not equipped with any other electronic navigation device except LORAN A which was not precise beyond a few miles. When the OOD asked the QM for a course to get to the next assignment for the ship, he was clueless. I had him go back over the log he where he had recorded all the minute course and speed changes over the preceding hours to plot some approximation of our position. We were later able to confirm our position as we closed to within radar range of the coast.

One day in June of 1971 after moving back aboard the ship in preparation for the upcoming deployment and realizing that I did not want to pay for long-term storage of a car I did not want to drive when we returned from deployment, I took my MG Midget to a car dealer and sold it for $600. I took a cab back to the ship, and we deployed the next day as part of the USS ENTERPRISE (CVAN 65) (known as the Big E) battle group headed for Subic Bay in the Philippines via a stop in Pearl harbor, Hawaii. Was I divesting myself of entangling worldly possessions in anticipation of combat? One wonders.

In the position of ASW Officer, I oversaw about 23 enlisted men which included a Chief Gunner's mate (GMT) and several junior GMTs who were in charge of the anti-submarine rocket launcher (ASROC) and two first class sonarmen and a bunch of junior enlisted sonarmen. The senior sonar first class and the gunner's mate chief did not get along too well, but the gunner was senior and was thus officially the division chief, even though the real leaders were the two senior sonarmen.

Doug Jernigan deserves special mention here…..

Petty Officer First Class, later Chief Petty Officer Jernigan, the lead sonarman, was one of those characters you just don't ever forget. He was a bit chubby, with thin receding red hair, snaggle-toothed and profane in the old Navy way that brought art to the form or oral communication known as cursing, and he would lambaste his men with inventive four-letter word combinations for any failure to perform all assigned duties. He was fiercely protective of his men yet would not hesitate to hit a sonar operator with his "tweaker," a several foot long piece of threaded steel rod, if they failed to maintain contact on a submarine during training events. My clearest sense of the right thing to do with Jernigan was to let him have his head because he got results. The leading enlisted man of the division was the aforementioned anti-submarine rocket gunner's mate chief, and Jernigan did not like him or the fact that his numerically superior numbers of sonarmen had to kowtow to the gunner's mate chief who really did not understand them or their equipment.

When he and another first class sonarman named Green made chief, Jernigan came to me and said that he was now taking over the chief duties for the sonarmen effectively making a new division out of them, and Green, his ever-present partner in crime, went along with it. His powerful personality overcame any objections from the gunner chief who may have been just as happy to not have to put up with Jernigan as a subordinate any longer. The Gunner was not very effective anyway and eventually left us. So, in the meanwhile when I went to the division formation on the ASROC deck every morning after officers' call, I was confronted with two groups of sailors rather than the unitary formation before that - the chief gunner and his gunner's mates and torpedomen and Jernigan and his sonarmen. I never said anything about this de facto minor reorganization to the executive officer, who would have had to pass on such a thing, because it just sort of worked out. After the gunner chief left, the two blobs of people re-coalesced happily enough into one under Jernigan.

The wonderful thing about all this for a junior officer like me was that all the personnel matters were handled by Chief Jernigan. When it came time for enlisted evaluations to be done, he popped into my stateroom with a hand full of them before I even thought of asking for them. Same thing for when chief evaluations were due. He popped in and said, "Here's me and Green's evaluation, Mr. Gano." And of course, the marks were all in the perfect column, and the prose, which needed some grammar work by me, sang their praises! Too funny.

One time while the gunner chief was on leave, the next senior gunner wanted to talk to me about something ASROC related; so naturally, Chief Jernigan came up to the ASROC deck where I was standing with him in tow. During the discussion, I came up with some detail I wanted attended to, and the gunner's mate who was a bit of a whiner objected. Chief Jernigan grabbed him by the arm and walked him around the far side of the ASROC launcher at which time I heard a definite smack of fist hitting flesh. Then they walked around back to me, and the Chief said, "Now tell Mr.

Gano want you meant to say!" "Yes, sir," said the gunner while ruefully rubbing his arm, and whatever it was I wanted got done. Old school but effective.

When we deployed in June of 1971 for WESTPAC, Chief Jernigan came up to me as we neared the end of our two-week transit with Olongapo a day away and told me that ALL Third Division's planned maintenance and cleaning and paperwork would be complete and that there would thus be no need to delay the division's liberty in our first port of call, Subic Bay. Well, that seemed great to me, but I assumed that the ship's routine as put out by the executive officer would reign supreme with nobody leaving the ship until "Liberty Call" was announced over the 1MC. In retrospect, I should have reiterated that fact to him, not realizing he intended the conversation as his form of seeking and attaining permission for early release. Having been in Subic before in 1968, I was quite well aware of its decadent attractions to sailors. We got into Subic relatively early in the day, after which normal ship's routine would take over, meaning everybody would report to his workstation until the captain and XO were satisfied with cleanliness and that liberty call could be called away.

I was wandering about topside and happened onto my boss, the Weapons Department Officer, a full lieutenant who was a bit new to the ship. We were conversing on the ASROC deck on the landward side of the ship with him facing forward and me facing aft such that I could see the gangway. At that inopportune moment, over my boss's shoulder I saw Chief Petty Officer Jernigan followed by every man in the division except the several in the duty section required to stay aboard, go traipsing down the gangway in civilian clothes! Liberty call had certainly not been sounded, and my boss thought all my people were down below working away. I just kept talking so he would be unaware of my division's departure without my express consent and breathed a sigh of relief as the last man disappeared from sight. I have no idea what Jernigan told the officer-of-the-deck manning the gangway, but nobody was going to interfere with him. That was another near-run thing for yours truly.

I later found the whole gang out in town at a café sort of place where Jernigan had told me they would be without the usual hookers and bar girls and dim lighting. The guys were all sitting around drinking a beer or some such thing in good order. When I came in, Jernigan told me to give my wallet to the mama-san (owner/manager) and that she would return it minus whatever I drank or ate when I left.

When we were tracking a training submarine with the sonar, Chief Jernigan stalked back and forth behind the sonar operator making sure he maintained contact. If he lost the sub the chief would grab his "tweaker" which was a three-foot length of ½ inch stainless steel all-thread and smack the operator with it. I was calmly watching the tracking for the first time when we lost it and suddenly heard the operator yell, "Ouch, goddam, Chief!" I looked around, and there was Jernigan glowering at the third-class petty officer operator clenching the tweaker telling him to get back on target or he'd get another! Holy cow, I thought, what have I gotten myself into? Do I write this guy up for assault or what?

Toward the end of the deployment, word got around that it would look really good on the record of chiefs who qualified as junior-officer-of-the-deck underway. I had been qualified for some time as officer-of-the-deck (the officer on the bridge in charge of the ship whenever the captain is not on the bridge), and the next thing I knew Chief Jernigan had gotten himself assigned as my junior-officer-of-the-deck in training. That guy had some PULL, but I was going to make him work for his qualification. As we threaded our way from Subic through the placid waterways south of the island of Luzon, I had made a late night visit to sonar to find a crowd of Third Division folks (but not including Jernigan who was probably drinking his share in chief's quarters for all I knew) imbibing in a clear liquid from a mason jar which I found to be labeled something like "Old Bulldog, guaranteed not to be over 30 days old." I was outraged and ordered it immediately tossed over the side, but being my own guys, I did not want to place them on report.

The next morning Chief Jernigan and I had the watch on the bridge just as we entered the rolling Pacific via the San Bernardino Strait between Samar and Luzon. As I took the watch, I spied

Jernigan hanging over the bridge wing like a dead man. He made it a habit to thoroughly enjoy himself on liberty the last night in each port and would invariably tell me the next day, “Oooh, Mr. Gano, I am never gonna drink again.” This was once again his mantra as we began to roll and pitch in the Philippine Sea. As a chief not usually on the underway watch bill, he could usually hide away in chief’s quarters (also known as the goat locker) until he had recovered, but now I had him where I wanted him. He finally dragged himself over to me and asked permission to go below to which I responded with the query of where was I to find a replacement for him on the bridge. Why, I replied, I would have to get the senior watch officer to juggle the whole watch bill to get somebody who should expect a full eight hours off back up to the bridge to stand Jernigan’s watch for him. Permission denied. ☺ It was a much-chastened chief who struggled through the four-hour watch that day!

Jernigan taught me a lot in my first tour afloat about looking out for your men and how to get the most out of them. I learned all about the things they don’t teach you in training but are necessary to know to survive as a division officer.

But now back to the deployment.

Before deploying, I had been promoted to OOD in charge of my own watch section on the bridge. My designation to this point was OODI with the “I” denoting “independent” because I had not yet qualified as OOD in a Fleet steaming situation where other ships were in the formation. Steaming with the Big E now put us in the big leagues, and I was soon designated OODF, the pinnacle of bridge watch standing qualification.

We made a stop at Pearl Harbor Naval Base in Hawaii on the island of Oahu for a few days and then headed to Midway for refueling before rejoining the Big E heading toward Subic Bay the Philippines. We had a few hours to wander around Midway staring at the newly hatched albatrosses and their parents. We even visited the commissary catering to the small Navy population there and found that it was rather bare because it was “between supply runs.”

We made a stop in Subic Bay (scene of the Jernigan liberty stunt) where the Big E was bound before heading up to Yokosuka, Japan (on the west side of Tokyo Bay) from which port we conducted a patrol in support of a mission known as PARPRO (Peaceful Airborne Reconnaissance Program) in the Sea of Japan where we were over flown by a Russian “Badger” jet bomber, my second sighting of a Russian aircraft. My first such sighting had been of a large “Bear” reconnaissance aircraft which flew over the Big E in mid-Pacific with a pair of the carrier’s F-4 Phantom fighters trailing close astern.

As the squadron flagship, we were encumbered with a rather obnoxious individual, one Captain Pace, as the squadron commander and a dozen or so officers and enlisted who comprised his staff. Nobody liked this cantankerous drunk who lorded it over us. One day I was OOD on the bridge during the above mentioned PARPRO mission in the Sea of Japan when Pace, probably thinking of a place to hide his ships from the prowling Badger bomber, called out from his bigshot chair for the duty quartermaster (QM) to plot the position of a nearby fog bank. The duty QM, for whose performance of duty I as OOD was responsible, was a QM2 (E-5 ranked enlisted) nicknamed Buzzard. I have lost his real name to history, but I remember his crusty character, short stature, and bright red hair and beard which reminded me of nothing so much as the cartoon character Yosemite Sam of the Bugs Bunny cartoons. Buzzard looked owl-eyed across the bridge from his chart table and enquired in a disbelieving tone, “You want me to plot a moving fog bank, sir?” Knowing Pace’s long term alcohol abuse induced short temper and how a run-in with one of our enlisted men would end up with Pace berating our good captain, I quickly stepped in a said, “Yes, sir, we’ll get right on that,” as I shooed Buzzard back to his chart and quietly told him to pencil a small cloud adjacent to our position on the chart and print “fog bank” annotated with the time. Buzzard thought this sacrilege upon the navigating profession and voiced his disgust in his not-so-quiet stage whisper under his beard as he intoned, “I’ve been around the world three times, seen two county fairs, and a goat fucking contest, and this takes the cake!” I

have no doubt Pace heard this, but as I quickly looked over my shoulder at him, he had his binoculars to his eyes looking intently off in the other direction pretending to ignore the insult. Sometimes the little guy actually gets the last word.

My other activities in Japan included a sight-seeing trip to Tokyo on the train and a climb up to the top of Mount Fuji to see the sunrise (foggy). With a summit at 12,389 feet above sea level, climbing this thing was not a piece of cake for somebody used to the denser air down at sea level. I remember gasping for air and being able to trudge only about ten steps at a time as we neared the top while a little old lady carrying supplies to the sunrise pavilions at the summit just jogged on by. We spent a night at about the halfway point in a hostel where we were placed alternating head to toe on thin tatami mats on large wooden shelves and jammed together before a heavy quilt was thrown over us – absolute torture. I got no sleep and was relieved when they got us up hours before sunrise to finish the climb. When I stumbled onto the wide bowl-shaped summit, I was greeted by thick fog and the yellow glow of lanterns placed in and around the various concessions there. After not seeing the sunrise, we were offered two ways down the mountain. One was to reverse the trail we'd taken up, and the other was to go down an ash slide.

This ash is not like ash from a wood fire, it is composed of large, black, and porous grains much larger than sand. The slide was very steep, and those of us who took that route had our legs sink into it up to our knees as we careened down it, resting for moments alongside large rock outcroppings. Each step outward with one foot would carry you about ten feet downward. We were down in nothing flat. Then we were taken to a much-welcomed Japanese hot bath (wow, was it hot!) and refreshments.

Not too far from our base at Yokosuka Naval Station rests the enshrined battleship IJN Mikasa, flagship of Admiral Togo who won the Battle of Tsushima Straits by annihilating the Russian fleet in 1905. Some say this battle put Japan on the long road to World War II. I found it interesting to poke around this relic battleship encased in concrete comparing it to modern vessels and only five feet longer than the *Wilson*.

Later, while the ship was visiting the port of Kure, the wardroom was treated to a reception on the grounds of the Japanese Naval Academy. Some of us also took a bus trip to Hiroshima and later ate a fine hibachi dinner at an outdoor restaurant on a mountain looking toward the bays to the west in the sunset. I also went on a tour of the nearby Hiroshima to see the atomic bomb sites and museum there.

After our mission in the Sea of Japan, we were suddenly alerted to get ready to depart on a classified mission after taking on an important passenger. Underway time came, and the ship was already to go, but no passenger showed. Several hours later this youngish guy with a scruffy goatee showed up with boxes of gear which turned out to be a rather large frame camera to be mounted on our gun director high above the bridge. Once underway, we were told to head up to the area off the Kamchatka Peninsula and hang around off Petropavlovsk to observe a Russian naval exercise.

That night this passenger showed up for dinner in the officers' wardroom, and we all figured he was a highly paid civilian of equal government rank to an officer. However, the executive officer whose job it is to keep track of all such things found out this guy as an Army enlisted man, and he was seen no more in the wardroom. He must have been assigned to some spook unit where they encouraged to nondescript civilian look.

Enroute, we passed through snow flurries and watched little puffins struggling to make headway alongside us at bridge level in the head winds we both faced. We arrived off Petro on a calm day just in time to encounter a group of surface combatants including a large Kynda-class cruiser and some frigates and destroyers. They were apparently trying to retrieve an exercise torpedo, and as we closed in, my sonarmen called out a contact ahead. Soon it surfaced and was identified as a November-class nuclear submarine, probably the shooter of the torpedo.

We hung around all-day and closed in to pass close to the cruiser. As we did so, many sailors in scruffy white working uniforms came out on deck to watch us. There was a flash or two from the occasional box camera while just about all of our sailors unlimbered large see-through-the-lens Nikons and Canons with long telephoto lenses – it was quite a contrast.

While idling slowly along near the cruiser, a small Russian patrol corvette came up astern and slowly came abreast of our port side about 150 feet away. We were looking at each other when somebody on the Russian bridge looked up, and then suddenly they shot out of the area. We looked up to see this Army dude with a bed sheet or such thing draped over the front of the gun director with some Cyrillic writing scrawled on it. I was told it said something like “Fuck you.”

We continued to patrol around the Russian operating area and got word that a fleet oiler had been dispatched our way to enable us to extend our stay as long as it seemed profitable. A Riga-class corvette had been assigned to trail us around, and being that this was the Cold War, we manned the aft gun mount (mount 52) with ammunition at the ready in case he got to be overly aggressive. At one point this character nosed up to place his bow between our port quarter and the side of the oiler as we were refueling, a foolhardy thing to do.

Eventually, we headed back toward Tokyo in clear bright weather. The ride back south was memorable for the huge swells from some distant Arctic storm, which started overtaking us from astern. They were probably 30 feet high at one point, but their wavelength was so long that the WILSON was just slowly picked up by the stern and sort of shoved along with the bow plowing into the trough and then lifting to the sky as the crest of the swell went under the ship. I came out onto the bridge via the door in the aft bulkhead one afternoon to assume the watch as OOD only to see nothing but calm water through all thirteen bridge windows. Then it was all sky. It was like a slow-motion E-ticket ride at Disneyland to go out onto the bridge wing to find myself perched precariously over the trough of the swell as the ship rolled slowly to that side with her stern way up the face of the swell above me.

As part of their in-your-face policy of ensuring we knew whose ocean we were encroaching on, the Soviets sent an aging World War II destroyer to trail us south. To show them who had the better ship, Captain Farnham ordered that the propeller shaft RPM of our twin screws be increased by three RPM every few hours. We were eventually rewarded with the appearance of black smoke emanating from the funnels of our shadow as he tried to keep up, possibly thinking something was wrong with his own engineering plant. All we could see of the Rooskie by the second day was a blot of smoke on the northern horizon.

We were headed back to Yokosuka from some place during our Japan sojourn, and the ship was scheduled for an early morning test of its electronic warfare systems at the ULM4 range along the coast south of the entrance to Tokyo Bay. I had the 0400 to 0800 bridge watch as OOD with my Gunner’s mate Chief as JOOD. We took over as the ship was heading toward the range for a 0600 arrival, but there was a tremendous amount of shipping traffic running along the coast into and out of the traffic separation scheme there, one of the busiest waterways in the world. Added to the difficulty of our approach to the coast across this traffic was the low visibility in the prevailing misty rain. I elected to call Captain Farnham and let him know we were soon going to be very busy dodging other ships and that I would not be able to take time to call him when closing contacts were going to have CPAs (closest point of approach) under 5,000 yards per the captain’s night orders. I was thinking that the captain would take the hint and come to the bridge to oversee my efforts, but he did not, and I didn’t notice that fact once I got busy.

We were soon nearly overwhelmed by the constant reports from CIC about impending close encounters with numerous radar targets ahead. I was concerned that we would miss something in the low visibility and suffer a collision; so, I placed the chief, who had the conn, on the port wing and told him to put the rudder hard over to starboard if he saw any green navigation lights, my thinking being that we would lessen the impact. Ships crossing us from that side would be under the obligation to yield to us and would hopefully remain clear or turn to port if they saw us at very

short range. I stationed myself on the starboard bridge wing because if we saw any red lights on that side it would mean the other vessel had the right-of-way, and we would have to do something radical to avoid collision. Being the OOD and in charge of the ship, I could instantly take the conn by shouting, “This is LTJG Gano, I have the conn, left hard rudder, all engines back full!”

Luckily, we managed to get through the traffic with no seriously close calls and arrived at the range on time. As reveille sounded at 0600, I made the wake-up call to the captain reporting the weather and that we had arrived on station. The weather had also begun to clear. The captain walked out to the bridge at bit later and went straight to the radarscope beside his chair while I silently prayed. He looked up at me in wide-eyed amazement and more commented than asked, “You went through that?!!” referring to the crowd of shipping now astern of us. I expected a tongue lashing for not ensuring he was called to the bridge, but he said nothing as I nodded saying, “Yes, sir!” I think he thought this was a near-run thing.

My next direct encounter with the war in Vietnam was coming up - our two 5”/;4 caliber guns were urgently required off the coast of Vietnam, and we were ordered to hustle out of Japanese waters and make for the Tonkin Gulf at best speed.

After we exited Yokosuka harbor and were well out into the approaches of Tokyo Bay in the traffic separation scheme where a system of special buoys marks the centerline of the sea lanes denoting where outbound and inbound vessels remain to the right side of the centerline, I relieved the Special Sea Detail OOD. The sun had now set and being little to no moon it rapidly became very dark. The captain and the commodore were conversing over by the captain’s bigshot chair while I concentrated on threading our way out of the area through the other traffic at probably about 15 knots. We began to become aware of a single white light directly ahead which could have been one of several things. For some reason, probably because it was set to too long a range scale, nothing showed up close ahead on the radar screen in CIC or on the bridge. Mysteries are not fun on the bridge of a ship at night- one wants everything visible to be thoroughly identified and accounted for. But this light seemed to slowly get more intense, and I wanted to tell the captain that I wanted to alter course a bit to get this thing off our nose, but he seemed intent on his conversation with the Commodore, his boss. Finally, I could stand it no longer and ordered the conning officer to come right about 20 degrees or so, and very rapidly the light began to move quickly to the left far faster than just the effect of a small course alteration would have suggested for a contact well ahead of us. The reason became startlingly apparent as a several hundred-ton coastal freighter slid down our port side closer than I would have been comfortable with in broad daylight! Had I waited much longer, we would have climbed right up his fantail, not a near-run thing, but a disaster. I had a heart-to-heart talk with the folks in CIC and the bridge about radar settings and watching for close-in contacts after this near-run thing.

During this trip, Gene Serafin, the officer who had relieved me as navigator before we deployed made a major boo-boo when he mislabeled a plotting sheet used when we were in open ocean instead of the printed charts that we used closer to land. We were on a tight schedule to get to Vietnam, and his mistake cost us a bunch of time causing the captain to be highly irritated with him. Celestial navigation takes a lot of attention to detail.

Our first mission off Vietnam was at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which theoretically separated North Vietnam from South Vietnam. We approached the coast in darkness at GQ. My battle station was as JOOD conning the ship. As we approached the coast, we were running on dead reckoning because the skies had been overcast during dusk meaning that celestial navigation could not be used to fix our position before we headed toward land. LORAN A, a time-difference of arrival electronic navigation system we had in those days was only accurate to within a few miles. However, our radar began to show the land ahead, but until we were within several miles of the coast, we could not be certain whether what we were seeing was the coast itself or the mountain range some miles inland and parallel to the coast.

As we slowly closed the coast blacked out with no navigation lights showing, we also noted what looked like a cloud several miles off to the north. Eventually that “cloud” took on the aspects of something more solid like an island. A quick check of the chart showed that the only island in the area was Tiger Island, a heavily defended piece of North Vietnam, whose artillery could easily blow us out of the water had they had decent radar to see us. We had apparently strayed some eight to ten miles off course to the north, probably pushed by a tidal current. Captain Farnham quickly ordered us to reverse course and head quickly back eastward to sea and then southward for a while before again turning back westward toward the DMZ.

Once established in our firing position a mile or two offshore, we shifted into Condition III wartime steaming where half the crew could sleep at a time. With submarines the least of our worries in the shallow Tonkin Gulf, I moved from my GQ JOOD job over to the old familiar navigation plot behind the captain’s chair to take over as navigator during my six-hour watches. We did this for a couple of months. My job, besides keeping us off the rocks during my watch was to plot each target called for by the spotters ashore and to make sure that the gun liaison team in CIC behind the bridge and I agreed to within 2 degrees and 10 percent of the range to the targets before the OOD gave “battery released” to shoot.

At the DMZ, we worked with a Marine spotter ashore called Anchor 26 Charlie. One of the first things he told us was that if his position was about to be overrun, he would call for our 5-inch rounds to land on his location to “dust off” his roof while he hid deep in his bunker. We never had to do that, but the thought was sobering. That first evening, we worked with the spotter on a couple of missions before he gave us a list of targets to shoot at odd intervals during the night as a form of harassment and interdiction (H&I) fire.

Soon thereafter, I went below to bed when the watch changed around midnight. My room was several decks directly below the bridge on the first deck below the main deck. The forward 5” gun mount was on the main deck not far forward of the bridge. I remember that being in the room when the gun went off was like being placed in a metal wall locker and having somebody hit the thing with a baseball bat. I recall counting sixteen rounds going off as we conducted the odd-interval H&I fire before falling exhausted into bed after my first day of combat, Andy Petruska, my roommate was the on-watch Gun Liaison Officer (GLO) in CIC during this watch and was in charge of the overall effort to deliver the shore bombardment. I chided him the next morning as he came off watch about goofing off all night because I only heard the few rounds going off. He said we had shot 316 rounds during the night! Guess I was really tired to sleep through 300 rounds.

At some point during our wartime swing, we ran over to the sprawling Subic Bay Naval Station in the Philippines where all sorts of memorable things happened ashore. It was still every bit as “wild west” as it had been in 1968 when I was a Midshipman in MUANA KEA. We also got the usual good deal of a few days tied to a buoy in Victoria Harbor, Hong Kong where the legendary Mary Soo organization accepted our junk and garbage in exchange for painting the well-worn sides of the ship.

The story on Mary Soo goes that sometime after World War II she began taking in the unwanted Chinese female children of the area and raised them putting them to work in the harbor on sampan collecting trash from ships and cleaning and painting the sides of the ships. No US Navy ship which visited there escaped her attention, and soon after mooring she or a representative would appear on the quarterdeck to negotiate the deal. She was reported to live in a mansion up on the sides of the mountain of Hong Kong Island.

One evening while I was out in Olongapo in the Third Division’s favorite, the crew tired of the place for that evening, and it was decided to go out to the more notorious East End Club. The distance involved in this trip required the services of motorized transport, which in Olongapo took the form in those years of the ubiquitous Jeepney. These vehicles were originally based on World War II Army Jeeps left there at the end of the war. The enterprising Filipinos would expand

the body to provide for facing benches along either side of the body under a solid roof. To my amazement, nearly the whole division squeezed into one with me crammed up against the driver and Chief Jernigan riding “shotgun.” We decided to give the slow-poke driver a little help so I mashed my right foot down on top of his gas-peddle foot, and Jernigan took control of the gear shift leaving the terrified driver to steer as best he could as I lifted my foot long enough for Jernigan to slam us into a higher gear, bypassing the clutch altogether. Ah, the joys of youth.

At some point we were underway in the South China Sea, and I had a night watch when we came upon a fleet of fishing junks. The horizon ahead had begun to look like what we would see approaching a major city in the dark - only there was no land that way. Hmmm, well, calling the captain was the right thing to do, and I did. As we approached, it became clear we were encountering a fleet of Chinese fishing junks all using Coleman-type lanterns probably to attract squid. The radar did not pick up these wooden vessels until they were fairly close, and it seemed impossible to find a hole through them. Going around was not an option because the fleet stretched clear out of sight in either direction. In those days, we employed a grease pencil to track targets on the backlit radar scope head where the and the side-lighted head made the little grease marks glow. I started marking the junks as they came into view on the radar and soon had so many I just cluttered up the scope. As the range closed, I hurriedly wiped the scope head clean and reduced range to the shortest possible. Then I began plotting grease pencil dots on the closest targets, racing across the scope from left to right with my pencil like a typewriter. After a minute or two, it looked like rain coming down the scope, but I thought I saw a break. Once we were into the mass of junks, it was the captain and the conning officer twisting the ship this way and that while all I could do was look on. We were so close to the closest vessels I could have recognized a familiar face looking up at us from those junks as they franticly heaved on fishing gear to keep from getting entangled with us. These near-run things were getting to be a regular occurrence.

In order to maintain our ammunition stocks and to get food and fuel aboard, we had to leave our shore bombardment station every few days to rearm and replenish from ammo and stores ships offshore. As usual, my station during these events was on the bridge as JOOD under the OOD my friend Marty Collins, our Operations Officer. If it was dark or stormy or just plain weird, Captain Farnham had either Marty or me do the conning. Marty was one of the coolest customers I ever knew.

One time I was conning alongside the MAUNA KEA taking on ammo, lots of it, when the steering gyro went haywire. In the shift to magnetic steering, the helmsman ended up steering a bit wide, and we ended up way out at 240 feet, near the limit of the UNREP cables. I coached him from the port bridge wing where I had to stay while the skipper and Marty were in the pilothouse trying to figure out what was up with the gyro. The next thing I knew, the phone and distance line (a line with different colored flags at 20-foot intervals held by two men on the deck below me) was at 120 feet and being hauled in fast. I looked down at the rudder angle indicator to see the rudder at left standard (MUANA KEA was to port) as the helmsman was apparently fighting vertigo at the magnetic compass. A LOT of rudder angle when alongside for UNREP was 5 degrees - we were literally racing for a collision with 15 degrees of rudder! To check this precipitous run to port, I instinctively ordered in my loudest quarterdeck voice "RIGHT HARD RUDDER," which instantly froze every single person and conversation within hearing. The skipper, who in a twinkling materialized in front of me between the pelorus and the front of the bridge wing splinter shield, instantly grasped the situation and started looking aft as I strove to get us straightened up to parallel the ammo ship. I never looked aft, preferring to concentrate on the bow and keeping my senses – I was busy trading distance between ships for degrees of heading AWAY from the ammo ship. I figured if I could get to a parallel course before we collided, we had a chance to avoid a hard collision. All sorts of general confusion and purposeful action erupted. Suddenly both ships' whistles were blaring the six-blast emergency breakaway signal; people on the fore and aft UNREP stations were shouting orders; and seawater started spouting up between the ships to near bridge height in thunderous gushes. Once I figured we were about parallel, I ordered rudder amidships. The skipper never took his eyes off the rapidly swinging stern, and he only nodded his approval as I gave the rudder orders - a SUPERB ship handler himself, he never

took the conn instead correctly feeling he could better supervise the situation than actually handle it. At this point we were only a few feet away from the ammo ship, and I am told by those who were on the rigs down on deck that the rigging blocks fell onto the decks of the MAUNA KEA as they were cut loose.

By now I more or less sensed where the stern was, and I think the skipper may have said something about watching the stern. As I did not feel the thud and shudder of our stern impacting the side of the ammunition ship, I ordered LEFT standard rudder to make sure we didn't swing the stern in too hard – The skipper nodded, "OK." The engaged deck edges of the ships bows both swept off in divergent directions from my viewpoint toward their respective prows, making it hard to tell exactly how parallel we might have been to the other ship. There was never time for me to look aft - the skipper did that - this was a two-man job. Then I ordered rudder amidships, and he shook his head "No," meaning he was not yet satisfied with the momentum of the stern. I compromised and ordered left five degrees rudder and then after a bit, rudder amidships – he nodded an OK at each rudder order. Then I ordered right five degrees rudder to get us out of there - head shake, "No." An order for right two degrees got a nod of "OK." I left the rudder there and watched intently as the angle between the bows SLOWLY increased. Finally, as we got back to a safer distance with the rudder at right five degrees, the skipper breathed a sigh of relief and departed the bridge wing to continue investigate the gyro problem.

The MAUNA KEA, in which I had spent my First-Class Midshipman cruise delivering bombs and bullets in the Tonkin Gulf right after the Tet Offensive of 1968, sent over a flashing light signal saying, "If you touch me again, I'll scream." The collective wisdom was that we had gotten as close together as 3 feet, but no harm no foul was the net result.

I don't think the captain and I ever really talked about the event, but many years later I heard that at a ship's reunion he credited me with saving his career (mine too), but it took two of us plus all the other people who flawlessly executed their duties in an emergency. We both agreed this time that is had been a genuine, bona fide near-run thing.

The next week I was at the conn while alongside the USS KANSAS CITY, a large replenishment vessel almost as big as a battleship, when that ship had a gyro casualty and failed to tell us. I was suddenly faced with a supply vessel just going off away from us in a slow turn as the UNREP wires began to stretch and sing. The skipper was off the wing and came out of the pilot house when he heard me giving orders to speed up by a whole knot and ordering left five degrees rudder to chase this wayward beast down. Finally, we got an emergency breakaway going and cleared out. The very next week the KC had a serious collision with a ship she had alongside. There but for the grace of God.... A second near-run event in a week.

Over forty years later, the Boatswain's Mate-of-the-Watch, Tom Dawley, wrote, "One of my favorite memories of my time on the 'Henry B.' was the day we were taking on fuel underway and the oiler's rudder got stuck about five degrees to port. I believe Mr. Gano had the conn. I was the Bosun mate of the watch. Mr. G didn't even blink. He just quietly kept adjusting course to follow the oiler around in a big left-hand circle until the fueling gear was disconnected and recovered by the oiler's deck crew. As I recall it, nearly everyone on our bridge was sweating bullets except Mr. G and the Captain (Farnham). After it was all over, I overheard the captain say to the OD, 'I think I would have to kick that boy in the ass to make him sweat,' or words to that effect, referring to Mr. G. It was a long time ago."

Maybe Bosun Dawley didn't think I was sweating, but I am sure I was. There was just not time to do anything but the right thing, quickly.

One bright day back at the DMZ while the ship was blasting away at targets ashore, I had the afternoon watch as navigator on the bridge. The enlisted men in the gun director high above the bridge were free to scan the beach because we were only using the MK 47 computer in gun plot down below decks to direct the guns to shoot at targets out of sight inland. We had two visiting

junior officers on the bridge from the wardroom of the *Mauna Kea* to observe and learn about life on a destroyer. Things were calm, or as calm as they ever got while conduction shore bombardment from a destroyer, as we went about the by now almost boring business of hitting our targets until we got a frantic call from the director that there was a tank-like vehicle coming over the dunes onto the beach on the north (enemy) side of the Cua Viet River about a mile away.

An armored tank is a tiny target to hit from a destroyer a mile or two off the beach while an UN-armored destroyer (they are called “tin cans” by the men who sail them for a reason) is not so small a target for the tank. As I was taught at USNA, the issue from the destroyer’s perspective becomes an “engineering” problem meaning how fast the engineers can get the ship up to full speed and out of the area.

All hell broke loose on the bridge as a lot of things happened all at once as word was passed throughout the ship. The gunnery officer, my USNA classmate John Blaue) rushed onto the bridge as both 5” guns were hurriedly switched to director control; the engines were ordered ahead full accompanied by the ever-increasing high-pitched whine of the turbines of the forced draft blowers spooling up reaching our ears; the captain arrived; both guns began firing at their full rate of 30 rounds per minute. Out of time to climb up to his normal GQ position in the gun director, John snatched up a pair of mil-marked binoculars and began adjusting fire from the engaged bridge wing; the visiting junior officers retreated to the seaward/disengaged side of the bridge as the rest of us rushed to the engaged side to observe and yell encouragement over the blasts of gunfire as explosions from our shells began to walk up the beach and land around the tank. The vehicle we were firing at made a quick getaway back over the dunes, and we ceased firing and slowed back down to our normal shore bombardment crawl. The visitors came back into the pilothouse and looked at all of us with the killer gleams in our eyes and said we were crazy and that they wanted to go back to their nice quiet ammunition ship. I imagine the tank crew as well as our visitors thought of this event as a near-run thing!

Later, we were assigned a mission to support a South Vietnamese battalion, which was to make a sweep for bad guys through a forested area within reach of our guns. We pulled into Da Nang for a briefing on this event, and I got my first and only time ashore in the country as I walked up the pier a way while other officers were off some place at the briefing. When we made our mooring at the wooden pier, there was a strong breeze pushing us away from the pier toward shoal water. There was no pilot aboard to handle the lone Vietnamese-manned Navy tugboat standing by. We got a bow line over to the pier, but the stern began swinging downwind away from the pier as the wind speed increased. Captain Farnham, instantly sensing the peril to us of the shoal water not far downwind of the pier, turned to me (not conning this time) and told me we needed the tug to push us to the pier NOW. Normally, this would have been easy enough on a radio circuit, but there was none set up, and yelling some American English at the Vietnamese tug master through a bullhorn was not likely to bear satisfactory results. Lacking a pilot or radio contact, there was nothing left to do but to get the tug master’s attention and use hand signals. There were a set of established hand signals for tug control, but I had never seen them used, and I doubt more than one or two officers aboard had ever studied them. Luckily, the tug master and I had, me way back when I was the navigator with time to spare looking through obscure manuals on the bridge and him as a part of being a tug master, and I was able to signal the tug to get into position and begin pushing appropriately. It was a near-run thing as we avoided being pushed into shoal water which would have “bent” our ship.

The next morning, we arrived in the area from which we were to conduct a pre-H-hour bombardment for the Vietnamese battalion. To get close enough to the target area, we were going to be required to go into a shallow bay. This bay was too small for us to use the very slow but straight-line track we normally employed for best gunnery accuracy. Instead, we went in on a much more difficult curved track taking fixes every thirty seconds and keeping one eye on the very shallow depths being registered on the fathometer. As we opened fire for the requested barrage, I looked astern and saw muddy water being kicked up in the long arc of our track. We were all but aground – another damned near-run thing!

Sometime after this exploit, WILSON was assigned to conduct shore bombardment off the southernmost part of Vietnam near the forbidding and swampy Viet Cong enclave of the U Minh Forest fronting the Gulf of Siam. Visual navigation here was exceedingly difficult because the coastline was simply a flat line of trees with no manmade structures or natural elevations to use for the bearing takers. Radar navigation was little easier since the low coastline was endlessly flat - we could maintain a safe distance off the beach but could not tell where along the beach we were. The radar navigators in CIC thought the gaps in the trees which showed up on radar were the representative streams depicted on our charts, but that was just wishful thinking. I maintained that the tiny lines indicating streams or creeks were only representations and should not be taken seriously. The folks in CIC stood by their claim.

To fix our position I had been using a very long beam compass that had been constructed by brazing the parts of two regular length beam compasses together and two navigation charts taped together in order to swing radar ranges to the distant island of Phou Quoc (where my USNA roommate Steve Shumlas happened to be in a coastal surveillance station), and I was certain the CIC navigators had established our position 1,000 yards south of our real position. Since we had to agree on target range and bearing to within ten percent of range and within two degrees of bearing from the ship before we could “release batteries”, we were at an impasse and could not shoot at the target the spotter had radioed over to us. Finally, somebody, maybe me, suggested we call the spotter to find out if there were any friendlies in the area a thousand yards north of the intended target. He came back in the negative, and I agreed to a shot. If the spotting of the fall of shot from the spotter ended up being north by a thousand yards, I was right, and CIC would be proven wrong.

Finally, BANG, off went the 75-pound 5” /54 projectile, and then we waited. The spot came back nearly as I had predicted. Now CIC had to call a halt to operations while they scrambled around taping charts together and arranging for a beam compass of some sort. I took the opportunity to exit the bridge and walk aft into CIC just behind the bridge with my thumbs in my belt. I didn’t say a word; I just walked in to show them who the MAN was and walked back out to the bridge and to let them know what a near-run thing we had experienced.

One day two Vietnamese patrol gunboats, with US Navy officers aboard as advisors, came out and tied up alongside us for resupply and refreshment of the USN types. They seemed most pleased to be off the boats, which they said were filthy messes, and to grab some air conditioning and ice cream. These guys, like the operations officer I first worked for when I came aboard WILSON, had been part of the ’67 and ’68-year group officers who had earlier that year been grabbed off their ships in mid-tour for assignment to Vietnam. My ’69-year group had been considered too junior for this assignment. I considered myself fortunate.

For our last mission before permanently departing the gun line, Captain Farnham told the spotter he could have a 20-round salvo as opposed to the less than five normally requested for the sake of ammo conservation. The skipper commented that our gun barrels were so worn the projectiles were probably coming out end over end, a large exaggeration. It was really something seeing the gun let loose with that call for fire mission. I could see gouts of water and mud shooting up beyond the trees lining the coast before the last round was sent ashore.

Next stop Singapore.

While headed to Singapore, we were assigned as part of the destroyer screen for the carrier USS *Oriskany*. One night, while standing the mid-watch watch on the bridge, I realized it was time for the annual Army-Navy football game to be played in Philadelphia. I called down to the radio room and had the watch there dial up the game on a short-wave frequency and pipe it up to a bridge speaker over my head on the port side of the bridge. Since our station was on the far port side of the screen, I could listen to the game while looking across the breadth of our bridge keeping an eye on the watch standers as well as the other ships in the screen and the carrier on a glassy sea illuminated by a half moon.

As we approached the Malacca Strait separating Indonesia from Malaysia the next day, we began to see an increasing volume of shipping, much of it very large oil tankers. Arriving at the anchorage area off Singapore, with me conning, we initially intended to execute the standard U.S. Navy anchoring approach to the "man-of-war anchorage," but we soon found out the huge agglomeration of ships of all ages and types were no respecters of our privilege as the man-of-war anchorage was covered up with civilian ships. In the end, I simply looked for a space in the crowd wide enough in which to put our destroyer. I ended up throwing the rudder over hard and sort of sliding into a slot. I had never seen so many ships in any one place.

Singapore was an impressively clean and orderly place for an Asian city, and we enjoyed the place immensely over Thanksgiving of 1971. One day one of our warrant officers and I found an A&W Root Beer stand down by the waterfront and decided that a hamburger was in order. The root beer was fine, but something was just a little off on the taste of the hamburger. It turned out that the ketchup, although red-colored, was made from a base of banana paste because tomatoes were not in great supply in the Far East. Turkey day was partaken of aboard the ship where all of the standard American Thanksgiving Day gastronomic events were pursued.

The trip south to Singapore meant that we would cross the Equator on the return trip if the captain could obtain permission to veer off our course for about a half a day on the way toward our next port of Subic Bay. He did, and what ensued can only be described as organizationally condoned mayhem as the Pollywogs (those who had not previously "crossed the line") were hazed during the days leading to their initiation into the realm of King Neptune by the right honorable Shellbacks (those previously initiated). Outside of the official watches in engine and fire rooms and on the bridge and in CIC, a person's rank began to mean little if he were a mere slimy Pollywog in the presence of Shellbacks. The Shellbacks began dressing in piratical ways and slapped lengths of old fire hose against their thighs in ghastly anticipation.

The details of what was in store for us Pollywogs (most of the crew) was vastly exaggerated and purposely kept vague by the Shellbacks as the big day approached, but we clearly saw that mess hall garbage was being stored away in locked places instead of being thrown overboard. It was getting ripe in the equatorial heat, and rumors of a slop chute we would be required to traverse on our bellies began to circulate. A lack of caution on their part let the keys to a garbage storage room fall into my hands, and with the help of some fellow "wogs," I tossed most of it over the side before I was apprehended and handcuffed to a lifeline. There I was mercilessly hosed down with the full 100 PSI available in the fire main. The conniving Shellbacks then used their position of trust in the nuclear weapons personnel reliability program to gain access to my nuclear weapons magazine where they stored their ill-gotten garbage as I watched powerlessly from my soggy handcuffed position across the ASROC deck. My name was then officially but temporarily removed from the nuclear weapons access by the Executive Officer (a Shellback, of course) to the magazine keys meaning the nuclear weapons armed guard would have to shoot me if I were to try to force entry. We wogs were screwed.

The Executive Officer, who was a Shellback, decided that Andy Petruska, my roommate, and I were to be designated as "Special Cases" who would receive extra "attention" during the initiation. John Blaue and I came up with a scheme to slow the XO up on the morning of interest. The day before *Wilson* crossed the equator, we gathered up a drill, drill bits, and a hasp and lock. While the XO was at lunch, we scampered aft to his room and marked and drilled holes matching the two parts of the hasp onto an obscure lower part of his stateroom door opposite the hinges. Late that night, around midnight, we went back with our padlock and hasp and a pop rivet tool. Using pop rivets meant we did not have to open his door to install our hasp and lock with nuts and bolts – he may well have had his door locked anyway. Our biggest concern was that the loud pop the rivet tool made as it set each rivet would wake him up, catching us red-handed. We wanted him asleep until reveille. We carefully placed the hasp and inserted our first rivet and pulled the lever on the tool. A loud POP sent us scurrying down the passageway and around a corner until we were sure the XO was still slumbering. A nerve wracking five more rivets went in, and we attached our lock and threw the key away. Being smarter than the average bears, we

then went down to the interior communications switchboard below the mess decks and had a fellow pollywog on watch there disconnect the XO's phone so he could not call for help.

As we had suspected would be the deal, it was before reveille when the XO and his henchmen came pounding on our locked door, but it was not nearly as early as he had planned due to his being locked incommunicado in his stateroom. After a lot of pounding on his door, some fellow Shellbacks finally got a bolt cutter and freed him – he was not amused. Now he was yelling outside our door for us to come out using all sorts of ruses like the ship was sinking or such, but we demurred telling him we were no fools and wanted no part of the slop being served on the mess decks to the Pollywogs dumb enough to go there. He finally left, and Andy and I quietly emerged from our room to join the rest of the Pollywogs now gathered on the forecastle around the forward gun mount.

At some point, the Shellbacks, unable to enter the forecastle area because the Pollywogs had locked the weather break doors, got up on the torpedo deck under the bridge and called for the special cases to be handed over. Our fellow wogs rallied to our support and a brief fire hose fight between wogs and Shellbacks ended in our submission to the inevitable. We were forced to crawl in our now wet clothing the several hundred feet along the rough non-skid surface of the starboard side main deck all the way to the fantail. Meaty Shellbacks were stationed every few yards swinging pieces of fire hose with which they all took great pleasure in smacking our exposed rear ends as hard as they could.

When we arrived on the fantail, we were greeted by King Neptune's royal court. First up was the Royal Baby, the Shellback with the biggest belly smeared with some awful greasy concoction. We were told we had to kiss the baby's belly before going forward, and when we gingerly moved forward, our heads were grabbed about the ears and forcefully pulled into a full-face plant in this mess on the belly of the fattest Shellback on the ship.

Then it was on to the Royal Doctor and is assistants. This worthy wielded a huge syringe about a foot long which he filled with red hot "truth serum" which was administered to our open mouths before being led forward to King Neptune on his throne played by the senior Shellback. At this point the royal personage generally sentenced the lowly wog to one or all the various tortures arranged about the fantail. Soon the area was crowded with wogs in the electric chair powered by a hand-cranked megger, closed up in "coffins" filled with mess deck slop, or crawling through a chute filled with muck. Lastly, we were told we would be washed clean before being declared Shellbacks by taking a backward flip into a pool, but this canvas sided apparatus was filled with firefighting foam liquid made from vile smelling animal protein leaving us with a cloying smell in our hair and on our bodies that took days to clear off. I took off all my clothes as I walked forward up the port side and threw them over the side on my way to the first of many showers that week.

From Singapore and the Equator detour, we began our journey home via a brief stop in Subic Bay and Hawaii. We had no escort duty on the way home other than to steam in company with another destroyer, and we arrived in San Diego before Christmas 1971.

The first night underway from Subic found me wandering down into sonar control to see how the troops on watch there were doing. I found most of the sonarmen, including my two chiefs, there celebrating the start of the voyage home with a mason jar full of a clear liquid that turned out to be some alcoholic swill whose label proudly declared "Guaranteed not to be over 30 days old." I was incensed as much at the thought of my division being found out and made to look bad as I was about the blatant disregard of a seriously enforced Navy regulation. I ordered the stuff dumped and everybody not on watch out of the compartment.

I assumed the watch as OOD the next morning as we exited the San Bernardino Strait and hit the long swells coming at us from the Philippine Sea. Chief Sonarman Doug Jernigan had taken it into his head that it would look good on his record if he were to qualify as OOD, not an unheard-of thing for chiefs to do, but not all that normal in destroyers. Thus, I ended up with him as my

JOOD where the professional knowledge tables were turned a bit because now, he was in an area where I had more experience than he did. But this day the Chief was ailing from his debauchery in sonar control the night before. As the swells hit us, he turned distinctly green and swore an oath, as he had done leaving every other port we had made, that he was never going to drink again. He pleaded for permission to lay below, but I told him he could damned well puke where he stood but he was NOT leaving my bridge. This was his punishment for bringing booze aboard, and he knew it.

We had steamed 41,000 miles in those six months, and we fired over 5,000 rounds of 5"/54 ammunition at the enemy. We had visited Japan, the Philippines, viewed Russia from a distance, visited Hong Kong, and crossed the equator (where I became a Shellback) headed for Singapore. Everyone waxes nostalgic about their first ship as if it were a first love, but unemotional reflection has led me to the conclusion that I could not have had a better ship and shipmates with which to be initiated as an officer.

Upon arrival in San Diego, I was most anxious to get out to Mission Valley where I picked up my new 1972 Jeep CJ5, which I had ordered at a special discount for foreign purchase while we were in Japan. To my surprise, the dealer prep was not included meaning the soft top and its metal bows and fittings were just piled into it in a big cardboard box. A quick trip to the auto hobby shop at Naval Training Center, San Diego solved that problem.

With the demands of Vietnam sucking up junior officers like a vacuum cleaner, the Navy started to experience a shortage of officers available to become destroyer department heads via the six-month Surface Warfare Department Head course in Newport, Rhode Island. In a destroyer or cruiser there are division officers (ensigns (ENS) and junior grade lieutenants (LTJG), who supervise enlisted men under their respective department heads (full lieutenants (LT) and possibly lieutenant commanders (LCDR)), who in return report to the Executive Officer and Captain.

So, the call went out to the Fleet for qualified but very junior officers to be offered up to attend the department head course. Captain Farnham recommended my roommate and fellow division officer, Andy Petruska, and me to attend. I had more or less "grown up" in the Fleet under Commander Farnham but was happy to jump into my new Jeep and depart for Newport. I was still only a LTJG, not yet promoted to the full LT rank normally required for this schooling, but thanks to the splendid captain and crew of the WILSON and the varied operations we had undertaken, I was well qualified for the challenge. After my arrival in Newport, I started keeping a journal in a rather desultory manner in longhand from which much of the following is drawn. I wish I had kept some sort of account of my comings and goings before that time.

Destroyer School, Newport RI 1972

After a long drive across country via Seattle and Montana (just to see the country) I arrived in Newport on the 19th of April 1972 in the middle of a snow flurry - welcome to New England. The schooling at department head school was aimed at making us technically schooled in all matters relating to destroyers and their operation. Officers and chiefs who knew their topics well conducted our classes, and I felt much better for the education when I left as a full LT six months after arrival. I had been promoted to O-3 in June of 1972, only three years after graduation, thanks to the war, but as the war slowed to a stop in 1975, promotions also slowed, and I would wear the "railroad tracks" of a LT for the next six years.

I later heard from Operations Officer Marty Collins, still in the *Wilson* that the ship had been recalled to Vietnam only six months after our return from Westpac - normal deployment turn-around was a year. While there, the ship was assigned to Operation Linebacker which included dashing north of the DMZ and making high-speed gunnery runs on shore targets. North Vietnamese shore batteries were ready and gave them a hot reception. I have a picture of the WILSON with a bone in her teeth taken from another showing a towering rooster tail at her stern

and large caliber enemy shell splashes as high as her masts all around her. Luckily, while shrapnel fell all around them, nobody was injured, but it was definitely a near-run thing for the ship and crew.

While in Newport I made friends amongst the other students some of which would last a lifetime. We had about 30 or so students in three sections ranging from a single Ensign in our section through LTJG and LT to a single LCDR also in our section. That LCDR, Bob Sutton would one day become the commanding officer of my fourth ship.

Off duty activities included sailing some Wednesday beer can races as part of the crew of a fellow student's 30-foot Hunter sloop, traveling about New England in the summer, and visiting my sister's family in Boston. A girlfriend from San Diego flew in one weekend, and we saw Arthur Fiedler conduct the Boston Pops. She later elected to drop me in favor of a shore-bound civilian with long hair. Smart girl, I guess.

Upon graduation, I was lucky to be assigned to another DDG on the west coast, but some additional specialty schooling was required before heading west again.

USS *JOHN PAUL JONES* (DDG-32) 1972 – 1974

I left Newport in September 1972 and headed to Norfolk for six more weeks of missile school at Dam Neck, Virginia before heading back to Long Beach, California to join USS *John Paul Jones* (DDG 32), commanded by the very soft spoken LCDR Gerald Anderson, as the Weapons Department Head. The *Jones* was originally a FORREST SHERMAN-class destroyer built some years before the *Henry B Wilson* and converted to fire the same Tartar anti-aircraft guided missiles the *Wilson* had been built to carry. As a brand-new LT with only one ship behind me, I was a bit junior to be taking the helm of a department, and the Executive Officer told me so. I shot back that I was what he got and that I did not have any doubts about my ability to satisfy the requirements of the job.

The *Jones* had started life in 1956 as a “straight stick” all-gun destroyer with two 5”/54 gun mounts aft and one forward. She weighed in at 4600 tons and was 418 feet long and had a power plant similar to *Wilson’s.* During her DD days, my future brother-in-law, David Neisius, had held the Weapons Officer job, probably occupying the same bunk I later slept in. She had undergone a conversion to guided missile destroyer in 1967 which removed her aft two guns and added a single-arm missile launcher, a missile director, a long-range air search radar and an ASROC launcher.

My department consisted of the hundred and fifty or so officers and men in the ASW, Gunnery, Fire Control (Gun and Missile), and Deck divisions, each headed by an ensign, lieutenant (junior grade), or lieutenant.

It really should have come as no surprise to the XO that the department heads were relatively junior because the ship had been designated by the Navy as one of Admiral Zumwalt’s (Chief of Naval Operations) “mod squad” vessels where the captain was one rank junior than normal. Thus, we had a LCDR as captain as well as another LCDR as XO. We department heads (including Engineering Officer and classmate Mike Morgan) were the normal rank for the job, just barely.

I think I got his attention immediately when I decided to forego the normal ten-day turnover with my predecessor and took the reins in four days. My reasons were that Christmas was nearing, and I had found significant deficiencies in the ASW nuclear weapons area and that waiting the extra week to take over would not give me sufficient time to jerk the ASW Officer out of his dream world before the nuclear weapons safety inspection scheduled the following month. Besides being embarrassing in the extreme, failing such inspections could get a ship’s captain or the responsible department head (me) fired.

The all-important Anti-Submarine Rocket (ASROC) launcher from which the nuclear depth charges were fired, located amidships on the 01-level, turned out to have some serious material deficiencies which would surely come to the attention of the no-nonsense nuclear weapons safety inspectors and cause us to fail. At the time we had actual nuclear depth bombs loaded into two of the eight cells (cells were arranged over and under, two to a “guide”) of this rattle trap launcher, and one of the cells would not display a “Missile Latched Light” indicating that the rocket with its attached nuke was not securely held in position and could slide out and fall on deck if the launcher was elevated to either shoot or to unload the cell. The civilian launcher experts suspected that the relay (not the actual latch in the launcher) that caused the light to come on was the real culprit, but with a rocket in the cell, it was not possible for a man to get to the latch to check its actual condition. It was however, against every tenant of nuclear weapons safety to move the launcher in this condition – Catch 22. With the advice of the civilians from the local Naval Weapons Systems Engineering Command, I elected to solve the problem the only way any of them knew how. I didn’t bother to inform the captain or the XO because I figured it would slow down the process.

I called away the special security force normally posted for routine nuclear weapons handling training meaning that nobody could come onto the ASROC deck to interfere. We next trained the launcher around to the loading position and held our collective breath while elevating the launcher guide containing the two nuclear weapons cells. Once we got the loading crane hooked up to the back end of the cell, where it could prevent the rocket from sliding out, we all let our collective breath out. The repair now became a simple matter of using the loading crane rail to push the nuclear weapon a few feet forward (its distinctive nose now sticking out of the front of the launcher) so that a man could climb into the cell from behind and replace the faulty light relay. The weapon was tied off with manila line to part of a nearby radar mast, and the loading rail was removed for access to the light relay. The nuclear weapon was now held in place at a forty-five-degree angle by a piece on manila line. I ordered a tarp thrown over the nose of the nuke while the crew got about fixing the switch.

Of course, about this time the XO came out of a door on the main deck below me and started up a ladder toward me doubtless on some mundane administrative mission. He came to a stop when he saw the security line and asked what we were doing. I looked him in the eye and said, “XO, you really don’t want to know.” He took one look at the nuke tied to the mast and then to the stepladder at the back end of the launcher where the sailor had gone into the launcher cell, turned a shade or two paler, and disappeared!

I ended up getting everything (including the ASROC launcher) fixed in the nick of time, and we passed the big inspection in fine style. I never heard any more nonsense from the XO about my being too inexperienced. It could have been, yup, a near-run thing.

Getting the nuclear weapons security force, we had aboard up to snuff before the big inspection required a lot of drilling. I held security alert drills for each in-port duty section, and they involved a lot of running around with pistols and rifles by the enlisted folks selected for that duty. During one drill, a man tripped and fell resulting in his gun hand impacting a small cleat on the top of the rail of the main deck weather break. He reflexively released his grip on the .45 caliber model 1911 semi-automatic pistol he was carrying, and it went over the side. Oh, horrors! Losing a small arm is just about the worst thing that can happen to the officer signed for the weapon, me. The endless investigation and paperwork and career-ending event if one is found culpable were all just too much to contemplate. Enter cumshaw.

The word cumshaw may have come to the US Navy from British Navy personnel who encountered it in Chinese ports, during the First Opium War of 1839. Cumshaw is apparently from a word that means "grateful thanks" in the dialect of Xiamen, a port in southeast China. Sailors probably heard it from the beggars who hung around the ports and mistook it as the word for a handout. Since then, US sailors put their own unique spin on the practice of cumshaw as it has come to mean something obtained through unofficial, usually devious, or ingenious, means and used as a means of greasing the skids in any transaction.

To the case at hand, I had a pistol in a known location (straight down on the bottom alongside the pier we were moored to), a weighted line from the offending cleat down to the assumed location, and no diver to go get it. But there was a Navy diving locker with divers down the quay a bit. Official requests and all the paperwork involved in getting the divers over to us could have involved a lot of time be which the gun would corrode to uselessness, and we might have moved the ship. So, I sent somebody to the dive locker to ask for immediate help with the reward being anything within my power to give them in exchanged, i.e., cumshaw. The price sent back was two ten-pound can of coffee, and the deal was done. An hour or two later I watched anxiously as the diver’s bubbles indicated he was at the right location at the end of our weighted line. Soon a gloved hand emerged from the dark water with my lost .45. What a near-run thing that was!

We had several more training exercises and inspections to undergo before our scheduled Westpac deployment, and all went fairly well except for the anti-aircraft gun shoot featuring our single 5”/54 on the bow. The radar in the director for the gun was very troublesome, and nobody seemed able to get it to work well enough to track anything smaller than an airliner. Unfortunately, the towed target we had to shoot at was very much smaller than that. I will always remember the day off Long Beach when we and small destroyer escort (DE) built right after WWII were out for an anti-aircraft gunnery exercise against a sleeve towed by an aircraft. The plane would pass overhead at which time we were allowed to shoot at the sleeve some thousands of feet astern of the airplane. The idea was to be radar tracking the target with the director’s gunfire control radar when the plane flew overhead. The gun would then be placed in automatic to follow the director which in turn was following the radar via the gunfire computer. Loading the gun and opening fire quickly was required before the target sleeve was overhead and gone. Success in all this activity was measured by how many target-triggered bursts (TTBs) we counted as the radar fuse in the nose of the practice shells we fired detected the target and blew a black smoke signal out the back of the projectile.

After several passes during which the director crew could never get the radar to lock onto the target despite their ability to visually follow the damned thing, Captain Anderson felt obliged to bring the DE up abreast of us from his position astern so that ship could have an opportunity to fire at the target before the tow plane ran low of fuel. So around came the plane for one more pass. Pop, pop, pop went the twin three-inch guns on the little DE while our five-inch gun sat motionless on the bow because our fire control system could not track it. I was standing on the flying bridge above the captain and near the base of the gun director when I heard a crash below me as the mild-mannered skipper threw his helmet (we were at GQ) onto the deck in frustration. I felt like doing the same thing but refrained. That damned radar never did work well.

The last days before deployment were very busy with last minute preparations including loading of all sorts of supplies which were dumped on the pier for working parties of sailors to carry aboard and stow in assigned locations. At some point it came to my attention that there were two crated bronze boat propellers on the pier. The Supply Officer thought they may have been something my department needed for my two boats (a whaleboat and the captain's gig), but close examination revealed they were way too big and were actually for 70-ton LCM-8 landing craft. Remembering the Mary Soo side cleaners/painters I had encountered in Hong Kong while assigned to the *Wilson* worked for odd bits of junk, preferably brass or bronze, I ordered the crates broken up and the propellers stowed away in a fan room off the ASROC deck.

Preparations of a personal nature for me who was living aboard the ship involved taking my Jeep to a long-term storage garage. Others had more pressing matters including the young black sailor who came into the wardroom the night before we deployed to ask if the squadron chaplain who happened to be riding us and was present would marry him and his girlfriend before we got underway. The chaplain hemmed and hawed about how he would need to talk to and counsel the two of them over a period of days before he could marry them. Disappointed, the man left.

The next morning, the ship had steam up and all stations of the Special Sea and Anchor Detail were manned and ready. The usual muster was taken and reported to bridge, and guess who was missing? Our enamored sailor had not made it back. It is an extremely bad idea to "miss ship's movement" in the Navy, and this guy was facing heavy discipline and probably reassignment to another ship once he turned himself in to the Naval Base Commander. All lines were singled up and one by one the lines, starting from astern with line one from the bow still over to hold the bow as we twisted the stern clear of the pier. Just as the last line was to come aboard, there was a commotion among the crowd of friends and relatives assembled to see us off, and our newly married sailor and his new wife came running down the pier, he in his white uniform and she in her white mini-dress. With the bow of the ship nearly over hanging the pier it was a quick trick for the deck crew to hand him up onto the deck with a cheer all around. We were off. A couple of months later the sailor got a "dear John" letter from his wife.

Thus, on 9 May 1973 I was again underway for Westpac, this time from Long Beach, California as the *Jones* deployed with several other ships of our squadron (destroyer *Edson* and destroyer escorts *Cook* and *Francis Hammond*). With no large fueling vessel in our group, we destroyers had fueling stops at Hawaii and Midway before meeting the USS *Kansas City*, the replenishment ship that ran away from me in the Tonkin Gulf in 1971. We all sailed in company to Subic Bay via Pearl Harbor.

This was during the time of the negotiations over the US withdrawal from Vietnam by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger with the North Vietnamese. We thus saw no direct combat, but we had several "line periods" as we went into the Tonkin Gulf as a carrier escort or as a quick reaction force for the US minesweepers clearing out the mines from Haiphong Harbor. On the last night of their minesweeping operations, we and other destroyers headed north to the entrance of Haiphong and went to general quarters to be prepared for any last-minute retribution the North Vietnamese might decide to inflict on our "sweeps" as they exited the harbor.

During this period, we got a new squadron commodore, and *Jones* was the squadron flagship. He was a black officer with gunnery background in older destroyers and knew nothing about missilery. As his flagship's Weapons Officer I became his chief advisor at conferences relating to upcoming missile shoots. We kept it between us that he did not know anything about what was being discussed, and I briefed him later what he had actually heard. I liked him much better than his predecessor.

The previous commodore was a horse's ass with too much of a liking for his liquor. We were anchored in Hong Kong for a few days, and the commodore would come and go at all sorts of odd hours in his gig (a shore boat we carried), our captain's gig which was turned over to the commodore and manned by a three-man crew we provided. He was frequently inebriated and sometimes accompanied by women. The boat crewmembers of a gig were chosen for their good behavior and seamanship and traditionally came and went at the captain's, or in this case the commodore's discretion, and it was usual custom for the officer they served to ensure they were given sufficient liberty and rest time. This practice was not being adhered to by our commodore, and the boat crew was getting worn out.

As Weapons Department Head, I was in charge of all the ship's boats and crew training as well as the Command Duty Officer (the officer in charge of the in-port watch section) one day when this disreputable man arrived back onboard and went to his cabin, I ordered the gig crew to get some food and standby. Sometime later I was called to the commodore's cabin where he ordered me to have the gig at the accommodation ladder in short order. It took longer than his hair trigger patience could handle before I reported back to him that it was going to be a few more minutes than his peremptory order would allow before the gig was manned and at the ladder. This bleary eyed drunk with his popping facial veins looked at me and simply said, "I don't believe you!" and slammed the door closed. He had just called me a liar, and I viscerally hated him for it. I balled my fist, cocked my arm, and said "Commodore, come here," fully intending to deck him right then and there and the devil take the hindmost. In the seconds thereafter tow things happened to save me from a court martial and dismissal from the service; the drunk did not open the door and I cooled enough to realize he was simply not worth my time.

At some point during our Westpac cruise, the new commodore was made aware of the fact that it was his duty to nominate junior officers from his squadron's ships in the rank of Lt and below for the Annual Fleet Junior Officer Ship Handling Award. He had observed my mooring the ship in Subic Bay and maybe conning during underway replenishment as well and had decided that I was to be his nominee. Maybe my backing him up on missilery had helped too. Anyway, in due course, it was announced that I was the winner of the award. One of the benefits of this award was that I got my choice of next duty station, within reason.

Ship handling seemed to come naturally to me from the very first time I conned a YP at the Naval Academy. Whether figuring the complexities of a change of station in a large formation or mooring to a pier, I have always been able to quickly assess the conditions and come up with the proper course and speed to get the ship to move in the proper direction, often before the person working out the solution on the maneuvering board came up with a definitive solution. A keen awareness of the ship as almost a living thing being influenced by its environment was always helpful in close quarters situations like mooring to piers and buoys when trying to figure out what engine and rudder combination would move the ship as desired.

During the first few days of each deployment while headed across whatever ocean I was in, as OOD I always spent some time on the bridge wing watching the wake stretch out to the horizon astern us as new helmsmen took the wheel. It often looked like a broken-backed snake, and I knew that the newbie helmsman was wasting fuel and slowing us down with excessive use of the rudder. I would go into the pilothouse and ask him (no women aboard then) if he was trying to write his name in the water. I would tell the conning officer I was assuming the helm and send the helmsman out on the wing to look aft where he could see his wake. Then I would spend some time with him at the helm as I kept the course right under the lubber line of the gyro

repeater as if it had been nailed there. I would show him how a tiny amount of rudder applied before the ship's head began to swing off course was preferable to a larger amount after it had shifted off course and how the moment to apply that small amount of rudder could be felt in the feet as the ship responded to the seas. Then I would send him back to the bridge wing to see the now pencil-straight wake going clear over the horizon. I used this trick on every ship I sailed in, and it invariably got the attention of the officers on watch as well as the helmsman. But I digress.

We returned to Long Beach on 8 November 1973 from Subic Bay escorting USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43). During this transit, around the end of October, the United States went to from Defense Condition (DEFCON) four to DEFCON three, the highest level since World War II. This action was because of the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union over the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the coalition of Egypt and Syria, which had begun on October 6th when the Egyptians crossed the Suez Canal into the Sinai Desert. I remember being called to radio-central as part of the two-man team required anytime the top-secret safe containing the sealed and coded cards for nuclear weapon release was opened. The top-secret message sending us to DEFCON 3 indicated the card we should break open and the code verifying the message to be found there. The operations officer and I verified the code and then took it to the captain. Being in mid-ocean in the Pacific half a world away from the conflict, the new defense condition had little practical or immediate effect on us. We continued our transit home as before expecting at any moment to be ordered to turn around and head westward in support of whatever was about to happen, but this near-run thing for the whole world thankfully quickly subsided.

In January 1974, our homeport was changed to San Diego, and I couldn't have been happier.

The *Jones* had a long sorry material readiness history before I ever reported aboard, and it continued during my tour of duty. While the weapons systems were generally OK, the engineering plant had been run hard during the war and had been "put away wet." The boiler tubes, of which there were thousands in the four 1200-PSI boilers, were in bad condition and continually blowing out, sending us into darkness at the worst times. So, after we moved to San Diego, we were promptly "welded to the pier" for extended engineering repairs, which never seemed to end.

There was a great deal of pressure exerted on numerous weary ships' crews by higher authority at this time to bring the ships which had been run so hard during the Vietnam era back into shape. The US presence in that sorry region of the world was now almost nil, and suddenly people realized the Navy was in disrepair with ships reporting inability to get underway for both lack of personnel in critical billets and/or worn-out machinery. So, it was up to the crews to fix things beyond their capability because there was not time or space at the shipyards which would have been the normal place to carry out extensive repairs. The *Jones* was selected as the San Diego poster child for this condition, and we were frequently disrupted by visits of Congressmen and officials enquiring into where all the money was to be spent the Navy wanted to fix the fleet.

The engineering department was woefully undermanned to take on the task of both repairing our four broken boilers and other miscellaneous equipment and spiffing up their dilapidated spaces for VIP visits, and so it was decided that other departments were to assign personnel to jobs in the engineering areas which did require the skills of the machinist mates, boiler technicians and electricians of engineering. In the case of my department, I had to assign an officer or two and 47-men forming task forces tackling jobs assigned by the Chief Engineering Officer. In order to wring the last once of effort out of the crew, work hours were extended such that we came into the ship at 8 AM and were not released from it until 8 PM, and unheard-of practice. Since we weren't going anywhere, most work in the other departments (Weapons, Operations, and Supply) slowed way down, and I found myself frequently checking on my men and how they were getting along in their menial cleaning and painting jobs for the engineers. I was heartened by the positive attitudes I encountered in these men who had put in the months deployed only to be denied the routine expected company of their families and friends as they arrived home worn out at 9 PM or so nightly. At one point an irritated delegation of wives arrived on the pier and picketed the ship!

After a couple of months of this ridiculous state of affairs, sufficient progress was deemed to have been made, and the draconian work hours were rescinded, and we returned normal hours, if not normal work.

We next got underway about six months later after CDR Carpenter relieved LCDR Anderson as commanding officer. I happily left the ship shortly thereafter. The last time I saw the *Jones* was as it was being towed out of San Diego Bay to Long Beach to finally correct the engineering issues which still plagued it and kept it from getting underway.

Alaska and USS *DENVER* (LPD 9) 1974-76

The reason I was transferred from the *Jones* to the *Denver* had to do with two policies recently instituted by BUPERS. It had recently been deemed necessary to broaden surface warfare officers' experience by "splitting" their nominal three-year tour as a department head into two separate assignments, and the amphibious and service (replenishment ships) forces had been complaining for years that they had been sending their best junior officers off to Destroyer School and never seeing them return as department heads educated at that fine school. My last direct contact with the Vietnam War would be while serving in this ship during my participation in the evacuation of Saigon, South Vietnam, in April and May 1975.

While still aboard the *Jones,* I contacted my detailer in Washington at the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, DC to discuss my next assignment. A detailer functions as the career advisor and a job-finder for a specific set or subset of officer year groups (commissioning year) and is usually a rank higher than the officers whose careers he looks after. When my detailer in

later told me he was going to assign me to an old amphibious ship as chief engineer, a department I had assiduously avoided to this point in my career, I pulled out my ship-handling award and told him that was NOT my choice. I finally wangled my way into the First Lieutenant (deck department head) job in USS *Denver*. That was a near-run thing about being assigned as a chief engineer.

I was only too glad to be transferred from the *Jones* on 3 July 1974 enroute to USS *Denver* (LPD 9). The *Denver* was only up the pier a few hundred feet, but I had thirty days of travel time and leave to get there; so, I went via Alaska. I departed San Diego in my Jeep on the 7th of July and spent the first night on the road at my great uncle's and aunt's (George and Sigrid Thorburn) home in Long Beach before heading off to Alameda, CA near San Francisco to visit George Bieda, a USNA/NPS classmate.

A quick repair to a leaky drive shaft seal in Portland, Oregon was followed by a stop in the Seattle area, a visit to Stanly Park in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and then a drive up the Fraser River Valley deep into BC on my way to the Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) Highway. I purchased a Yukon Territories camping permit for the summer for a mere five dollars and sallied forth.

On the 13th of July, I reached the southern terminus of the ALCAN at Dawson Creek, British Columbia in the rain and paused to give some thought to the prospect of traversing this then-unpaved road through hundreds of miles of wilderness. Any misgivings I may have had were dispelled when I saw a mere station wagon pulling a muddy camper trailer in the other direction.

What followed was a wonderfully scenic and exciting trip across the Northwest and Yukon Territories of Canada and into Alaska. I averaged about 240 miles a day on the washboard road often dodging huge log trucks thundering along in the other direction. For a small seasonal fee, I camped in fine Canadian and Alaskan government campgrounds while wending my way along to Haines, Alaska.

At some point in my bumpy progress of about 240 miles a day along the ALCAN, I decided to pull into a campground well before sunset in order that I might set up my pup tent and get organized for the night. The dirt drive lead off the highway downward on a slight decline through a grove of firs or pines under which the grounds had been cleared of brush, and I spotted a mixed group of adults and children about 50-75 yards ahead looking off to my left. They appeared to have some offering in their hands, and as I looked to the left, I spotted a black bear cautiously approaching this group of fools. I stopped the Jeep and shut off the engine while unlimbering my Winchester 1894 .30-.30 caliber saddle carbine. I sighted in on the bear and quietly awaited developments hoping that if it charged the humans, I would have enough of a shot to stop it. The bear eventually saw that discretion was the better part of valor and backed off into the woods. Putting my rifle away, I drove on down to my camping spot without a word to the tourists who were unaware of my oversight of their folly. That was a non-nautical near-run thing, for the bear.

In Haines, I picked up my Alaska Ferry Lines ride south. With the Jeep sleeping on the vehicle deck, I made myself comfortable with my camping gear on a deck chair under a glass-paneled shelter on the upper deck. Despite an open aft end, the radiant heaters of the shelter kept the place quite habitable as I watched the midnight sun skim the southern horizon. Stops included Juneau, Ketchikan, and St Petersburg before I debarked at Prince Rupert, Canada and headed for Banff and Jasper National Park and Lake Louise. After leaving Canada again, I headed to Spokane, WA to visit EXPO 74 before heading east to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons.

I next visited USNA and NPS classmate Mike Malone (of the Jeep accident in 1970) and his family in Idaho Falls where he was undergoing nuclear power training. I left there headed to Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks on 28 July arriving back at the apartment I shared with my ex-*Jones* shipmate Al Sanders on the 29th of July.

I reported aboard USS *Denver* for duty in early August of 1974 in time to get acquainted with the ship before the strenuous weeks of Refresher Training and Amphibious Refresher Training, which finally ended in November. Since she was an amphibious warfare ship, everything in *Denver* was new to me including the organization of my Deck Department where the Weapons Officer was a LTJG division officer who worked for me.

Beards were permitted in the Navy in those years, and when I reported for duty, the captain and XO looked at each other in some relief and noted that at least I wasn't one of the bearded wonders they'd seen working up and down the pier toward the *Jones*.

Captain Harry Jenkins reported aboard and took command shortly before I arrived. He was a naval aviator and had been shot down over North Vietnam and imprisoned in the infamous Hanoi Hilton for over seven years. He had been released back to the US about a year and a half before he came to the *Denver*. He was laid back but very attentive to what was going on, and we all worked hard to please him. Very little seemed to get him excited.

One of the more interesting features of the ship was the background of the department heads. Unlike destroyers where all the department heads were young and recently out of Destroyer School, the officers serving in that capacity in the amphibious and service forces were normally drawn from an older cadre of folks who had served in a variety of usually non-destroyer type ships. They were often limited duty officers (LDO) who, like my father, were only assigned to billets befitting their technical training and experience. One of the aspects of choosing a career as an LDO was that they could not be assigned to command of anything in the Navy. Such distinction was reserved to officers "of the line" like me. One can only assume that the word "line" here refers to the old line of battle from our antecedent, the Royal Navy.

Thus, as the first Destroyer School graduate to ever report aboard the *Denver* for duty, I found myself relieving an older LDO LT named, oddly enough, Jack London. I was also now the junior department head in a ship with a lieutenant commander, Jerry Sturvis, and a full commander (Jones) as operations and engineering department heads respectively. Additionally, we had an Air Department with a lieutenant commander helicopter pilot at its head, and a Medical Department with a lieutenant doctor and a lieutenant dentist. Commander Jones was a fine guy and always helpful, and why he as a full LDO commander was assigned to the ship was always a mystery to me. Anyway, possibly because he was an LDO or maybe because he was not in the mood to do the job, Jerry Sturvis had been assigned the job of senior watch officer, the guy responsible for arranging for all officer and enlisted underway and in-port watches, except those in the engineering spaces.

One of the jobs usually assigned to the Operations Officer in a ship was General Quarters OOD, which entails many long hours standing on the bridge in full battle dress during training periods as well as for every emergency, real or drill, the ship experienced. Jerry promptly told me that I would be the GQ OOD because of my excellent background as a destroyer officer. London, who was as nervous as a cat on the bridge had apparently not been suited to the job, and Jerry had been doing it. Now he saw his opportunity to go hide in combat information center and sit in air-conditioned comfort while I stood on the bridge under the direct gaze of the captain. Not only that, but we were scheduled to undergo a short two-week REFTRA soon after I reported aboard. I wasn't all that happy about it, but I saw his logic and accepted the situation in good humor.

A lot of how well a ship does in "REFTRA" rests directly on the shoulders of the OOD. Luckily, I had paid attention to Hank Levein who was the GQ OOD while I served as the GQ JOOD in the *Wilson.* In the end, after all the usual agonizing stuff the training command puts a ship through during REFTRA, we were congratulated on being the best amphibious ship the trainers had seen in several years, and the captain and I sealed our mutual respect.

Shortly after REFTRA, we underwent a special training for our type of ship called amphibious refresher training. While REFTRA had been sort of old hat to me, Amphib REFTRA was a very

new experience where I would learn a whole new set of skills. Thanks in large part to my one and only chief boatswain's mate with whom I got along exceedingly well, we hoisted out our four boats (two wave commander boats, LCPLs, and two World War II-style ramped LCVPs) from the amidships stowage racks with our large crane and hustled the large LCM-8 landing craft in and out of the flooded well deck day and night without incident. Again, we were adjudged the best ship the trainers had seen in many years. This was getting to be fun.

Denver was in effect a seagoing eighteen-wheeler. Her mission was to carry 875 Marines and their equipment to an amphibious landing. To support this mission there was a large helicopter deck under which was a floodable well deck that could contain four 70-ton LCM8 landing craft. There were also two vehicle decks capable of holding dozens of tanks, trucks, and jeeps. Large cargo magazines occupied much of the ship below the vehicle storage. Her Navy crew numbered 450 while berthing extended aft on either side of the well deck capable of bunking 875 Marines. *Denver* was 576 feet long and weighed in at over 17,000 tons when fully loaded. Two large 600-PSI boilers and turbines and two propellers powered her to over twenty knots.

In addition to the four twin 3"/50 guns and their three associated fire control systems, my domain extended over the numerous cargo magazines, all ships boats, the floodable well deck, and all the troop berthing compartments, and the ship's mooring and anchoring systems. My department manning profile was five divisions, four of boatswain's mates and one of gunners and fire control technicians, totaling 150 men and officers.

I always marveled at the intricate ritual required to launch our four LCPL/LCVP boats from their stowage racks. The boat-and-aircraft (B&A) crane was located on the starboard side of the ship in such a way that each 36-foot boat had to be plucked out of its cradle near the base of the crane and swung nearly 180 degrees around, over the helicopter hangar and down to the water on the starboard side, with the boat's keel always parallel to the ship's keel. The B&A crane was a massive piece of equipment with a long boom meaning that there was a long distance from the tip of the boom to the hook when the boats were initially lifted from their cradles. If there was the slightest bit of pitching or rolling by the ship (there always was) the result would be a wildly swinging fiberglass boat crashing into anything in the way unless it was well controlled. To accomplish a safe launch, we secured four lines to the boats, two off the bow and two off the stern. Only one line was ever allowed to be off a cleat at a time, and two men tended each line, one to secure and un-secure it to the numerous temporary and permanent cleats strategically located around the area, and one to carry the excess line whenever it accumulated. A boatswain's mate with a whistle was in charge. The bosun was one of my first-class boatswain's mates who, although a little rusty at first, developed a very good deck crew as well as honed his own skills in moving the boats.

When things were going well, the boat would be lifted straight up under control as all four lines were slacked with figure-eight turns used on the cleats to apply strong tension to the two-inch lines. Then the bosun in charge would tweet his whistle and give the B&A (Boat and Aircraft) crane operator the signal to start rotating the crane slowly while the first line to be moved was released from its first cleat and hustled to the next cleat based on hand and whistle signals from the bosun. Lines that needed to be taken in toward the cleat were handled with an S-turn on the cleat which was achieved by a simple flick of the wrist to remove half of the figure-eight turn which had be used to ease out the line. The chant, "In with an S and out with an eight." was repeated over and over again by trainers and us safety observers. If the boat did not start wildly gyrating at the end of its long pendulum (which would happen more often than my frayed nerves liked), the crane would continue to move slowly while the dance of the line handlers went on below until the boat was lowered level with the flight deck and secured while the crew boarded. Then it was a straight drop to the water some twenty-plus feet below.

After loading the well deck and cargo areas and even the flight deck with cargo and vehicles bound for Westpac, *Denver* deployed to the Western Pacific from San Diego, CA on 28 March 1975 amid the increasingly bad news from Southeast Asia. We laid over in Pearl Harbor for

several days. There we were made even more aware of the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam, and some preparatory measures to support a possible evacuation were carried out. Captain Harry Jenkins held several meetings with us department heads to map out how *Denver* would respond to an influx of an undetermined but assumed large number of people. As a result, we loaded quite a bit of rice, new metal trashcans in which to cook and serve it, plywood to construct privies, and numerous other hygiene items. No small part of our planning involved crew duties and responsibilities including food service, security (including body searches for contraband), medical screening, and taking census data.

As the Deck Department Head in charge of the ship's boats, cargo handling equipment and well deck, and liaison to the Marines aboard through my Marine Combat Cargo Officer, I was a key player in all of this.

We arrived in Okinawa (Kin Blue Beach) at 1900, 17 April 1975 with intentions to offload our WESTPAC-bound cargo ASAP and then move the pier at White Beach in Buckner Bay to prepare for whatever was to come next. Unfortunately, nobody was there on the beach to come out on our landing craft (two LCM-8s) to drive the bunch of LVTs (Landing Vehicle Tracked) we were delivering. I ended up driving several of them into the LCM-8s and taking them to shore before the Marines finally showed. I forgot to secure the heavy hatch in place on the first LVT I moved and got conked on the head when it flipped closed as the vehicle pitched forward while heading down the ramp from the level upper vehicle deck into the landing craft. I think I was momentarily dazed but ended up braking the vehicle to a stop well before it collided with the aft bulkhead of the landing craft's cargo well. It was a near-run thing, indeed.

We had considered having some Marines drive the LVTs into the water from our well deck to get them quickly to shore. We later found out that the bilge plugs in these vehicles were not installed meaning that they might have swamped on the way to the beach. Disaster averted!

We got to the pier at White Beach in Buckner Bay at 0600 the next day to load 700 Marines, 75 vehicles, and 50 pallets of cargo.

Again, amidst gathering rumors mixed with hard news, we were underway for Vietnam at midnight on 18 April 1976. I had the 04-08 watch on 22 April 1976 as officer-of-the-deck as we approached Vung Tau and joined many other US Navy ships on station. I think there were about forty-eight ships there.

We waited about four days to be told what to do, and boredom mounted. At one point we flooded the well deck and kicked the LCM-8s out loaded with Marines and Sailors dressed as they pleased and equipped with fishing poles while we raised the stern ramp to create a huge swimming pool in the well deck. About this time the Seventh Fleet Flagship, a missile cruiser, happened to come and witnessed our "hooligan Navy" show. Uh-oh. The admiral must have conveniently averted his gaze as his flagship sedately sailed by because we never heard any adverse comment from that province.

One evening I had the OOD watch on the bridge as the sun was setting and Captain Jenkins and the Marine colonel, who turned out to be high school classmates, were enjoying each other's company. As the skipper sat in his big shot chair on the starboard side of the bridge sipping coffee from a silver service, he was feeling rather expansive and called to me "Hey, Rich, want some coffee?" To which I replied, "No thanks, sir, I don't drink it because it keeps me awake." Now all captains WANT their OODs to remain wide-awake, and our normally phlegmatic skipper did the only double take I ever saw him do while the colonel laughed out loud. In truth, I have never liked coffee or anything tasting remotely like it. People often wonder how I ever made it through a navy career without coffee, but I did.

On the 29th of April 1975, after days of anticipation, the North Vietnamese Army overcame any remaining resistance in South Vietnam, and the evacuation of Saigon began in earnest. *Denver*

was a frontline participant over the next several days, as we received first American and “third-country nationals, and then a mix of Vietnamese civilians and military via helicopter. Saigon surrendered on 1 May 1976, and I was still up and running without any rest on 2 May.

After frantically taking some six thousand persons aboard via both helicopter and boat and transporting most of them to other refugee collection ships, we finally headed for Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines with 600 refugees camped on the flight deck and a hundred or so US and third country nationals stashed here and there. During the rush to get the people aboard by helicopter, we were required to clear the flight deck of now pilot-less helos. We ended up using my department’s rough-terrain forklift to smash into the front of the Huey’s on deck and push them over the stern – seven in all. The gouges in the flight deck nonskid deck covering where we pushed the helos which had only skids and no wheels off the deck were still there when I left the Denver for good.

After the Huey invasion, the various Marine helicopters (H-46s and H53s) from the larger ships which carried them began to arrive with refugees picked up primarily from the US Embassy. I was mostly on the fight deck with occasional trips down to the well deck to see how we were doing transferring refugees off the ship to other ships using our LCM-8s. I once counted eighty-nine Vietnamese get off a helicopter designed to carry thirty-eight marines, and this went on hour after hour for a day or two. We were exceptionally blessed with a calm sea making the entry and exit to the well deck far less hazardous than usual.

The aircraft carrier USS *Midway* had arranged her aircraft in such a way as to clear the flight deck for a bunch of large US Air Force helicopters, but after eight hours of flying their practice was to require hours of crew rest before they could take to the air again. Apparently, nobody thought to include extra crews for this operation. Thus, for long periods during the critical hours of the evacuation, the *Midway* sat useless. By contrast, our Marine helicopter pilots just kept flying. Well into the night I looked up to see our doctor standing beside me looking a bit distressed, and he told me that after about nineteen hours of straight flying the powers that be had directed that a medical person on each ship where they landed to go to the helicopters to determine if the pilots were competent to continue. Not being a flight surgeon, he was a bit nonplussed and was unsure

about venturing out onto the busy flight deck. I told him to just follow one of our deck crew out there and get the pilots' attention to see if their eyes looked weird or something.

At one point in the midst of this craziness, we got the word that a nearby MSC (Military Sealift Command) ship was having a "situation." A large, motorized lighter filled with what were purported to be thirsty South Vietnamese paratroopers were demanding to be allowed aboard. The problem was that they were still armed, and the captain of the MSC ship was not anxious to have them aboard as he already had several thousand people covering his decks from his earlier evacuation efforts at a port in South Vietnam. To avoid an escalation to violence, DENVER was ordered to close in on that ship and restore order. As we slowly moved in, our two LCM-8s were brought alongside at the side port doors, and 120 heavily armed Marines clambered down cargo nets into them. As soon as they were filled, the LCMs tore out ahead of us at full speed. As they arrived at the side of the lighter with *Denver's* bow menacingly looming over them, things calmed down a lot. Water was given to the Vietnamese soldiers, and they were allowed to board the ship after disarming.

While observing this event, somebody on the bridge (where I happened to be at that moment) pointed out a figure sitting atop the exposed rudder of the MSC ship. It was a naked woman who had apparently leaped for the ship as it was leaving port. The propeller wash during the transit out to sea must have ripped her clothing off. Nobody aboard the ship knew she was down there. After advising the ship that she was there, we watched as a life ring was lowered to her so she was hauled aboard. It was a near-run thing for her.

While going through some of my mother's old papers with her in July 2006, I came across the following naval message which was released as we were right in the middle of total chaos of Vietnam. It was probably read over the *Denver's* 1MC (public address system), and I probably ignored it in the rush of events. Well do I remember the sadness and bitterness I felt as we loaded refugees in the Tonkin Gulf in 1975.

R (*meaning routine*) 302217Z/27 APR 75
FM SECNAV WASHINGTON DC
TO ALNAV
BT
UNCLAS//N05713//
1. THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS QUOTED FOR YOUR INFO:
QUOTE:
O (meaning operational immediate) 292026Z APR 75
FM SECDEF WASH DC (Secretary of Defense)
TM AIG 8790
XMT DEPT MF TRANS WASH DC
FBI WASH DC
GSA OFFICE OF PREPAREDNESS WASH DC
UNCLAS 6621
SECDEF SENDS
TO "ALL DOD COMPONENTS"

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES:

AS THE LAST WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICANS FROM VIETNAM TAKES PLACE, IT IS MY SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS TO YOU, THE MEN AND WOMEN OF OUR ARMED FORCES, A FEW WORDS OF APPRECIATION ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

FOR MANY OF YOU, THE TRAGEDY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA IS MORE THAN A DISTANT AND ABSTRACT EVENT. YOU HAVE FOUGHT THERE; YOU HAVE LOST COMRADES THERE;

YOU HAVE SUFFERED THERE. IN THIS HOUR OF PAIN AND REFLECTION YOU MAY FEEL THAT YOUR EFFORTS AND SACRIFICES HAVE GONE FOR NAUGHT.

THAT IS NOT THE CASE. WHEN THE PASSIONS HAVE MUTED AND THE HISTORY IS WRITTEN, AMERICANS WILL RECALL THAT THEIR ARMED FORCES SERVED THEM WELL. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES MORE DIFFICULT THAN EVER BEFORE FACED BY OUR MILITARY SERVICES, YOU ACCOMPLISHED THE MISSION ASSIGNED TO YOU BY HIGHER AUTHORITY. IN COMBAT YOU WERE VICTORIOUS AND YOU LEFT THE FIELD WITH HONOR.

THOUGH YOU HAVE DONE ALL THAT WAS ASKED OF YOU, IT WILL BE STATED THAT THE WAR ITSELF WAS FUTILE. IN SOME SENSE, SUCH MAY BE SAID OF ANY NATIONAL EFFORT THAT ULTIMATELY FAILS. YET OUR INVOLVEMENT WAS NOT PURPOSELESS. IT WAS INTENDED TO ASSIST A SMALL NATION TO PRESERVE ITS INDEPENDENCE IN THE FACE OF EXTERNAL ATTACK AND TO PROVIDE AT LEAST A REASONABLE CHANCE TO SURVIVE. THAT VIETNAM SUCCUMBED TO POWERFUL EXTERNAL FORCES VITIATES NEITHER THE EXPLICIT PURPOSE BEHIND OUR INVOLVEMENT NOR THE IMPULSE OF GENEROSITY TOWARD THOSE UNDER ATTACK THAT HAS LONG INFUSED AMERICAN POLICY.

YOUR RECORD OF DUTY PERFORMED UNDER DIFFICULT CONDITIONS REMAINS UNMATCHED. I SALUTE YOU FOR IT. BEYOND ANY QUESTION YOU ARE ENTITLED TO THE NATION'S RESPECT, ADMIRATION, AND GRATITUDE.

UNCLAS

JAMES R. SCHLESINGER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.

UNQUOTE

BT

The following are two letters written by me in 1975 to my parents concerning my participation in the events surrounding the U.S. Navy's evacuation of Saigon, South Vietnam. Italicized sections were written years later for explanatory purposes.

Mom thought the letters I wrote home might someday be of interest to posterity; so, she typed them up on her old script-font typewriter and stored them away. She handed them to me in April 1997, twenty-two years after they were written. I have included some italicized editorial comments in this version interspersed through the commentary of the letters to help a latter-day reader who may not be familiar with the events and technicalities described.

The first letter is dated 27 April 1975 at sea in the Tonkin Gulf off the Vung Tao Peninsula of South Vietnam.

27 April 1975

Dear Folks,

I guess I can tell you where we are now seeing as how I'm sure the North Vietnamese are looking at us right now. We are within sight of the Vung Tao Peninsula doodling around in circles waiting for something to happen. We got so bored the other day we flooded down the well deck, kicked our two boats out, closed the stern gate to keep the sea snakes out, and held swim call for the sailors and Marines. I wonder what our Task Force commander thought as he steamed by to see our boats full of differently clad fishermen trolling along astern of us.

We have certainly planned and exercised at receiving evacuees (US and refugees) and consider ourselves ready to receive several thousand if the need arises. The XO (executive officer, second in command of the ship) says the worst thing that can happen to us is that nothing will happen.

Denver was directed to move in closer to the coast last night on my watch (*my normal watch was as officer-of-the deck on the bridge in charge of the ship's movements*). It was a little eerie leaving the *John Paul Jones* (DDG-32) and *Henry B Wilson* (DDG-7) (who've been escorting us) behind to move up into the area of flares and gun flashes, but that soon became a normal state of affairs too as we were in no immediate danger.

The Henry B Wilson and John Paul Jones were my first and second sea assignments - Denver was third. Coincidentally, sister Jean's husband, David Neisius, also served in the JPJ a number of years before I did in the same billet (Weapons Officer).

The *Jones* boiled by (*destroyers never just sail by!*) the other day saying by flashing light, "Pass to LT Gano - welcome to Disneyland West. Wardroom Sends." I don't know anyone on the *Henry B Wilson*. anymore, but it is still good to have her around. I'd be interested in knowing what news comes your way about this great shuffle. (*Most movements of our ships were the subject of SECRET message traffic at the tim*e.)

I think it's going to be too late very soon if we don't get the word to go and get our dumb (aren't all civilians?) people out of there. Captain Jenkins said no way could I ride one of the boats in as boat officer, even after I told him I was the best man for the job.

Captain Jenkins had met Mom and Dad during a trip they made to San Diego the previous year and had looked them up when he was in Pensacola for one of his prisoner-of-war physicals (he had spent seven years in a North Vietnamese prison after being shot down during a bombing run). When the idea of sending landing craft up the Saigon River to fetch evacuees came up, I volunteered to go (I was single and generally heedless of my own safety). He told me "No. What would I tell your parents if something happened to you?"

Luckily, the idea was scrapped because it was probably exceedingly hazardous, if not reckless.

I wish our original schedule after Okinawa would be reinstated so we could go to Singapore (*I had gone there in Henry B Wilson in 1971*). I find that I am among a vast minority being a Shellback (*one who has crossed the equator afloat and who gets to lord it over the poor Pollywogs who have not been inducted into the Realm of King Neptune*).

I hope by the time you get this that we'll be finished here, and that I won't have to sit off the coast of Vietnam again, but that's what we thought a week ago. Still, we sit.

Rich

1 May 1975

Dear Folks,

This is one of those "where the heck do you start" things. Days seem like months when you take into account the events of the last couple of days. We all sort of anticipated a "crunch" as the vacillating civilians (*State Depart*ment) decided to make a run for it at the last second - they did.

Actually, we've only gotten about 150 evacuees (*US, Filipino*). Refugees are all others and ended up being over 6,000). The first we got turned out to be a Huey-load (*Huey, the workhorse helo of the Vietnam era*) of officers (refugees) seeking asylum saying, "Please don't send us

back; we'll be killed." Little did they know we were completely set up to take care of just such things. We ran all refugees down the ramp from the flight deck to the well deck where they were to await transport by our Mike boats (*70-ton LCM-8 landing craft*) to chartered Military Sealift Command shipping nearby. The fact that they were all high-ranking officers did not create the best impression on us all.

Next thing we knew, there was a whole squadron of Hueys overhead trying to land as the word somehow filtered back we were available. We had shoved the first helo into a corner and painted over the South Vietnamese markings, but now that we had seven helos landed on a deck designed for three or four, things got a little hectic. (Must admit they were good pilots to do it). These were the more common soldier type with families aboard, and many were obviously overjoyed to be here as they jumped out amongst the still-whirling blades and danced around embracing each other. When they saw our Marine security force, with rifles ready *(we had been told to beware of possible North Vietnamese-commandeered helos with suicide squads*), they gladly threw all their weapons down saying, "Don't need any more."

We had weapons and helos all over the place with *Denver* crewmen scrambling to get the people out of the way and the weapons put in a stack and clearing another place to land.

Commander Jones (*our Chief Engineer*) came running up to me as I was directing people and weapons movement (my responsibility during this whole mess) to get me to help pull the jettison barrier lever at the end of the flight deck because it was becoming obvious that jettisoning helicopters would be the next step.

We dodged around people and landing helos to get to it and managed to drop the barrier. The flight deck crew and my deck gang immediately went into action with one of the helo tractors and one of my rough-terrain forklifts and started shoving helos over the side. We were all just sick to do it, but the ARVNs (*Army of the Republic of Vietnam*) had no intention of flying them off someplace else. They just abandoned them and got into line for body and baggage search.

A friend on USS Kirk, a frigate, which has a very small flight deck, later told me of a gallant pilot who hovered inches off the ship while his passengers debarked. He then ditched the helo off the side where it disintegrated once the whirling main rotor contacted the water. He was rescued by the ship's boat. We still had skid mark indentations in the deck a year later where the choppers were slid over the side. In 2010, this pilot, then ailing with advanced Alzheimer's, and quite aged was taken by his family to the Kirk reunion where he was an honored guest.

There were so many people running around throwing loaded and unloaded weapons around and so many obviously covetous eyes that I felt we couldn't control them (*the weapons*) and still run the evacuation; so, I hollered for them all to be thrown over the side.

We got rid of many pistols, M16 rifles, and M60 machine guns, some really beautiful.

During this our Marine helos flew overhead on their way to deliver the Marine Ground Security Force to the embassy. We became a fueling stop for these helos all night long as they commenced bringing out load after load of refugees/evacuees. (An Air America (*the CIA's air force*) helo brought out the Ambassador's wife earlier in the day).

We worked all night and into the early morning hours unloading helos in the unbelievable din, confusion, etc. of a deck filled with huge helos (*CH53s*) disgorging dazed and confused people (sometimes over eighty on a helo designed for 36 combat-loaded Marines).

We would later learn of the incredible scene at the US embassy.

We logged in people, searched them, sent them to the well deck (except Americans who stayed aboard), and started boating them out until about midnight when we had to move south out of danger. (*We had received information about possible North Vietnamese missile boats moving down the coast*.)

We had initially been ready to receive the conniving, sneaky people who might have Viet Cong among them; however, one of my more vivid memories of this will be the Marines in helmet, flak jacket, rifle, pistol belt, etc. carrying babies and old women down the steep ramps to the boats through the knee-deep water and gently placing them in a comfortable spot. My feelings about the South Vietnamese as a nation border on the contemptible, but watching all this I was, to say the least, moved at the tragedy unfolding before me. It was especially brought home when one pilot came back up from below asking for one of the helos we had stacked up on deck. He said "I'm no good without my family, and they'll be killed if I don't get them out; so I might as well go back and get them or die." I told Captain Jenkins standing there it was that guy's helo let him have it. We never saw him again. Another pilot started to go back for more people, and his wife ran and jumped into the helo with him before he could get clear - we never saw them again either.

There are other instances that impressed me much in the other direction, but these are the ones I prefer to remember.

While I did not write of it at the time, I also remember stumbling around after 48 hours with no sleep near tears at the bitter thought of these people abandoning a country whose cause had torn our own country apart and cost us over 50,000 lives.

All the LPDs (*Denver's* type ship) were used as floating dumps for refugees collected by the carriers and other ships in the area (I counted 40 ships on the status board before I was taken off the watch bill to coordinate evacuation activities).

The next day (30 April) we started getting *Midway's* (*an aircraft carrier*) load. We finished off-loading them yesterday morning (we're all anchored 50 miles at sea) when an armada of helos hit the decks of the *Midway* just like they did us, only more so. We could see helos going over their side too.

Denver was ordered to take aboard two Army LCM-8s that had been towed out from shore. We discovered their engines devoid of oil and water forcing us to lash them alongside our own LCMs to get them into the well. The well deck was designed for two pair of normal-width LCM-8s tied side-by-side. Only problem was they'd had pontoons (anti-rocket protection) welded to them around their after third, and were thus too wide to fit side-by-side into our well deck. I didn't think we could put them both along one side of the well deck and still get our two boats in (I was aboard the second of our LCMs at the moment), but after seeing our first boat squeeze into the well alongside the first Army craft, I decided to jam the bow of our boat in along the side of the first one and then see if we had enough room to fit our second Army LCM in. (*If it had jammed with insufficient room, our second boat could have been marooned or at least sticking out our stern all the way to Subic*). Captain Jenkins was openly skeptical, but we did it anyway and came out with a foot to spare (after a lot of screeching metal-to-metal contact). After throwing so much over the side, nobody wants to leave anything behind.

This afternoon (the first of May) the captain had the air officer paint "DENVER" in big yellow letters on one side of one of "our" Hueys and "LPD9" on the other side and then had him (air boss) take him for a ride. Later he came back and asked if I wanted to ride, which, of course I did since I had my camera gear on (I've carried it three days running and recorded all this).

We must have ridden around the vast anchored fleet for an hour or more. We checked in with HDC (Helicopter Direction Control), said we were "DENVER 01," and offered services for small lifts (helos filled the sky night and day as transfers of one sort or another went on).

Everybody was shaky about having us land because by now they expected to see a bunch of fully armed ARVN hop out when a Huey comes in around here, but we sure got ogled when they saw the paint (sloppy yellow) - everybody grinned.

As we flew, we saw a tug towing several barges, all empty except for a Huey sitting on the middle one. We went over and waved for the pilot to start up and follow. As we got closer, we could see he was an American and maybe a bit anxious about flying around the formation with South Vietnamese markings.

We also flew over a vast armada of South Vietnamese Navy craft evidently headed for Subic (*a large US Navy base in the Philippines*). They trailed out over the horizon, and since I was the only ship ID expert aboard, I got on the radio and made a report to HDC. There were World War II LSTs, PCEs, LCIs, PGMs, and YOs all around, crammed with refugees.

The next day an armada of boats (*civilian*) came over the horizon, seeking asylum. The order went out that none of these craft were to be allowed to come alongside – fear of bombs. We had to rapidly ready the engines in the Army LCMs in order to use them in this effort. Our boats are worked well into the night getting refugees aboard and then transferred to the MSC shipping.

POSTSCRIPT

As it was, we ended up sailing for Subic Bay the next day leaving dozens of Vietnamese craft gently bobbing on the calm waters of the Tonkin Gulf. DENVER ended up keeping about 600 refugees on the flight deck where a tent city was established for the two-day trip to Subic. Luckily, the weather continued to cooperate.

Rich

I finally went to bed after spending four days continuously on my feet. I will always remember the charity of my fellow officers who unquestioningly stood my bridge watches during my 24-hour undisturbed sleep.

During the run to Subic Bay, we could see gun flashes on the horizon as the US destroyers and frigates assigned to escort the decrepit Vietnamese naval craft sank the lame ducks after taking off their human cargo.

Once in Subic, we off-loaded our refugees to Grande Island in the middle of the bay. Eventually over 100,000 refugees were processed through that island. A day later it became obvious that the Philippine government might object to the Vietnamese naval craft (which we had overtaken and passed en route to Subic) entering their waters with more refugees. The task force commander canvassed the amphibs for seasoned LTs to ride out in USS *Mobile* and legally retake possession of these US-loaned vessels to bring them in under US colors. Needless to say, I volunteered and went out with a US flag and a .38 caliber pistol. We had been told of indescribably bad conditions and possible mutiny aboard the ships; so, the gun was a necessary precaution.

Luckily, the Philippine Navy did not make a showing, and the remnants of the Vietnamese navy straggled into port to put a whimpering end to a long, drawn out tragedy. Two years later I happened to be in Subic in the ship I commanded at the time, and I found the ex-Vietnamese vessels were still moored in a forlorn lump in the shallows at one end of the base. After four cruises off the coast of that benighted land spanning seven years, including one while still a Midshipman in 1968, I finally got my wish to never sit off the coast of Vietnam again.

From Subic Bay, *Denver* headed north to Okinawa to offload our Marines and to standby for whatever was to come next. We did not have to wait long, as on 12 May 1975 a Khmer Rouge

naval forces "Swift Boat" was sighted approaching the US container ship *Mayaguez* in the Gulf of Thailand. The Khmer Rouge fired across the bow of the *Mayaguez* and when they ordered the engine room to slow down to maneuvering speed to avoid the machine-gun fire, the Khmer Rouge fired a rocket-propelled grenade across the bow of the ship. The captain ordered the transmission of an SOS and then stopped the ship. Seven Khmer Rouge soldiers boarded the *Mayaguez* and pointed at a map indicating that the ship should proceed to the east of Poulo Wai. The ship eventually ended up off Koh Tang Island.

As US forces across the western Pacific mobilized to handle this situation, we were ordered to load a battalion of Marines and head at best speed for the area. After a frantic round-the-clock operation, we were loaded and ready to go, but a strong wind pinned the ship to the pier. The commercial tugs we used to moor and unmoor at White Beach came from Naha on the western coast of Okinawa and had to transit around the southern end of the island to enter the east-facing entrance to Buckner Bay, where our base of White Beach was located.

Rather than wait for the tugs, Captain Jenkins ordered me to use our two LCM-8 landing craft to pull the ship off the pier. The ship was moored stern to the beach with our bow at the end of the pier facing seaward. The two landing craft pulled as hard as they could but did not seem to be making any headway as the captain ordered the OOD to get underway. I am uncertain of the engine commands given, but the result was a grinding screech of metal as part of the hull under the flair of the bow collided with the unforgiving concrete of the seaward end of the pier. The ship ended up with a 15-20-foot-long horizontal slice in the hull about 15 feet above the water, which was temporarily welded up as we raced toward the Gulf of Thailand.

After a day or so headed south, we received word that the *Mayaguez* had been found and towed clear of Cambodian waters by USS *Harold E Holt,* and the crew was later released and taken aboard from a fishing vessel by my old ship USS *Henry B Wilson.* In the process, a hastily arranged operation saw a company of US Marines landed at Koh Tang Island by US Air Force helicopters where a bloody battle ensued with the Khmer Rouge forces encountered there. At one point, the *Wilson* and her captain's gig were charging up and down the beach firing at the Cambodians attacking the Marine positions on the beach.

We returned our Marines to Okinawa.

We later headed for Japan to deliver some Marines and their equipment to Numazu beach within sight of Mount Fujiyama. At one point, I went along on one of our LCM-8s as we offloaded. The beach was steep and composed of gravel, which one could hear rattling up and down as the waves broke on the beach. It was treacherous for the marines getting off the boat. They had to be sure to step off the bow ramp at the top of the surge each wave gave the boat. If somebody stepped off at the lower end of a surge and tripped, he could end up being crushed as the boat surged over him. And sure enough, a young Marine did just that, but the quick-witted coxswain slammed the throttles astern and hit the "hoist" button for the boat's ramp raising it above the prostrate Marine as the swell tried to push the boats hull over him. A near-run thing of the highest order.

Our next port of call was Yokosuka Naval Base where we would find a prefabricated chunk of hull to replace the badly dented and cut section damaged when we pulled away from the pier in White Beach, Okinawa as we got underway for the Mayaguez Incident. At his going away party just before the change of command back in San Diego, Captain Jenkins was given a gag gift with a twisted piece of metal from the damaged hull area mounted on a plaque with the caption in brass "White Beach Ship Handling Award."

As we accompanied other ships in our squadron toward "Yoko," USS *Mobile* suffered an engineering casualty, which left her dead in the water off the coast of Japan and drifting toward danger. *Denver* was ordered to take the *Mobile* in tow until a salvage tug coming from Yoko could relieve us. My men rapidly rigged our ten-inch diameter nylon towline in the well deck

behind the two LCM-8s, and I think it was approaching darkness as we made the approach to the *Mobile*. I was in the well deck supervising the rigging and could not see the *Mobile* until we turned across her bow. Another part of our towing detail was stationed on the flight deck high above my head to pass the shot and messenger line to the crew on the other ship. Our massive stern ramp was fitted with a hawse hole through which our towline would pass. The ramp was in the raised position, but the upper door, which covered the portion of the well deck opening above the ramp, was raised so we could see over the top of the lower door.

I was amazed at how close we were as the bow of the *Mobile* towered over us when the bridge crew twisted the ship around in front of her to pass the towline. I think rather than shoot the messenger line over, our topside crew simply used a monkey fist line thrown by a bosun.

Sometime later the ship was steaming down the western coast of Japan headed for Sasebo when we suffered a boiler room fire. This and a boiler room fire we had in the *Iowa* years later were the only fires of any seriousness I ever experienced afloat. In this case, *Denve*r was alone, and the fire caused us to loss all propulsion power.

As the fire was discovered and flared out of control, General Quarter was called away, and we all ran to our battle stations, in my case, as OOD on the bridge. The status of the fire was called to the captain and me on the bridge, and at some point, it was decided that the lower vehicle stowage, currently full of smaller Marine vehicles and my privately owned Jeep, was in danger because it was directly over the boiler room. As OOD it was my duty to relay the captain's permission to flood the space with the installed sprinkler system. I could just see in my mind's eye the saltwater as it flooded my prized Jeep. As it turned out, only a foot or less was needed to cool the deck down, but damage control people later told me the concrete layer in there was cracking and flying like cannon shots due the over-heated and warped steel below it. My Jeep survived this part of this near-run thing.

Once all propulsive power was lost, we found ourselves in the dark drifting toward a rocky shore on the coast near Sasebo.

Eventually, the emergency diesel generator was able to provide power for radar and fathometer and a few lights here and there while the engineers worked frantically to restore power and propulsion to the ship with the undamaged boiler. I ended up on the bow with the anchor detail, but the sea was too deep for us to anchor. As the navigator got a good fix on our location and drift, it became clear that we were drifting toward a small 30-fathom mound, the only place we had a chance for an anchor to catch before we entered an area of deeper water stretching all the way to the rocky shore. Even 30 fathoms of water is a long drop for a heavy anchor, and there was every chance of it shattering on impact or the chain getting into a runaway situation and just all ripping out of the ship endangering all of us on the bow.

It was silent on the forecastle as we released all but the last pelican hook holding the anchor in place. The captain called to me in a calm voice from the bridge, and it was easy to hear him as he asked me if we were ready. I reported back in the affirmative and listened as he called the decreasing depth readings to me. Just about the moment he was ready to order me to let go the anchor, lights came on and blowers spun up as the other boiler was finally brought online feeding steam to the steam turbine generators. That meant that propulsive power was soon to follow. We breathed a sigh of relief at this latest near-run thing in my career and went into Sasebo where the Navy had a repair facility. Talk about a near-run thing!

I think we spent six weeks in Sasebo as the excellent Japanese workers restored the boiler room damage – something we would have probably spent six months getting fixed stateside.

At one point in our stay there, we were required to anchor out in the middle of Sasebo Harbor to ride out a typhoon.

After this eventful cruise, we returned to San Diego in December 1975, and Captain Jones (later a Vice Admiral) took command of the ship from our beloved Captain Jenkins. I remained aboard until 21 April 1976 when I detached to start the long training "pipeline" for my next assignment as commanding officer of my own ship, the 205-foot long, 1600-ton ocean-going tug USS *Tawakoni* (ATF 114), a World War II veteran built in 1943. The ship was home-ported at Pearl Harbor Naval Station in Hawaii with a crew of 69 officers and men.

USS *Tawakoni* (ATF 114) 1976-78

Above is a photo I took of *Tawakoni* moored to the rickety pier in Hana, Hawaii.

I sent my Jeep to Hawaii so I would have wheels when I got there and bought a 1969 Mustang from the Chief Engineer of the *Denver* to drive across country and have wheels during all my training on the east coast.

Enroute training meant another stint in Newport, RI for six weeks of the Prospective Commanding Officer course, followed by salvage training in Norfolk and at the Washington DC Navy Yard. In between all this, I hopped a flight to Tyndall AFB where my parents picked me up to spend a couple of weeks idling around. After my training was completed, I drove to Pensacola and left the Mustang for my brother to have in college and then flew to Dallas with my nephew Randy in tow to drop him back into the lap of his family after a visit to Grandpa and Grandma.

I attended a couple of briefings in San Diego at the headquarters of the Commander Surface Forces Pacific before catching my flight to Hawaii where I landed on 21 August 1976.

I took command of *Tawakoni*, known as The Big Tee to her crew, from my USNA classmate Gerry O'Donnell on 15 September 1976 at the Naval Station Pearl Harbor and remember standing at the reception afterward under the thatched roof of the officers' club teahouse in my dress whites with a red carnation lei on thinking that this was truly quite an experience for a 29-year-old LT.

Eight days later I was underway with the ship on my first mission. We were ordered to proceed 800 miles to the west and rendezvous with USS *Cocopa*, a sister ocean-going tug which was running low on fuel as she towed two barges across the Pacific. Once there, we were to refuel her with an astern refueling rig, deliver her mail, and relieve her of one of her barges so she could better control the other which was taking on seawater.

Finding her was not a simple thing. Navigation was not all that precise in those pre-GPS days, and we could have easily steamed right by each other, just over the horizon from one another. We had an Omega system aboard, which was not too reliable. It was good to within a couple of miles if it could be made to operate, but our chief quartermaster could not do so for some reason, and we thus had to rely on celestial navigation using the chronometer and sextant. There was also the high frequency Fleet Broadcast, which we could use to send messages to each other via the Navy long haul radio system, but that was iffy and took almost a half-day to get a message through the system. As it turned out the Executive Officer took a fix at sunset the evening, we expected to encounter the *Cocopa* and figured that maybe the other ship was running on a track to the south of ours. We turned in that direction and figured we would steam up and down on a north-south barrier line to catch her. We also turned on the radar and soon saw interference from the south meaning another, similar radar was operating down that way.

We found the *Cocopa* and did all we were supposed to do before continuing on back toward Pearl Harbor together. At one point, we were advised of a hurricane threatening Oahu and Pearl Harbor, and we had to turn south to avoid its effects. Later on, we got the all-clear and headed on in to home arriving on the 30th of September. My first week at sea in command had gone exceedingly well.

Regular target towing and local cruising ensued (including an Aloha Day weekend visit to the small port of Hana on Maui) as the ship began to prepare for a Westpac deployment in July 1977. Another refueling and towing mission to the west to help fellow salvage ships returning with tows from Westpac took place in December. We refueled and passed parts to the *Safeguard* and took one of the tows off the hands of the *Quapaw*'s crew.

My most vivid memory of target towing occurred one bright sunny day as we were preparing to observe a destroyer's shells aimed at the target sled we were towing about 2500 feet astern. The procedure was for the firing ship to displace the aim of its guns 5 mils (there are 3600 mils in a 360-degree circle) astern of the target sled so as not to hit that valuable item. The towing ship used a fall-of-shot spotting apparatus called a "rake" for is similarity to a garden rake. The tines of the rake were turn upward, and it "handle" was actually a specified length of wood pivoted at the center of the row of upturned tines. As the dud projectiles made splashes in the water astern of the target, the rake team sighted down the rake's "handle" an reported the letter printed in the gap between the tines which aligned with the splash.

As the firing vessel trained its guns on the target, we on the towing ship sent all unnecessary personnel below, and we on the bridge went to the side opposite the shooter. While the shooter was often near the horizon some miles away, I always tried to use my binoculars to see if I could see the side of the gun barrels. If I could, I knew the guns were not aimed at us. One day the shooter was lined up, and the word had been given to commence fire. I had my binoculars up and was looking across the ship over the short smoke stake of our water heater boiler, straining to see the gun barrel when an orange ball of fire erupted in my field of view with a tremendous BANG. I instantly though we had been hit and died a thousand deaths in a second, but quickly realized it was the boiler backfiring, something it did on a regular basis when whoever was tending it that watch made the smallest error in firing it up. That had to be the worst coincidence of my career, and it was a near-run thing for the sanitary condition of my shorts..

Two weeks of arduous salvage training took place in April 1977. Having witnessed this training on two other tugs in San Diego before I took command, I felt like I knew what I was getting into, and we did very well. I have always thought that salvage training was the most realistic training I

ever saw in the US Navy. At one point, the training staff set fire to a large pile of flammable debris inside the training hulk. After the blaze got really going, we had to maneuver alongside in an open seaway and tie up before sending firefighting teams over to do battle with the fire dragon. We were rolling in the swell and getting dangerously close to popping the carefully rigged fenders between the ships – then it would have been metal-on-metal grinding away. I found a solution by having the powerful firefighting monitor aimed at the slab side of the hulk to push it away from us until the mooring lines were taut.

Later, the hulk was thrown up on the beach inside the harbor, and we had to rig our beach gear (salvage anchors laid out off our bow) while our stern was toward the wreck with our wire 'bull rope" attached to it. That was a two-day evolution all by itself and went very well until the wreck suddenly broke free at the predicted time and came flying at us in the dark. I hurriedly had the wires securing us to the beach gear let go and then took off out of the way of the wreck, which was attached to the end off out tow wire some several hundred feet back. I could not go very far before we would run into Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor, so I turned the ship and basically ran in a circle all the while reeling the wreck in with the towing engine. We finally roped that bull and got it alongside. Then we dropped our anchor and went to bed to finish up in the morning, but it had been a near-run thing.

I wanted to delay our departure for our five-month Westpac cruise a couple of days so the crew could have Fourth of July at home, but we were ordered out on the second of July 1977. So as not to be totally without celebration on our nation's birthday, our Supply and Operations Officer, Ensign Ned Lundquist, took some welfare and recreation money and bought up a bunch of fireworks.

Below is an article written years later by retired Navy Captain Ned Lundquist that appeared in a magazine dedicated to the towing and salvage Navy. It which includes our remembrances of a fireworks display at sea in 1977.

Gano: We had been ordered to start our five-month deployment to WESTPAC from Pearl Harbor, our homeport, on 2 July 1977 with a transit to Guam where we would undergo some engineering modifications. Now the Glorious Fourth was a big deal in Hawaii in those days with tons of fireworks set off all over the place, and we were going to be disappointed to miss it. We were only a small ocean-going Fleet Tug of 205 feet length and a 69-man crew, but we had a big heart - we were the Big T.

Somebody, quite possibly Ned, came up with the idea that we could purchase some fireworks for our own at-sea show using some of the crew's welfare and recreation fund. Of course, Ned was the guy. You see he was, while not a Supply Corps officer, trained via the Line Officer Supply Training program (LOST - an acronym whose irony was not "lost" on any of us) course to be our little ship's Supply Officer. You might say Ned was also the SLJO (Shitty Little Jobs Officer). The welfare and recreation committee was rounded up and rubber-stamped the idea with a flourish, and Ned was loosed upon the community to come up with the goods.

Lundquist: LTJG Chuck Monsen, the Operations and Diving officer, and I went to a fireworks wholesaler in Honolulu with an armload of soda machine profits and told the proprietor we wanted to spend our $50 to create a modest aerial display. I was amazed by the selection, especially as a kid who coveted even a single pack of illegal salutes in Massachusetts.

We didn't want to buy just any firecrackers. People could get hurt, or somebody might sneak some and save them for future mischief. So, we purchased conic fountains, smoke bombs, happy fireworks, smoke wands, worlds of silver, rainbow fountains and rocket parachutes. We bought dancing butterflies, whistling tornadoes and morning glories. We bought moon traveler rockets (with report). We bought flower scattering child rockets, gold sparklers, whistling fountains, and emerald meteors. We got a fifty percent discount. It cost us just $50.

Gano: What with the hubbub on getting prepared and then underway for our deployment, I was not much involved with what would to my mind be a minor side show involving some fireworks.

The Fourth found us at sea with a fine day on our hands. Seas were pretty calm, and we were plowing along with a gentle breeze at about 12 knots on two of our four big Caterpillar D399 main engines.

The Welfare and Recreation committee, with Ned leading the way, had a fine agenda for the "steel beach" afternoon. There were cockroach races, balloon tosses (actually condoms supplied by Doc, our corpsman), and various other activities including grilled meats, etc. All in all, a fine success for a bunch of guys stuck at sea a couple of hundred miles or more from and home and getting farther away by every turn of the 14-foot propeller.

Lundquist: We began our holiday activities with skeet shooting. We relaxed the uniform requirement, as well.

Our cockroach race was a diversion that involved the entire crew. Each of the four departments (Operations, Supply, Engineering and Deck) had caught a cockroach and marked same in some manner to distinguish their entrant. The teams proudly displayed their cockroach, except for Ops. They refused to show it to anyone.

We drew a large circle on the deck back aft. Inside that circle was another smaller circle. All cockroaches would be released simultaneously from inside the smaller circle. The first one to cross the outside circle would win.

Wagering was lively on race day. I would sometimes post entries in the “Plan of the day” that warned against the evils and illegalities of gambling, and on the next line announce, “Bingo tonight on the mess decks.”

When it came time for the first race, we discovered the strategy employed by the Ops guys. They had kept their cockroach in a box that had been used for photo paper, lined with black light-absorbing paper. Since the medical corpsman mustered with Ops, the Doc provided a squirt of pure oxygen into the box just before race time. When the race began, and the cockroaches were released, the Ops team held up the inside of the box at the outer ring, presenting a large, dark target for their cockroach which had just been released into the bright sunshine. Their bug raced for the black box and won easily.

My department, Supply, came in second. Engineering’s entrant came in last. We had another race, and the advantage was now lost on the Ops bug. Supply came in second again. Engineering was disgusted with their cockroach and eliminated their bug. Supply won the final race. We also had condom races, which were essentially water balloon races, where you had to put the water balloon between your legs, waddle down to your shipmate, transfer the water balloon, and back to the starting line, several times, without anyone using their hands.

Gano: After the fantail was cleaned up and everything was put away, Ned started setting up his fireworks display for the after-dark entertainment. It should be noted here that the *Tawakoni* had been designated as a "lift of opportunity" meaning that various naval activities in the Pearl Harbor area with items to ship to Guam could contact us and arrange to have them lifted aboard. There were a number of large wooden shipping crates involved, two of which contained new diesel generators for the modifications to the *Tawakoni*, and they were all stored right aft on the fantail, very conveniently located for Ned to use as launch platforms for his fireworks.

Lundquist: I was the FCO (Fireworks Control Officer). I had our hull technicians weld steel launchers for our rockets. I had three launcher teams; a distribution team; two fountain teams; a “special” rocket team (with rockets we modified by taping three or four kinds together, along with

a few sparklers), and a communications team. I was a big believer in letting everyone participate. The special rockets were pretty cool, but they had a habit of making unscheduled course changes and turn around to head right back at us. We also had several agents on the bridge, with the Very pistol, used to launch flares and Para flares. As the FCO, I would direct Rocket Team One to launch two rockets, followed by fountain team two to light a whistling fountain, for example. We had all teams expend all remaining ordnance for the grand finale, while we fired flares from the signal bridge, sounded the ship's whistle, rang the bell, buzzed the cease-fire alarm, turned on all of our task lights, fired the M-14 and the riot shot gun, and turned our blindingly bright 24-inch carbon arc searchlight on the oversized "holiday colors" of "Old Glory."

Gano: At the appointed time, various and sundry wondrous works of gun powder were sent into the heavens, and we all oohed and aahed, that is until the word can to the bridge that there was a class alpha fire (wood in this case) on the fantail. So now we were burning up our own new generators and other folks' cargo to boot! I thought that rather than call away General Quarters and all the attendant hoorah, that we'd let Ned and the boys handle the problem with the fire hoses they had laid out as a precaution.

About a half an hour later Ned appeared on the bridge with soot smudges all over his face and uniform to report the class alpha fire was out! Whew!

Lundquist: The Skipper is mistaken. Yes, we all enjoyed a fine steak barbeque that day, but I recall no fires that required reporting to damage control central or the captain on the bridge.

Gano: Have him tell you the story of the rubber raft and canoe race and how I nearly had a heart attack thinking wild natives were attacking my miscreant boat crew.

Our initial destination was Guam where we would have new generators (which we carried in crates on deck – undamaged by fire) installed in the aft engineering space (B2) as well as have some other miscellaneous items repaired that could not be done in Pearl. We stayed there about 30 days before heading off across the Philippine Sea to Subic Bay via the now familiar San Bernardino Strait. Although we had used the Navy's Optimum Ship Track Routing service, we ran into a strong southwest wind after the first day out of Guam's Apra Harbor. Our progress was slowed as we slogged along with the decks awash most of the time. I was worried about seawater getting into the fuel tanks via the gooseneck vents on the main deck. One of our crew became so seasick that the corpsman had to inject him with a muscle relaxant so he could sleep and quit heaving his guts out (he was transferred ashore in Subic).

From Subic, we went to Kaohsiung, Taiwan in early September for a port visit. One evening, I was invited to the Naval Head Quarters across the large expanse of concrete of the quay to which we were moored. It seems the local admiral had a problem. An obsolete destroyer being towed to Taiwan from the United States had broken loose from its towing vessel during a recent storm and had piled up on the rocks down the coast a few miles. He asked me if I would take my salvage tug on down there and do something about it. Such a decision was well above my pay grade, but it was clear to me from their sketched survey of the situation showing rocks piercing the hull that the only way that ship was coming off the rocks was in small pieces. I called my boss in Subic, who told me to politely decline.

Our next port was my favorite in Westpac, Hong Kong, where we got to tie up alongside the Royal Navy base HMS *Tamar*. In my previous four visits to this port, my ships were always anchored out or moored to a buoy requiring us to use our ships boats or rental water taxis to go ashore. Mooring alongside was a real luxury.

After arriving back in Subic on the 14th of September, I was advised that *Tawakoni* was to be part of the opposition (bad guys) force in a major exercise. In big exercises, the Navy assigns its auxiliary ships to masquerade as some specific enemy type combatants (Orange Force) to give the frontline combatants (Blue Force) something to search for and simulate attacking. Lacking

the surveillance equipment of the big-league ships, we auxiliaries were expected to merely steam toward the task force until its protecting screen of cruisers and destroyers found and "eliminated" us as threats.

The destroyer squadron commander in charge of the Orange Force told me he wanted to break the mold and be aggressive, causing the Blue Force Commander as much trouble as possible. Before we could enjoy that duty, the Big T had been assigned to tow a large aircraft barge to Sasebo, Japan. I told the commodore that if I could get the barge delivered fast enough, I would be free to intercept the Blue Forces in the Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines after they left their assembly port of White Beach, in Buckner Bay, Okinawa.

After numerous delays due to typhoon-generated seas, we got underway with our barge astern on the 27th of September. The Kurishio Current, the Pacific counterpart to the Gulf Stream, kicked us along very well, and we arrived at Sasebo on the 5th of October without incident.

Underway on the 8th, I took the ship south down the west side on Okinawa and doubled the southern end of the island coming up to Buckner Bay in the afternoon of the 9th just as the Blue Force escort cruisers and destroyers were getting underway. We sailed in with our battle flags flying and signaling "MM" and "GG" (meaning we were shooting simulated missiles and guns at them) with our antique but huge 24-inch carbon-arc searchlight. We went right up to the Blue Force flagship, the command ship USS *Blue Ridge* before the Blue Force commander (RADM Jones, my former C.O. in *Denver*) told me to consider myself out of action for a while.

We turned around and left but continued to harass the Blue Forces all the way down the west coast of Luzon as they headed south for their exercise area off Mindoro before running into Subic for five hours to get mail and fuel. On the way out to sea we teamed up with the USS *Barbel*, a diesel-powered sub with a very aggressive lieutenant commander in command. He submerged about a hundred yards on our starboard side with his periscope up. That was the side from which we expected the Blue Force. The idea was that we would be the radar target the Blue Force would see in the dark and that after we executed an attack diverting their attention, the *Barbel* would submerge and wait for the Blue Force to run over the top of them. It worked well, and we saw his green attack flares a few hours later as the sub emerged from the depths in the middle of the formation.

We made numerous intrusions and attacks into the area of Blue Forces once they settled into their amphibious operations area off Mindoro. The best attack was at 0130 one morning when the USS *San Jose*, a large stores ship simulated being towed by us. It was a great disguise because our bright towing lights were sure to blind any night observation devices being used on the Blue Force escorts. We managed to sneak right up to the center of the amphibious ships that were supposed to be protected by the escorts. It was a bit eerie during our approach to look back at the hulking mass of the stores ship simulating our tow by following behind us at a distance of a couple of hundred feet.

We finally detached form the Orange Forces and arrived in Subic on the 18th of October and were greeted at the pier by the grateful Orange Force commander with a band!

We towed a target for some Korean ships before heading back south to Mindoro as an Orange Force raider before returning to Subic on the 21st for a repair availability. When the ships of the Blue Force finally arrived in Subic, I was summoned over to the amphibious squadron commander's quarters. It was my friend Captain Jenkins, my first CO in *Denver*. He said that he understood the inventive antics of the *Tawakoni* when he found out who commanded her. He was a great man who died with his son years later while flying his home-built airplane.

On the 12th of November, *Tawakoni* departed Subic Bay on the first leg of her homeward journey via a surveillance tour of the Trust Territories of the Pacific. This mission was a real bonus for the

small ships of the salvage navy because it was a sort of free form period of independent steaming to locales most people will never see. We were the only ships suitable for the task.

Having "rescued" several returning ships running low on fuel as they returned from deployments with tows, I was most happy to learn that there was no tow waiting for us in Guam, our last stop before Hawaii.

In order to protect us from the effects of a typhoon to the east of the Philippines, I directed our course south through the South China Sea along the western flank of the Philippine archipelago, slipping between the Palawan chain and Mindoro Island into the Sulu Sea and passing within sight of Zamboanga on Mindanao before coming out into the wider Celebes Sea. Passing off the northeastern part of Celebes Island, we then angled south toward the equator in the Molucca Sea.

I had been campaigning with my superiors at Subic Bay to get the opportunity to Cross the Line as we call passing south of the equator in the Navy. The typhoon evasion caused us to have to bypass a planned visit at Ormoc City in the Philippines giving me an extra day or so, and now the traditional games began in earnest as the Pollywogs and Shellbacks vied for advantage in various ways, such as water balloon and egg fights, in the days before the crossing. At 0400 on the 16th of November 1977, we Shellbacks had a surreptitious breakfast of steak and eggs before rattling the wogs out of their racks for their daylong misery of hazing.

As the ship approached "the line," I undertook to show the Executive officer, LT Chris Rinko, and ENS Ned Lundquist, the Supply and Operations Officer, the classic effects of the Coriolis Effect on water going down a drain. We stood over the sink in Chris's stateroom and repeatedly filled the sink with water then allowing it to drain. In the northern hemisphere it circles to the right while in the southern hemisphere it circles to the left. My theory was that at the equator it would go straight down. It took some convincing of these two skeptics, but finally the water stopped circling right, and eventually, it went straight down, and I was able to stir it with my finger and get it to go either direction. We continued south for a half hour or so until the water would only circle the drain to the left – they were convinced we had crossed the Equator. Next stop, Tobi Island.

Tobi is a little chunk of island literally in the middle of nowhere occupied by a "family group" of 70 Micronesians making a living harvesting copra. After finding an adequate place to loiter while putting the motor whaleboat and the inflatable boat in the water, we went ashore. The whaleboat remained just outside the short channel through the reef while the inflatable ferried men back and forth.

Landing in flat calm water on the narrow sand beach overhung by coconut palms, I was struck by the silence – it was early morning. We had arrived near several obviously occupied A-frame thatched homes, but there was initially no sign of life. Eventually, several adult males and a child or two showed up but, as became the almost universal theme in these islands, no young women were seen. We handed over a barrel of gasoline as a goodwill gift and asked if their long-range radio needed any repairs before shoving off for Helen Island, which we visited that afternoon.

At Helen, we jogged up and down the area off the reef until we got the attention of the local conservation officer who got in a small outboard-powered skiff and headed for the entrance to the reef, some ten miles away. I had the ship keep pace with him as he ran along the inside of the reef and met him as he exited the channel.

We handed over some requested medical supplies to the conservation officer and followed him back to the entrance to the reef as darkness approached. He wanted us to follow him into the lagoon citing the aggressive sharks in the area, which nipped at whirling outboard motor propellers. Having no charts of the area inside the reef, I had no intention of attempting the passage into the atoll – a number of ships doing this Trust Territory Tour, including USS *Grasp*

earlier that year, had brushed coral heads or dinged propellers. Being literally thousand miles from anywhere, I was not inclined to run risks.

Our next stop was at the larger "metropolis" of Koror on Palau. We got lucky on the 20th of November and snagged the local pilot several hours early as he was debarking from an outbound freighter. As *Tawakoni* entered the 18-mile long, narrow channel leading along the western shore of Palau, I wondered at the skill of the officers of the Japanese Imperial Navy who conned their big battleships into this place during World War II when they used it as a hideout. We moored at the port facility on the island of Malakal where we met our local contact LT Jim Morrison, a civil engineer officer and the only military man in Palau.

After a lunch at the Continental Hotel, a bungalow style establishment overlooking a small bay, Chris Rinko, Ned Lundquist, Al Watkins (Chief Engineer), and I rented a car to look around. We visited a local museum and a bombed out Japanese communication bunker.

Later that evening at 1900, Chris and I boarded a small boat with Jim Morrison and his friend, a local civil servant, to go saltwater crocodile hunting. We were invited because we could lend firepower to the endeavor that the locals could not legally own. Local law forbids anything larger than a 410 shotgun. We brought a 7.62 mm M14 assault rifle and an M79 40 mm grenade launcher. We headed off across glassy calm water and were soon amongst a maze of knob-like islets. Each knob resembled a mushroom with its rocky sides undercut by the water while the tops were covered in green vegetation. They varied in size with most being maybe 100-200 feet in diameter and 50-60 feet high.

The plan was to use some sealed beam lights to search for the glowing eyes of surfaced crocodiles and then shoot them, but the local, who told us his absent wife was the real navigator, promptly got lost. We ended up puttering along looking into the water with the lights until shallow ledges suddenly loomed up out of the clear indigo-colored depths – these sudden appearances were rather startling. Then we would get out and push along until dark water was found again. I looked down into the water over the bow with the light to see a shark swim by as I was getting back into the boat after one of our wading spells. We were happy to find our way back to the ship by midnight because we were scheduled to get underway the next morning.

The pilot had made me aware of a small ship channel leading out directly east through the extensive reef system and assured me we were not too big to negotiate it. Using this exit would save us most of a day retracing our steps out the way we had come and then running around the islands to get a clear heading eastward. So, at 1030 on the 21st, with the pilot aboard, we gingerly made our way eastward. About halfway down the channel, he said that he would not accompany us all the way to sea because of the roughness of the sea (trade winds out of the east create a steady swell from that direction), and after telling me we just needed to stay in the center of the channel, he left. I was not amused as the coral close on either beam was quite visible, and we continued to the exit on our own. Any steering error would have piled us up on the coral instantly turning our near-run thing into a disaster.

We were scheduled to visit Kayangel Island that afternoon at the north end of the Palau group, but we could not safely get a boat ashore and so sailed on to Ngulu, 163 nautical miles east, where we anchored on the 22nd and went ashore. About twenty-three people occupied this island, and once ashore, natives in loincloths and topless grass skirts greeted us. The houses were smallish, thatched affairs. We sat in a circle on crushed coral under a tarpaulin, the "living room" with their prized items, an old electric wall clock, a length of manila line, and rusty coconut saws laid out in front of us. We traded a few trinkets and asked about foreign fishermen in the area (illegal) and were told about some Russians who some months earlier had come ashore on a spit of sand to have an evening picnic. The islanders made themselves out to be a fierce war party and a in the darkness, managed to steal a couple of their Boston Whalers. They told us they thought it was quite a joke. What they really wanted from us was some gasoline for their new hungry outboards.

Duty called, and after a pleasant time under the tarpaulin, we were off to Yap Island where we arrived at 2000 to await a four-man explosive ordinance disposal team and our mail. As we waited offshore, a message arrived that said the EOD team would not be coming but a briefing packet would. Eventually, a small boat brought out the packet but no mail. We moved on.

On the 23rd, *Tawakoni* arrived at Ulithi atoll, the famed vast anchorage of Admiral Halsey's and Admiral Spruance's fleets during the latter part of World War II. I have seen a picture of seven aircraft carriers anchored there surrounded by scores of other combatants. It was eerie looking at the huge coral heads vaguely visible in the deep water passing underneath us as we entered the lagoon. We went ashore on Mog Mog Island and were met by the local headman and an American named Peter Waddell, a former Peace Corp worker who had recently moved back to the island from San Francisco with his native wife because she became so home sick.

This was another very traditional island with loincloths and grass skirts and no women visible. We were politely shown about including the many stunted coconut palms with short ladders leading into their tops. These were the trees used to collect the sap from the tree's doubled over central tap for making tapa, a beer-like concoction. I noticed two rusted hulks of bulldozers and an aircraft wing tank used as a cistern, all probably World War II relics. The island had been evacuated of its inhabitants during the war to make room for a recreation complex for sailors who had spent many months at sea. Maybe as a sort of late payment, we had a bunch of the villagers out to the ship for a western movie on the fantail – shades of Tales of the South Pacific.

The headman asked that we send any large shore parties to the uninhabited island a mile and a half east. We loaded up a beachcombing and picnic party, and they seemed to enjoy themselves. There were relics of WWII there also in the form of rusty Marsden matting (probably used to make a solid landing for landing craft full of sailors) and a rather dated basketball hoop.

On the 24th of November, we got underway to mosey over to Falolop, the island in the Ulithi atoll where the high school serving much of Micronesia sits. No shore parties are allowed for obvious reasons; so, we only stopped long enough to talk with some fishermen before moving on. The kids from the scattered islands are sent off to this school on the copra trading ship for six months at a time because that is about how often the ship (usually the only one) visits the islands.

We next visited Fais Island where I stayed aboard and sent the X.O. and Ned ashore because we could not find decent holding ground for our anchor. I told Chris to tell the islanders he was the Commanding Officer so the local would not think they had been slighted. In retrospect, I should have gone ashore because the 8-10 men who went were given a memorable welcome.

We watched from the ship as the outboard-powered rubber boat landed on a sandy beach where the sailors were greeted by some natives. They disappeared into the brush, and we soon lost radio contact as they apparently went over a rise and down into a village clearing. We waited and waited for hours until I began to get concerned about making our next stop on time.

Finally, I spied my men running down the shoreline where they rapidly launched the boat and began to furiously paddle seaward. Natives carrying two or three outrigger canoes shortly followed them. My men were paddling with everything they had and also had the outboard motor going full tilt, and the natives were catching up to them. Oh God, I thought, somebody committed some horrid crime against a native woman, and we are in big trouble. Soon I was able to make out everybody in all the boats had flower headbands and leis around their necks, and they were laughing. Whew! It turns out somebody had challenged somebody else to a race.

When the two officers debriefed me, I was told that they had been led to the village and shown a real south sea island celebration. There was dancing and food, and at one point all men except our crew were shooed out and shown a sexually explicit dance by the women.

The next morning, the 26th of November, we stopped off at Eauripic, a tiny island with one hundred and fifty people living there. They reported a bit of distress because of a typhoon knocking most of their coconuts down. We could clearly see that all the trees were bent over in one direction.

There was a bit of confusion over our next stop at Woleai Atoll because of some garbled radio communications with the island. Mostly, we did not have radio communications with the islands, but in this case we did. We initially headed for the wrong island of the several surrounding the atoll. The doubtful look of the channel and the rain showers occasionally obscuring it made me decide against taking the ship into the atoll, and the whaleboat was sent in instead. It got to Falealus just as a bunch of locals were getting ready to head over to Woleai across the atoll. This was our last stop of our Trust Territories of the Pacific Tour, and our next stop was Guam where we arrived on the 28th of November.

One time, I went ashore to speak to the island's headman and found myself ushered to a woven mat under an open-sided bamboo supported thatched roof. This was the family's "living room" with a floor of loose, crushed white coral with the family treasured items on display in the center of the area. Among those items were a curved rusty saw blade, probably used for harvesting coconuts, and a non-functional electric wall clock. With my walkie-talkie to the ship nearby, I sat cross-legged and discussed events of the day.

While there, I was asked for gasoline to power the small Boston Whalers they had. I was surprised that these very monetarily people would have such a vessel, let alone more than one. I was informed that a Russian trawler (illegal to be in these waters) had anchored nearby and let some sailors ashore to enjoy the beach. The natives laid low until after dusk at which time they made a great noisy demonstration faking deadly aggression. This frightened the Russians into pling into one boat and rushing off into the night leaving two Boston Whalers as "war" prizes. C'est la guerre.

At some point during the Trust Territory Tour, one of the young crewmembers assigned to mess cooking duties objected and refused to do his duty. He had come to the ship from diving school a short time before we deployed – we were required to have two divers aboard. Had he been assigned to one of the larger diving and salvage ships with a large group of divers, things might

have been different for him. There he would have been involved in regular dive operations and would have worn the olive drab fatigues common to Navy divers of the era. But on a smaller towing vessel like the *Tawakoni*, we didn't have the luxury of segregated groups, and I required everybody to wear the regulation Navy uniforms appropriate to their rank. For some reason, this young man decided that he was a diver first and a crewmember second and that he should not have to perform mess cook duty.

He was first brought up to me at a quick captain's mast (a non-judicial form of proceeding at which behavior-modifying punishment may be meted out), and I basically scolded him and told him to get back to work. This lasted about a day until the large chief engineman, the senior enlisted man as well as the Master-At-Arms (MAA) aboard, came back to me with the news that the sailor had once again refused to cooperate. This time I restricted him to sickbay to isolate him from the rest of the crew, who were not favorably disposed to his ideas. We only had a few more days until we reached Guam where we could handle the matter, but this put a load on the corpsman that was stuck dealing with him. A day or so later a knock on my cabin door revealed this sailor standing there wanting to know if it was OK for him to go to the movie being shown on the mess decks. I sent him back below and called the MAA to inform him that his charge was roaming free. Word was no doubt relayed to the young man that he was to stay put or be handcuffed.

Once we arrived in Guam, I ordered the sailor off the ship. Captains normally were required to keep such troublemakers aboard and deal with them all the way through the lengthy administrative discharge process, but we small ship skippers were given some latitude. The sailor was left behind and later discharged. Over twenty years later I received a letter from the sailor through the Bureau of Personnel telling me that he had taken the lessons he learned from his discharge to heart and had become a successful chiropractor with a family and that he was involved unofficially in his profession with a local reserve group of SEALs.

We spent several days in Guam getting broken things fixed before heading home at 2230 on the 1st of December. Seas were heavy at 9 to 12 feet and winds at 25 knots. By the 3rd, the seas had abated to the predicted 6 to 9 feet, and on the 3rd we found that the chain locker had filled with hundreds of gallons of water because of all the water we had been taking over the bow. The ship rode better after we pumped the water out with a submersible pump and filled the chain pipe with salvage concrete to keep the water out – the concrete would easily break up whenever we next dropped anchor. Ten knots was about all we could make into the seas.

Weather on the 6th erupted in a very bad way, and we were tossed all over the place, but by the 7th, winds were down to 10 knots with respectable seas. By the 8th, weather was beautiful as we crossed the International Date Line, and I ordered up some machine guns and grenade launchers for practice against the marauding flying fish.

We came upon an abandoned freighter (La Carlotta) as dusk approached that evening. We had been aware of its presence via message traffic, but we still approached it closely and sounded our horn a few times on the off chance somebody was still aboard. It was down a good bit by the stern, and we could see the lifeboat had been lowered. We did not know who had taken the crew off, but a commercial rescue tug was on the way from Japan to take charge of it.

On the 11th we sighted a sister ship, USS *Cocopa* (ATF 101) southwest of Kaula Rock dead in the water checking out a main motor short. They were headed to Westpac.

We arrived at our old familiar berth at the tugboat pier at Naval Station Pearl Harbor on the morning of 12 December 1977 much to the joy of family and friends. I was met by my fiancé, Lila Horton and friend Stretch Morrill, and Mike and Connie Morgan.

Lila Horton and I were married aboard the *Tawakoni* on the fantail by a Navy chaplain on the 30th of December. The marriage was pleasant union for a few years, but Lila never warmed to being

a Navy wife and in fact said she planned never to marry a Naval officer. She should have stuck by that idea. The marriage was officially over in 1996 after unfortunately having died some years earlier.

With the impending decommissioning of the *Tawakoni*, my new squadron commodore, Commander Ansley, offered to try to get the Bureau of Personnel (BUPERS) to place me in command of one of the larger class of salvage ships (ARS) in the squadron, normally commanded by a lieutenant commander. I was pleased to accept his offer, but BUPERS had other ideas, and I ended up with orders to leave the *Tawakoni* in April 1978 and proceed to duty at BUPERS in, Washington, D.C. for my first-ever duty in a shore billet since graduate school in 1969-70.

The ship followed a busy local schedule in the Hawaiian Operations Area after the New Year towing targets and being one for submarines or even being towed for exercise purposes by other ships. Hardly a week went by without us being underway for a day or two.

On one occasion, we were assigned to run between Oahu and Kauai as a surface target for submarine prospective commanding officer (PCO) training along with the old destroyer tender, USS *Bryce Canyon* (AD-36), also known as Building 36 because she never got underway. What happens is the sub people get a bunch of PCOs together on one submarine where they are put through their paces each one firing exercise torpedoes and supervising other evolutions. Since we could achieve up to 15 knots while the tender could make no more than 10 knots, the captain of the "Canyon" and I worked out a plan where the Big T was to be the escort out in front of the lumbering tender, which acted as the "high-value target." With our speed advantage, we could zig-zag back and forth across the track we were to travel. As we came to the end of the track before reversing direction, I had us reverse course and run past the tender which was still going in the other direction. This got us a good lead on our charge allowing us to look out for the sub's periscope. We didn't have sonar, leaving us only our binoculars to search for the signs of the sub. The seas were unusually glassy smooth, and we actually did spot the periscope a few times at which times we charged right over toward it forcing the sub to dive. After returning to port we heard from the submarine training people that we were the most effective and aggressive "escort" they had ever encountered.

At some point during this period, I sat for my command qualification examination. This examination was designed to qualify any Surface Warfare Officer who aspired to command a Navy ship in the rank of commander, and it consisted of a rigorous several-day written examination as well as an oral board in front of several senior officers. To refresh myself on many details from various tactical manuals, and since we as a salvage ship did not carry them, I spent several days on the cruiser USS *Reeves* where my old USNA classmate and sometimes roommate, Jon Hine, was the Weapons Department Head.

Eventually, I determined myself ready for the written portion of the exam, and it was duly forwarded from Washington to the local cruiser-destroyer group commander who proctored it for me. This consisted of placing me in a vacant office and telling me to report completion of each phase. This went on for a couple of days. Eventually, I was notified I had passed and that I should next report aboard the *Bryce Canyon* on a certain day for my oral examination. There I found the captain of the *Bryce Canyon,* and another full captain, I think a destroyer squadron commander, and my own squadron commander, CDR Ansley.

I sat down across from these august gentlemen, and CDR Ansley said that as I had passed the written exam and had just completed a successful western Pacific deployment in command of the *Tawakoni*, he had full confidence in my ability to command a ship in the rank of commander (whenever in the future I should achieve that rank) and had nothing to ask me. The skipper of the *Bryce Canyon*, said the same thing, but the destroyer squadron commander said he did not know me and wished to examine me to his own satisfaction. He posed the hypothetic situation to me of being aboard a *Knox*-class frigate ready to get underway from the very berth we sat in with a

strong on-setting wind and no tugs available to pull the ship from the pier. The *Knox*-class was a single-screw ship with an exceptionally large and vulnerable rubber-domed sonar protruding from the bow, and more than one skipper of this class of ship had ruined a sonar maneuvering around piers. My answer was that I would remain alongside the pier and not risk the damage. He had nothing further to offer, and that was the end of my command qualification examination.

Tragedy struck on the 22nd of March 1978 when our Executive officer Lt Chris Rinko died from complications of an aneurysm and subsequent kidney failure. He was a popular and effective officer and was greatly missed. It was very difficult for me to deliver comments at the memorial we held on the fantail on the 24th. I sent Ned Lundquist as the escort officer to take Chris home to Pennsylvania.

I was relieved of command in the traditional change of command ceremony on the 28th of April by LCDR J.J Ostertaag who had just decommissioned his larger ship. This was done because BUPERS, my next duty station, was anxious for me to get to D.C. By now, I had been notified of my selection to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and that in the next year I would actually be promoted to that rank.

Tawakoni was decommissioned six weeks later and sold to the Taiwanese in whose navy she was still active well into the 21st century.

Commander Ansley was very excited for me to go to BUPERS saying that it was a splendid opportunity and that only top-notch officers were selected to go there. It turned out that BUPERS is one of only two places in the Navy (the other being the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations) where the gaining command may screen prospective officers by looking at their fitness reports, which makes sense because that is where they are all stored. My new boss later told me that he rejected nine other nominations from the LCDR detailing desk before he accepted me for the job. Hmm.

Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS), Washington, D.C. and Naval War College, Newport, R.I. 1978-81

Duty in Washington was truly a shock to my Fleet-oriented psyche. First came the sticker shock of buying a small three-bedroom house in Burke, VA. Next came the horrible traffic. The mental effort to wrap my mind around the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of the “Bureau Against All Naval Personnel” and my duties therein was a wearying task to say the least. Last, but by no means least, we were only allowed to wear our uniforms on Wednesdays because the Navy, with all of its major headquarters commands in DC, did not want the rest of the government to see how many people were serving in the area. Thus, I wore a civilian coat and tie to work the rest of the week – for somebody coming from eight years of sea duty proudly wearing uniforms nearly twenty-four hours a day, this was simply an affront. I immediately had a visceral dislike for the “people-pushing” business and felt I was not suited to it.

During my two years in D.C., I held three different jobs in the surface officer placement shop. The officers in this group were responsible for ensuring that the officer billets in the commands grouped at their desk were all filled with trained personnel of the proper rank. Officers working in the “detailing” offices nearby were responsible for direct contact with and career counseling of officers grouped at their desks by year group. Detailers came to us in the placement shop to “sell” their man into one of our billets. We in placement, after consultation with either the commanding or executive officer of the concerned command, would then write the orders for that officer with the proper enroute training courses. Each of my commands had its officers listed on narrow hard paper strips inserted into a sheet metal “slate” with all the slates inserted into a large holder on the desk much like a giant book. This method of display was reputed to have dated back to the time of Admiral Nimitz when he was head of BUPERS

For about six or eight months, I was assigned as the SEAL officer detailer. This was just a name for what we called the “cats and dogs” desk where the SEAL officers were lumped in with mine sweepers and some anti-submarine listening posts around the world. It was said the 250 SEAL officers were too compact a group to have one of their own doing their detailing; so, a surface warfare officer had been doing the job for some years. Thus, I was a detailer to these officers and a placement officer to the numerous other commands grouped at my desk.

I had not been officially promoted to LCDR, and my number was not due to come up for a few months; so, I answered the phone as “Lieutenant Gano.” My boss, a full Captain, heard me one day and told me that since I was selected to LCDR, I should answer the phone as “Lieutenant Commander Gano,” since nobody I talked to in the Fleet was going to be impressed by a mere lieutenant. I told him it made me feel like a poser. The next thing I knew he had me scheduled to appear in front of the admiral in charge of our section of BUPERS where, because I was also serving in a LCDR billet I would be “frocked” to LCDR. He did this on a uniform Wednesday so that my LCDR shoulder boards could be placed on my uniform. Some months later, I started receiving pay at my new rank.

Eventually, I was assigned as the Atlantic Fleet Cruiser and Destroyer Placement Officer, and when we were down an officer in the office, I ended up with the Pacific CRUDES desk for a month or two as well. I had a civil service secretary at each desk, and paperwork stacked up in my in-baskets at the rate of about a foot a day. Going on leave for a few days meant coming back to piles of officer order file stacked on the desk and adjacent chairs. Most of my workday was spent on the phone with commanding and executive officers about their officers ordered to their commands. I got the hang of it all and did well, but I hated all of it, and I hated Washington.

As I was promoted to Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) when I got to Washington, I was now eligible to be considered for an executive officer job in a destroyer at the end of my Washington tour. Due to job burnout, tours in my BUPERS office were limited to two years, and I was well burned out and happy to get orders to the ten-month long command and staff course at the Naval War College in Newport, RI. I left my spouse in a good job in DC and lived in the BOQ in Newport commuting to DC on many weekends – I was now what we called a “geographic bachelor.” I spent a lot of time perfecting my racquetball game after hours in Newport.

Shortly before I left BUPERS, I was advised that after War College, I would be assigned as executive officer in USS *Dahlgren,* our largest class of guided missile destroyers, where my Hawaii squadron mate and now Washington carpool mate, Commander Hal Gehman was to be assigned as Commanding Officer. Hal was a really good guy and had served well in the challenging position of executive assistant to the Captain Addams who was in charge of all surface warfare officer detailing and placement, my boss’s boss. Thus, it was his job to escort me into Captain Addams for my exit interview. When he asked me where I was going after War College, I proudly told him that it was to the *Dahlgren,* he looked askance at Hal and said, “Isn’t that where you are headed?” After Hal answered in the affirmative, he said, “Well, friends can’t be C.O. and X.O. in the same ship; we’ll have to change that.” The next day I was informed that I would be going instead to USS *Preble*, a sister ship of the *Dahlgren*. I would always regret not getting to serve with Hal who later went on to become a four-star admiral. I would certainly come to regret going to the *Preble* for other reasons.

Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island 1980-1981

While Newport was never my favorite place nor Rhode Island my favorite state, I found my studies at the War College to be entirely interesting and illuminating. The Command and Staff course was attended by about one hundred and fifty officers of all the armed services with Navy officers making up only fifty one percent of my class. Thus, we were exposed to a wide variety of views informed from a great variety of a experiences. Our ten months of instruction were separated into three trimesters including military theory from such renowned sources as

Clausewitz and Tsun-su, US economics and the military, and finally the study of modern US military capabilities culminating in a war game.

The war game was umpired by the War College staff from a large room full of desks where each desk oversaw some facet of the play. The students assigned to the various staffs of a fictitious major US joint task force assigned to take and hold Iceland from Soviet control were involved in a couple of weeks of planning before being assigned to spaces in a warren of offices where they would keep track of their various assignments as the actual game developed. For some reason, I was chosen as the overall commander, which required me to interface with all the eager beaver types on the various subordinate staffs.

Life at the War College was easy with many weekends being three-plus days long. At first, I would drive to Kingston, R.I. and board the train for Washington so I could spend the weekend a home. I had a heavy reading assignment each weekend and would spend the eight-hour train ride getting most of that done. Riding along the Connecticut coast during the late summer and early fall was very scenic, and I often saved the reading until the train got into the dingy areas of New York and New Jersey. Later, when reading assignments were not so onerous, I began to fly to Washington every couple of weeks or so because I got more time at home by flying. The airline was USAir and the round trip was $105.

Thankfully, there were no near-run things in Rhode Island.

USS *Preble* (DDG 46) 1981-83

In due course, I completed War College, entered the prospective XO pipeline training (including six weeks in Newport at the Surface Warfare Officer School), and headed to the Norfolk area to find a house. Then I boarded an Air Force C-141 cargo plane on the 14th of September 1981 at Norfolk to head for my new job as Executive Officer of USS *Preble* (DDG 46), at that time in the Indian Ocean. After stops for fuel and crew rest in Rota in Spain, Athens in Greece, and Nairobi in Kenya, we landed, after one failed attempt, on Diego Garcia Island in the middle of the Indian

Ocean. There I spent a couple of nights in a screened tent awaiting transportation to the ship. That transport arrived in the form of an S-3 Viking anti-submarine jet converted to haul several passengers and vital cargo to the aircraft carrier USS *America* (CV-66) escorted by the *Preble*. Because of the large cylindrical cargo pod slung under its wing, the plane was called Miss Piggy.

The job of executive officer in any Navy ship is a challenge, but being XO on a destroyer is, well, nothing short of torture. You are expected to run the ship's routine for the captain through the department heads, plan ahead for all major training exercises and maintenance periods, enforce discipline, ensure cleanliness of the ship, and just generally do anything else the captain does not want to do. Complicating this picture is the fact that by Navy Regulations, the department heads have direct access to the captain for matters pertaining to the running of their respective departments. In a destroyer, the XO also has significant duties related to the management of nuclear weapons.

Preble was one of ten *Farragut*-class DLGs (guided missile destroyer leader) the Navy built in the late 1950s and early 60s. They weighed in at 5,600 tons fully loaded and were 512 feet long and were powered by high-pressure steam plants similar the 1200-pound plants I had seen in the smaller *Wilson* and *Jones*. The major weapon system was a medium range nuclear capable Terrier anti-aircraft missile. The missile launcher was aft (I slept over the nukes), and the single 5"/54 gun was on the bow with an ASROC launcher on the 01 level in front of the bridge. In the mid-1970s when the Navy reclassified most other DLG type ships as CG (guided missile cruiser), the *Farraguts*, even though they had the same weapons systems as the new CGs, were downgraded to guided missile destroyers largely because of their limited range. *Preble* was a very top-heavy ship and rolled a lot. We were required to refuel frequently to keep our center of gravity low.

I had never landed on a carrier before, and after a 2,000-mile ride northward in Miss Piggy, I was still not looking forward to being "trapped" on one. From my seat in the right rear section of the cabin, I could see the carrier looking small over the pilot's right shoulder as he turned "final,'' and, once he was lined up with the plane's nose up, the ship disappeared. Now all I could do was look out to the right and down at the ocean through a 3-inch diameter porthole. Looking at the waves gave no sense of their height, and I was sure we were way too low until I was suddenly slammed forward against my seat and shoulder harness as the plane's tail hook caught the arresting wire on the carrier's flight deck. We had been "trapped."

I stepped out on the busy, dangerous, and oily flight deck in time to be briefly greeted by the *America's* captain and escorted to a waiting helicopter with blades already spinning. The next thing I knew, I was dangling by a wire in a horse collar lift being lowered to the fantail of the *Preble* – I had arrived on the 18th of September 1981.

In *Preble*, I was relieving an acquaintance of mine, LCDR Tom Smith, who seemed clearly burned out with the job. He had been putting up with the captain, CDR Tom Stone, who had taken a year to gain confidence in the job. He said the skipper was a micro-manager and a political animal. I soon found that Captain Stone was no seaman and generally made a fool of himself bouncing all over the bridge and generally cowing all the conning officers during any ship handling evolution. What a shame the Navy did such a lousy job in its commanding officer selection process! It was unfortunate for me, because my original assignment to USS *Dahlgren* with a friend, Hal Gehman, in command had been changed before I left BUPERS.

I later found out that there had been a lot of family separation as the ship had been moved from its Hawaii homeport to Norfolk and that the CO and XO while in Hawaii for a prolonged time away from their wives, had competed for the same woman. So, bad blood was an issue. I relieved Tom on the 22nd of September, and he moved into the vacant flag cabin while I moved into the XO stateroom where I had a lost feeling as I entered after four days of listening to Tom explain the duties and concerns of the job. How would I keep all the balls in the air?

CDR Stone kept Tom Smith aboard for several more days because Tom had not finished an application for a recruiting award for the ship known as the Golden Anchor Award. Tom was furious, but he completed the application, and we were in due course allowed to paint our anchor gold.

XOs do not get a lot of time handling the ship, but C.O.s must observe them doing some conning in order to fill in the ship handling blank on their fitness report. So, on the 5th of October I conned the ship alongside an oiler. Once alongside the CO had me relieved of the conn so he could have me available in case he wanted something checked out in some other place on the ship.

It came to pass after a week or two that the captain was called over to the carrier one day for a conference. After the helicopter flew off with him, I went to the bridge and sat in my "big shot" chair on the port side of the bridge while the captain – my first time to indulge myself with this perk. I later developed the habit of taking some paperwork to the bridge while we were in port because the view was a nice change from my dark room with the porthole high up in the bulkhead, but in my entire tour as XO, I probably did not avail myself of that nice chair a half dozen times underway.

Anyway, on this day while I was there on the bridge, a prepare-to-change-station order came in over the primary tactical circuit meaning the OOD and his bridge team needed to decipher the coded message, plot the new station, and figure out the relative motion problem on a maneuvering board to get the ship over to its new position in the formation.

I could see the OOD, a relatively inexperienced LTJG, looking nervously in my direction as if seeking some sort of approval or expecting some ranting from my direction. I knew he was used to CDR Stone hopping nervously about second-guessing every move he might make while chiding him and his team for not being fast enough, but I remained sphinxlike. The execute order came in about the time he had broken the signal, reported it to me, and plotted his move. I had already decoded the message in my head and had a good idea of the course and speed required to get to the new station.

Escorts were expected to smartly execute station changes with the alacrity of border collies meaning puffs of smoke should exit the funnels seconds after the execute order indicating that the conning officer had ordered up a speed increase to race to the new station while simultaneously ordering the helm to be put over toward the course to station. Nevertheless, without CDR Stone there to jump-start every move he made, the OOD was frozen like a deer in the headlights looking at me – this was the result of Stone's incredibly poor leadership.

I looked at the OOD and said something to the effect that I didn't know why he was looking at me and that he should do what he knew to be right. Then I went back to pretending to read some paperwork I had brought along. A look of wonderment came over his face as he realized he had just been empowered to do the very type of thing he had been trained to do without anybody harassing him about it, and we moved smartly to new station. Of course, this short reprieve and professional improvement was shattered the instant Stone came back aboard and resumed his tyranny over the bridge watches.

My notes of the time show that we were busy just about every other day replenishing fuel or stores or taking mail from a helicopter or having whale boat races or shooting the gun. By the 16th of October, as we headed toward the Red Sea on the initial leg of our trip home, I had become thoroughly fed up with this idiot of a C.O. I had been saddled with.

We escorted the *America* up the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal, the first Navy ships in many years to do so. CDR Stone was grabbing the conn at the slightest concern the whole way through. He had no confidence in anybody but himself, and I had none in him, as he was a terrible ship handler.

A large rusty steel cylinder had been towed out to us while we waited at anchor for our turn through the canal. We used our spare anchor chain to hoist this monstrosity to our bow where it was secured in place. Shutters were opened to reveal a transparent window behind which was a large spotlight with adjustable aperture. In the event it was needed in darkness or sandstorm, an Egyptian operator would climb down inside the cylinder and operate the light under command of the pilot on the bridge.

The Egyptians were intent on putting on a good show of security for the first American warships to pass through the canal since the 1967 Israeli-Egyptian War. We saw a soldier every 40-50 yards along the eastern side of the canal for the whole hundred-mile trip. The view over the berm of the canal was of glaring desert sand, monotonous as hell and likely as hot. There was much evidence of war damage being set right near the southern terminus of the canal at Suez.

We arrived in Palma, Majorca on the 26th of October for a three-day visit and were moored alongside a pier while the *America* had to anchor out. The visit was pleasant with the exception of the evening I went to dinner with Stone and watched this high functioning alcoholic get stoned. What an idiot.

We exited the Mediterranean around the first of November, and we hung around off the coast of Spain and Portugal doing some exercises with Spain. One evening we were rolling at 20-30 degrees off the Azores as we trolled along at five knots astern of the carrier, which was hosting some Portuguese dignitaries.

We arrived in Norfolk on the 12th of November and started a couple of months of reduced activity. I stayed busy on the ship responding to CDR Stone's reactionary methods of leadership leaving my home in Newport News before daylight and returning after nightfall.

One of the more onerous tasks XOs perform is holding XO's Screening Mast. All disciplinary infractions worthy of note are written up on a "report chit," which ends up on the XO's desk. If the infraction is deemed serious enough at XO's screening, the matter goes before the Captain at Mast. At both XO screening and Captain's Mast, the ship's Chief Master-at-Arms (CMAA) presents the culprit, and his division officer and chief petty officer show up along with any witnesses. It seems that most cases come forward during in-port periods, and the period after our return from deployment was no exception.

I held screenings in my small stateroom with the accused about one or two steps inside my door, and the others behind him just inside the door or outside in the passageway. One day I was presented with a new seaman, an Operations Specialist, who had been away without official leave (AWOL) for a day. Being AWOL is a fairly serious matter in the military, but circumstances of the offense are always taken into account. As the nervous young man's story unfolded, it became apparent that he and a buddy had left Norfolk over the weekend in his car for a jaunt to the gaiety and gambling of Atlantic City. When he ran out of money in the casinos with not enough gas to get back, he happened upon the idea of going to his mother's home nearby to borrow the required funds, but she was not home, leaving him to wait on her porch all night for her return on Monday. I looked at the clearly repentant sailor and asked him, "How in the world could you be so dumb as to run out of enough money to get back to the ship?" He looked earnestly into my eyes struggling for an answer and then blurted out, "I b-b-bet red, sir." The gruff old CMAA standing guard behind the lad clapped his hand over his mouth to stop the oncoming guffaw as his face turned red, and he retreated to the passageway while everybody else behind him mimicked his actions. I somehow maintained a straight face and told him to always save aside some get-home money and never to darken my door again with this sort of offense. The CMAA told me later that my stock had gone up all over the ship after that event.

It was soon revealed to us that the ship would deploy in June for a six-month long cruise (a mere seven months since the ship's return from the Indian Ocean) around South America in place of USS *Farragut,* which was having serious engineering problems. This deployment was to be

UNITAS XXIII, an annual goodwill tour by a small task force. In overall command of the operation was the rear admiral who was Commander Naval Forces South (COMNAVSOUTH) with a destroyer commander in charge of the day-to-day operations at sea.

After a selected restricted availability (SRA) to correct some material issues, *Preble* was underway on the 12th of April 1981 for a series of exercises in the Puerto Rican Operating Area to re-qualify in gunnery and missilery and generally work the crew up after a long layoff.

Commander Stone, maybe because his tour aboard was coming to a close, was not quite his usual pain-in-the-neck during this period, but his hubris continued to know no bounds as he ordered the operations officer, Kevin Green (later to become an admiral) to have a shadow box made up to be given to him by the chiefs at his change of command. It was to include a ship's commission pennant and a recitation of his achievements in command. I owned such a box from my command of the TAWAKONI, but such items are typically gifts voluntarily bestowed upon a popular captain by a grateful crew, not something ordered up. I knew Stone had seen my shadow box at my home during a wardroom party we once held there and craved one. Not content to let events unfold on their own or simply aware of the low esteem in which he was held, he took matters into his own capable hands. I suspect the reason he did not come to me to handle this was shame and the lowliness of the deed. The chiefs had actually intended to give him nothing; so, I had the wardroom officers chip in for the damned thing.

The Falklands War between Argentina and Britain was now raging, and with the USA siding with Britain, relations with Argentina became so frosty that we would not be stopping in that country during this UNITAS cruise – too bad.

Preble deployed for UNITAS on the 21st of June 1981 with Commander Destroyer Squadron 32 embarked. I was nearly burned out from all the work related to getting ready, but I was pleased that CDR Stone would soon be gone and that CDR Bob Sutton, with whom I had attended destroyer school in 1972, would take command.

Somewhere about this time Commander Naval Surface Force Atlantic (COMNAVSURFLANT) became perturbed at the lack of accountability of executive officers in regard to a spate of navigational accidents like groundings. The executive officer is directly or indirectly responsible for many things in Navy ships, but navigation pretty much falls to the designated navigator and the captain to sort out. Bluntly put, COMNAVSURFLANT wanted an excuse to fire the XO as well as the captain and navigator of any ship, which had an accident.

To ensure the direct involvement of the second senior officer in the ship in navigational matters, all XOs in the fleet were designated as the ships' navigators. This placed the junior officer, usually a LTJG, who had been serving as the navigator directly under the captain in an awkward spot. In *Preble*, he continued his role but was renamed the assistant navigator. However, to fulfill my new additional official role, I had to be present whenever he conducted briefings and whenever the ship was at navigation detail within five miles of shoal water.

Our first stop was in Roosevelt Roads, PR to get fuel and a few passengers, including a "friend" of the commodore's for a quick transit of a few hours to anchorage at St Thomas. Then it was back to Roosevelt Roads before getting underway for Curacao.

During this time, I somehow got in the way as CDR Stone was ranting about the bridge throwing switches while trying to silence the alarms we had duly sounded as part of a fire drill. He ended up in one of his usual uncontrolled rages and cursed me. I was smart and kept quiet but later told him I in no way appreciated his behavior. Then I resolved to just remain clear of him until we got rid of him.

Curacao was a very interesting port. The entrance is through a swinging pontoon bridge in a very narrow channel right through the city followed by a cleft in the hill behind the city before the interior harbor opens up to a sizable bay. I drove around in the captain's car for a bit and discovered a barren island with seafront resorts here and there. Several of us were invited by some Dutchmen to help crew some very competitive sailboats at a protected area called Spanish Water. The race was a whirlwind of furious racing in a strong breeze, and I was pooped out when it was over.

Other than that, my days were filled with many duties from command plaque exchanges to arranging sporting event challenges from our allies. For the duration of the cruise, the crew had been divided into three duty sections while in port. The off-going section was given shore leave every morning after being relieved. The oncoming section assumed all the normal ship watches and fire party duties while I kept the third section aboard until I determined I had no need of them to support some sporting team or to flesh out a group invited by the locals for some social event. I was usually able to let the third section go by noon. Then I would have a few hours to catch up on my own list of tasks because the captain was usually off at some required-presence function. This would be the routine for the next six months.

When we got to our next stop of Cartegena, Columbia, my Spanish classes in high school and USNA began to be put to good use. It seemed nobody spoke English, and my Spanish was initially woefully inadequate. The supply officer, Greg Easton, and I were the only officers who could even begin to use the language. Later, we joked that we figured we were getting the hang of it when we dreamed in Spanish, which we indeed did.

Our next stop was Kingston, Jamaica. CDR Stone's unbearable wife came to visit, but luckily, they found some place else to go. After fueling across the harbor, we moved to a pier downtown. Thank goodness the pier was separated from the land by a pair of narrow walkways at either end because the Jamaicans would have stolen us blind had we been easily accessible. The country was suffering 40% unemployment, and street thugs ruled the area, especially at night. The people living in them had apparently commandeered the waterfront buildings nearby. We were told it was not even safe to stop at stoplights during daylight. Kingston, in my personal view, was the foulest place I had ever seen, far out stripping any place I had ever seen in Westpac for filth and garbage.

After his wife left, CDR Stone, in a rare show of magnanimity, told me to take his car and get lost until the following day. I took another officer with me and first went to see Port Royal, the old pirate hangout on a peninsula forming Kingston Harbor. There I saw ongoing underwater archeology as scientists studied parts of the city that had submerged following an earthquake during the pirate years. We then went to the other side of the island to Ocho Rios where the tourists go and saw a quite different part of the island. I spent the night in the Hilton at the "diplomatic rate" of $29 and returned to the ship the next afternoon after touring about a bit more.

We were thankfully underway on the 27th of August for a week of exercises with US-only units and then went to the Panama Canal. Our schedule, due in part to the Falklands War, was a bit up in the air after Chile, and it was beginning to look like we might spend some extra time in that country. Change of command was scheduled for the 5th of August, and I could hardly wait. I did not really get to know Bob Sutton, the incoming CO, all that well at department head school, but I remembered him as a straight arrow. I certainly could not presume on our earlier acquaintance to make my job any easier, but ANYTHING was better than Thomas Stone.

It was during this transit that my official status as the navigator ended me up in the middle of a "pissing contest" between our embarked destroyer squadron staff and the ship. As the navigator, I was also tasked with additional duty as the staff navigator, not normally an onerous job, but one night the quartermaster-of-the-watch and some "staffie" got wound around each other's axles. The upshot was the staff, and by extension the commodore, was not getting adequate positional information on which to base formation speed needed to get to Colon, Panama on schedule. I

was abruptly summoned to the bridge and told to get the situation squared away ASAP. Luckily, we had been equipped with a new satellite-based system which could give us a position about every 30-45 minutes, and a satellite had just passed over. I quickly got the two feuding parties sorted out and on the same scale chart (their biggest issue) with the new position and went back to bed. I don't know where the assistant navigator was, but the Commodore clearly wanted to make a point in having me handle the matter personally.

We anchored in Limon Bay at 0600 on the 2nd of August in preparation for transiting the canal. CDR Bob Sutton came aboard, and a general Quarters Drill was conducted for his benefit before we got underway at noon.

Unless you are on watch below, a Panama Canal transit is generally a sightseeing trip for Navy personnel. The Canal is the one place in the world where Navy regulations do not hold the captain of a Navy ship responsible for grounding and other accidents. I guess that is a tribute to the pilots, who are in complete charge of the ships.

Once *Preble* was moored at Rodman Naval Station on the Pacific side of the canal, it was decided that our change of command would happen on the 4th of August vice the 5th. Change of Command is probably the most intense period of the XO's existence. He is responsible for all aspects of the ceremony as he tends to two masters, one outgoing and the other incoming. I was lucky to get the COMSOUTH show band to participate as well as having a Navy League-sponsored sports day being held right outside the base gym where we held the ceremony.

Because we had personnel inspection by the new CO followed by an awards ceremony followed by an hour break and then the change of command, the crew was required to be in their dress white uniforms in the gym for three hours. Thank goodness for the band and the hotdogs and hamburgers from the Navy League. I was finally rid of Stone and now had to prove to Bob Sutton that I was a worthy XO.

Preble got underway on the 5th of August for some exercises off Panama and returned to port on the 8th and then left for Chile in the afternoon of the following day. The atmosphere on the ship with the new captain was like a sunny day after a storm has passed. I was still busy as ever but not harried by a nut job. The last I ever heard of Tom Stone was that his communications subspecialty had landed him in charge of some obscure overseas communications station – maybe the Navy finally wised up.

We had a really good crossing-the-line ceremony with the captain as the senior pollywog and me as the senior Shellback. He participated like a trooper and even led a Pollywog uprising on the 10th of August. The whole event went very nearly as the one I had endured ten years earlier in *Wilson*. I didn't tell anybody about locking the XO of that ship in his stateroom until after the event - no need to give young wog minds bad ideas.

Our task force entered Bahia Mejillones at the Chilean outpost-style town of the same name on the 17th of August. Each ship took a turn going alongside an anchored Chilean oiler for fuel before returning to anchor.

Mejillones was a one-story tall town, just a building fringe along the water backed up by the most desolate desert waste I had ever seen, including the area around the Suez Canal the previous year. The place is famous for having 365 days of sunshine a year. The desert inclined inland for as far as the eye could see. The Andes were visible way off in the distance. The guano industry was the sole reason there was any settlement here, and we occasionally got whiffs of the factory. The massive colonies of birds fed on the abundant sea life off the coast and deposited their guano where it was mined. I noted some ancient idle guano barges constructed of wood timbers about the size of railroad ties at anchor nearby.

We were underway for Antofagasta, Chile sixty miles to the south on the 19th arriving on the 20th. While we were still at sea, a Chilean helicopter from our host ship landed on our stern. As usual, I stood by to handle any passengers who got out. Instead, the pilot jumped out and came over to me calling my name. It turned out he was Marcel Arcil a Chilean exchange student at USNA who graduated in 1971, and he had been in my company there.

While in Antofagasta, we had what is known as an arrival conference attended by Chilean officers from their shipyard in Talcahuano where we would be getting some work done. One of the Chileans turned out to be a USNA classmate. Carlos Paraque.

The harbor at this port was exposed to the swell from the ocean, and our top-heavy mini-cruiser rolled 5-7 degrees all the time while we were moored outboard of a frigate. We always held "visit ship" for a few hours on several days in each foreign port, but I had to cancel it once due to the dangerous movements of the gangway.

My Spanish was improving a bit, but it was still rather rudimentary. The COs and XOs and a few other senior officers from all the US ships were invited to a reception, which included several Chilean flag officers. Little or no English was being spoken, but I soon found myself talking to a general who oversaw the northern air defenses of the country. I apologized for my poor Spanish, but he was kind and helped me along. The other XOs had by now all gathered around me because they obviously did not speak any Spanish and were looking for a comfort zone near me. The general looked over to them at one point and asked them in Spanish if they spoke any of his language. To my everlasting shame for American Naval officers, they all stood there without even replying in English or asking me to translate and instead shrugged their shoulders and pushed out their chins in the standard American gesture of, "I don't understand what this guy wants." The general looked at them and in perfectly clipped English from his American education said, "Well, in that case, gentlemen, let us speak in your language." I continued in Spanish out of pride and an attempt to save some face.

After one of our sailors punched out a local in front of his family (can't remember why, but I paid out $130 in foreign claims to the guy) and another ship's crew tore up a whorehouse, we were warned by the admiral to cool it in the future.

After a stop in Tongoy Bay to shoot a shore bombardment exercise and conduct a precision anchoring exercise, we departed the bay in two lines of three destroyers each and conducted an opposed underway replenishment from a Chilean oiler in rough weather. My notes showed I had the conn and we rolled up to 30 degrees while doing this at darkened ship. We arrived at anchorage off Valparaiso at 1700 on the 28th of August 1982. The anchorage was exposed directly to the sea making it not the most comfortable place in the world. Valparaiso and its sister city of Vina Del Mar just a few miles north along the coast were charming places. We spent most of our liberty time ashore in the more modern Vina – it was reminiscent of a newer American town.

Luckily Carlos Paraque was assigned as our liaison officer.

The officers of the Chilean frigate *Zenteno*, our host ship, entertained our wardroom with a barbeque at the Club de Campo (officers' club) near Vina. Then we adjourned to a large lawn rimmed with trees where we had a view of the Pacific in clear, breezy, and cool weather. We later retired to the *Zenteno* to continue the party.

We eventually departed Valparaiso headed for Talcahuano with the US Ambassador to Chile James Theberge aboard. I was the ambassador's personal escort during the several-day trip and found him to be interested in naval strategy and generally good company. A mechanical casualty of some sort prevented us from showing him a missile shoot, but we held a formal dinner for him in the wardroom the first night out, and I accompanied him to a dinner in the chiefs' mess. It was

good that I was along on the second dinner because our chiefs were not the most loquacious of folks, and conversation would have lagged had I not been there to prompt it along.

We arrived in Talcahuano on the 4th of September and moored alongside the naval shipyard pier in preparation for a couple of weeks of upkeep and miscellaneous repair work. The base is protected by a large promontory and had several ex-US World War II era cruisers in layup. These ships had been sold to South American navies after the war as obsolete surplus.

I spotted a unique piece of naval history as I was traveling about. It was the monitor *Huascar*, a war prize captured from Peru in 1879 off Mejillones. Built in 1864, its mechanical and gunnery details were very close to those of the revolutionary USS *Monitor* of Civil War fame. This particular ship was built to travel in the open ocean and thus had a more ship-like appearance than the *Monitor*. Its construction included masts able to carry sails as auxiliary power. The ship is moored to a pier, which was itself removed from the shore by about 50 yards. Access was gained via rowboat operated by a pair of white-uniformed Chilean sailors. The interior of the ship was pristine and a real treat to see.

Talcahuano is a more working-class area than Valparaiso and Vina Del Mar and has no large city center. A drive along the coast revealed a gorgeous area of nature reminiscent of the coast of northern California. We ate a lot of good, cheap, and varied seafood there.

Our chiefs' mess held the traditional initiation rite for several new chiefs at a facility they rented ashore. The captain and I were invited as honored guests. After several days of hazing aboard the ship, the ceremony started with the dungaree-clad initiates being subjected to some semi-humiliating pranks and ended in an emotional recitation of the Chief Petty Officer's Creed with the new chiefs changed into their new khaki uniforms.

I stayed pretty close to the ship during this visit but did venture as far as Concepcion, a bigger and busier place than Talcahuano, for some shopping and dinner. One night the captain, two department heads, and I went into a restaurant we knew to be a bit expensive by the look of it. An English-speaking waiter sauntered up and asked us what we wanted to eat. There was no menu – hang onto your wallet time!

On the 20th of September, we moved from the pier to anchorage in preparation for a return to Valparaiso for a week. It seems the Navy had run short of fuel money, and we needed to stall around for the rest of the fiscal year. "Valpo" was as good a place to do that as any.

We remained anchored at Valparaiso from 22 to 29 September. This return visit was much less hectic than our first arrival. There was virtually no Chilean Navy involvement meaning no formalities. Our ship's chandler, an Italian named Franco Mattiozzi, gave the captain, supply officer, main propulsion assistant, and me a fine meal at his house before taking us to the casino for some entertainment and a drink. Franco followed us all over South America always standing on the pier as we arrived and always got us everything we needed. He became a good friend to the ship and later traveled to the USA to visit us.

A couple of days after things died down Captain Sutton sent me off for a couple of days of rest at a beachside cabana owned by the officers' club and offered to us as a courtesy. I was ready for this and enjoyed the solitude and leisurely walks about Vina Del Mar. One evening Captain Sutton picked me up for a game of tennis and dinner, something his predecessor would never have done.

Our task force consisting of the amphibious ship USS *Portland* (an LSD) and *Preble* departed Valparaiso for the second and last time and headed for the long-anticipated transit of the Chilean Waterway and the Straits of Magellan with LT Pedro Urrutia of the Chilean Navy aboard as our pilot. As a matter of national defense (mostly against longtime rival Argentina), the Chileans keep

the details of the remote and scenic 900-plus mile long waterway to themselves. Qualification as a pilot of these waters is a big deal in their Navy.

Our plan was to avoid the fierce Southern Ocean gales by transiting the waterway and exit its southern end into the historically significant Straits of Magellan where we would fight a mock engagement with the Chilean missile boats, which lurk there, painted as rocks.

I arose at 0330 on the 2nd of October to navigate us through the narrow Chacao Channel (rocks only a couple of hundred yards away at times) leading from the broad Pacific into the Golfo de Ancud where we met up with our task force's frigate USS *Blakely,* which had been visiting Puerto Montt. Then *Blakely* and *Preble* refueled from the *Portland*, as we moved down the Golfo de Ancud and the Gulf of Coronado before reaching the narrower confines of the waterway itself.

We threaded our way between mountains for a time until we came to the Darwin Channel where we had to exit the waterway to sea at 0400 in the morning of the 3rd for a while before reentering it farther south. A full moon shone through the low, thin overcast, which obscured the sheer cliffs on either beam. The moonlight, such as it was, at least allowed us to see the blacker shadows of land on either side. It was raining too. I stood by the short-range radar watching the general nav picture while the captain and OOD sought counsel with the assistant navigator and LT Urrutia on the starboard side of the pilothouse.

We had a rough ride all day on the 3rd and reentered the calm but treacherously narrow waterway at dark under clear skies and a nearly full moon. Navigation in the waterway was generally a simple matter of looking at the chart to determine which way to turn whenever there was an option and to remain in the middle of the path between the hills and mountains.

On October the 4th we passed the trickiest part of the waterway known as the English Narrows. This section of the channel was about 200 yards wide and contained two 90-degree turns in a distance of a few hundred yards. Except at slack tide, there was a swift tidal current coursing through the area which could easily throw a maneuvering ship up against the rocky shores. It was essential that our three ships pass through precisely at slack at 0728. Since the bulky *Portland* was the most susceptible to being swept away, she was placed behind guinea pig *Blakely* with *Preble* bringing up the rear. We were to pass through at 90-second intervals with *Blakely* passing through 90 seconds before slack water and *Preble* entering the cut at 90 seconds after slack water.

With those two turns ahead of us, it appeared as though we were headed right at a blank wall of rock as we approached the narrows at about ten knots. We were soon looking at *Blakely's* port beam as she made the first turn. Then *Portland* negotiated her turn exactly at slack water. We all mentally hitched up our belts and plunged in with LT Urrutia conning. As we turned hard to port, I popped out the starboard pilothouse door to look at our rapidly swinging stern and could swear we were brushing the trees along the bank astern. Whew, a near-run thing for sure!

Later that day we slowed to a stop at a much-anticipated break near a place called Puerto Eden to trade for seafood with the indigenous people. We had been collecting clothing and any old thing for a few days to use in trade. LT Urrutia supervised the bargaining because the Chileans didn't want the free-spending Americans running up the price of seafood hereabouts. The natives, dressed head to toe in colorful woolens and sea boots, came rowing out in several large stout wooden boats. Those people got their king crabs using a hardhat diving rig in the frigid waters, and I saw at least one ancient hand-cranked dive compressor in the boats – primitive indeed. We traded about $130 dollars' worth of foodstuffs and some clothing for five or six gunnysacks full of shellfish and 100 king crabs. Sailors being sailors, there were some other exchanges of miscellaneous items.

Underway again, we continued south on the 4th and early hours of the 5th of October in waters as wide as two miles and at times much narrower but generally straight. At dawn on the 5th , we

negotiated the tortuous shoal area of Cutter Island and swept past a wrecked ship shot full of holes by passing Chilean warships and into the wide Straits of Magellan. We were in the tracks of history. Our Chilean Navy pilot now went below to rest thinking the Americans were now safe – little did he know.

Captain Sutton and company had figured that the much-vaunted Chilean missile boats in their invisible paint schemes were expecting us to steam in line-ahead formation right down the middle of the mile-wide passage at a sedate speed. They were in for a surprise. While our "high value unit" the slower *Portland* did just that well astern, *Blakely* and *Preble* leaped ahead at 25 knots hugging the cliffs and rocks on the left side of the strait as closely as possible. *Blakely* would train her gun toward the nearby left side of the channel and simulate putting a few rounds into each potential hiding place as they flashed past the opening while we "gunned" each opening on the far side as it bore. Flicking by the coves side of the strait too fast for a missile boat to react, she would be safe from attack from that direction, but both *Blakley* and *Preble* (coming along just seconds behind the *Blakley*) would theoretically be vulnerable to simulated missile attack from a boat hiding in the coves across the strait. We would depend on *Blakley* for protection from attack on our side of the strait just as she would depend on us to neutralize any threat taking a bead on her from the far side.

The day was bright and cool as our forced draft blowers spun up and whined like jet engines while we thrilled to being just a flick of the helmsman's wrist away from disaster – a helm safety officer was placed behind him. The captain left the bridge to go to his proper combat post in CIC to fight the war. My job was to give the right course to the conning officer to avoid the next outcropping while remaining close to the side of the strait. I stood at the centerline gyro repeater following along with the chart in my hand. As we passed each discernible point, I took a bearing to the right tangent of the next obvious point using a pair of dividers on the chart scale to obtain its distance on the chart (we were in radar silence). I then used the radian rule in my head to calculate the number of degrees we should steer to the right of that bearing to remain within a quarter of a mile of it as we passed abeam of it. Being just a bit prudent, I told the conning officer to keep just a ship width the starboard of *Blakely's* wake.

At one point we had a rather sharp turn to make to starboard around a point, and *Blakely* disappeared around it before I noticed a small brown spot in her path on the chart on the other side of the point in the otherwise light blue area depicting good water – a ROCK! I grabbed up the radio handset to warn *Blakely*, and as we flew around the corner, I saw her heeled way over to starboard with hard rudder on in an effort to avoid the brown smudge I could now see in the water – OH, SHIT! Time froze, and then white water on the port side of *Blakely's* bow wave fell across the brown smudge as she raced on clear of it undamaged. Sometimes, a near-run thing….

Sometime later, probably after noon, as we were still roaring along at flank speed "shooting up the countryside," LT Urrutia came out onto the bridge from his well-deserved rest and stood in shock looking at the rocks whizzing by to port and the racing frigate just off our port bow. Didn't we know there were dangerous rocks along the edges of the strait and that we should steam down the middle? "Sure," we said, "You shoulda seen the one *Blakely* almost ate; bet your missile boats dropped their jaws when we flew by!" He paced around nervously for a while and then wandered off mumbling something about crazy Americans.

The encounter exercise was over sometime before we got to the last turn before our refueling stop in Punta Arenas, the southernmost city in the world, and we slowed to a more sedate cruising speed. We looked astern to see two missile boats painted like rocks catching up. I don't think anybody saw them as we passed. That night we met Franco Mattiozzi ashore and had dinner at Pippeno's Italian Restaurant with Pippeno (a four-foot-tall Neapolitan) who burst into song after a while of observing our high spirits.

Captain Bob Sutton had previously told me that he wished to observe my ship handling skills at the difficult fueling moor we would have to execute at Punta Arenas. There was no fueling pier, just a large buoy a couple of hundred yards off the beach supporting a fuel hose rising from the bottom. Because of prevailing winds and current, we would be required to drop both of our bow anchors 45 degrees off each bow while backing in close enough to the fueling buoy to get a mooring line pulled by a small boat from our stern to the buoy. This arrangement of having the bow anchored and the stern secured with a mooring line is known as a Mediterranean Moor (med moor for short).

A large hand-drawn sketch was prepared of the approach and the anchors and with all necessary distances and bearings plotted and briefed to all concerned officers and enlisted personnel. All this was good, but a lot of judgment was going to be involved what with the strong tidal currents and all. I had done a similar moor in *Tawakoni* when we visited Hana on Maui, but the ships were of greatly different sizes and current conditions were also different.

As I conned toward the fuel buoy, I wondered if the anchors would hang up as they sometimes did for a few seconds and not drop as soon as the pelican hooks were knocked off their chains or if a throttleman in one of the engine rooms would fail to spin the ahead steam valve shut and spin open the astern steam valve fast enough. A hundred related thoughts passed through my mind. This mooring was not one where ANYTHING could go wrong if it was to succeed. I had to make the approach to the area parallel to the shore and into the current dropping the seaward side anchor at precisely the right moment and then using the engines and rudders and the drag of the first anchor to pivot the ship 90 degrees to starboard to a position just a bit beyond the buoy in order to place the bow in the right spot to drop the other anchor before backing gently in while holding the ship's stern against the current while the small boat came to our stern to get our heavy mooring line. Lots of moving parts.

All went as planned until I looked astern at the boat coming to get our mooring line off the fantail. It was a mere cockleshell of a rowboat with one rower and a line handler. If I ordered so much as a touch on the throttles of either of our 50,000 horsepower engines, I would send a pulse of water whirling this thing and its occupants clear up on the beach or even capsize it. I had to clinch my teeth and watch as our stern did whatever the winds and currents did to it while these guys plodded along about their business. Thank goodness my last engine orders had placed us correctly before I had ordered "All Stop." The pilot pronounced it an outstanding effort, and Captain Sutton never had me handle the ship again – he was satisfied that I had nothing more to show him about my abilities and that future ship handling opportunities might be better put to use training junior officers. The fine write-up he did about it in my annual fitness report made it clear he thought I was a topnotch ship handler and ready for my own destroyer command as a full commander, but I would have to classify the evolution as almost a near-run thing.

The next morning, we got underway for Uruguay after an hour's delay to have a diver from the *Portland* check that a float missing from the fuel buoy was not somehow entangled in our propellers.

Because of the simmering hostility toward the USA by Argentina resulting from our siding with British in the fight over the Falklands, we had to sail well to the east into the South Atlantic Ocean to skirt the islands. We ended up arriving in Montevideo on the 12th of October 1982 in a driving rain, which caused us to anchor for a while before mooring to a pier. We passed within several miles of the buoy marking the grave of the World War II German pocket battleship Graf Spee. I was able to see the buoy later from a promontory ashore while on a bus tour of the city.

Montevideo impressed me as a very clean and modern city. The cleanliness and architecture of some of the areas we passed through on our bus tour were reminiscent of southern California in the 1950s. I attended a dinner party in place of our ailing captain at the American Ambassador's gorgeous hulk of a mansion with its high ceilings on the second night in port. The head of the Uruguayan Navy and I enjoyed ourselves before dinner as he practiced his English on me. Then

we adjourned to the dining room where I sat at a table for six with our task force commander, Admiral Elfelt, who paid more attention to me than the Uruguayan destroyer squadron commander with us.

I enjoyed the European feel of downtown and felt very safe as I shopped around and ate the delicious Montevidean equivalent of our hamburger, a thin steak, at open air stands. There were leather goods shops all over the place, and our crews bought many suede coats.

Our departure for Brazil on the 17th was delayed an hour as 30-knot winds and a driving rain pinned us to the pier. We arrived at Rio de Janeiro on the 22nd of October and fired a 21-gun salute from our 40-mm saluting battery before anchoring in the impressive Guanabara Bay with its huge Sugarloaf Mountain overlooking the bay.

Lila met me on the pier, and we registered at the Luxor Regente Hotel on Copacabana beach. I found some places where dollars could be exchanged at 370 to 1 vice the official 220 to 1, and we ate steak dinners for five dollars apiece while traveling on buses for fifteen cents a ride. Visits to a nightclub featuring dancers in the gaudy feathered costumes of carnival, the tropical gardens, and a ride on the cable car to the top of Corcovado and Sugarloaf rounded out our sightseeing.

Preble departed Rio and arrived in Salvador on the 29th of October where the ship remained until the 2nd of November. We moored at the north end of the quay at the bottom of a steep hill, which we scaled by stairways into town. Salvador was a small potatoes kind of place compared to Rio but bills itself as a tourist area. The crew was quickly made aware of the fact that local taxi drivers were intent on ripping them off and that the cops were in cahoots with them. I suppose many of them were broke after Rio anyway.

The first night in town, I was invited to the home of the 2nd Naval District Commander's home for dinner. The house was a beautiful stucco and red brick structure on top of the end of a hill overlooking the lower city. The interior walls were all white and the floors were all dark stained wide planks with dark furnishings. The living and dining rooms opened via large, dark framed French doors onto a park-like yard overlooking the bay. The effect was stunning. The admiral and his wife served us local foods and drink, and I sat with Rear Admiral Elfelt and him as he talked of his interest in literature and local conservation efforts.

Another day I went out with a couple of staff officers to diner and a run through a three-story ramshackle building called Mercado Modelo.

Our next port of call was Recife on the eastern bulge of Brazil where we were moored alongside a foul-smelling quay wall on which all the spaces between the bricks were filled with what was probably fertilizer. I was initially worried about the entrance to this low-lying port because it involved a 135-degree turn as we entered the breakwater, but all went well. Here we had a dinner with all officers of the task group including a thorough roasting of each other. The next night I was invited with several other officers to dinner at the port captain's home where we ate dinner under balmy skies and a huge mango tree. Leaving Recife alone in ideal weather, we bid adieu to the South Atlantic staff, as well as *Blakely* and *Obannon*. UNITAS XXIII was essentially over, but we still had some commitments.

Our last stop in Brazil was Fortaleza on the north coast where we moored alongside a grain-loading pier. As we went back and forth in the darkness on liberty, we would see the shapes of rats the size of cats skittering back and forth. Our mooring lines suffered a lot of damage due to chafing as the heavy unobstructed east winds hit us. Despite the wharf area, the crew enjoyed this stop as much as any we had made in the whole six-month cruise. The city and beach area were wide and clean and nearby. The beach was backed by a wide walkway with broadleaf shade trees and beverage stands every hundred yards or so.

Most of the wardroom ended up at a very nice restaurant the first night, and the captain and I attended a nice reception luncheon with the commodore at a naval apprentice training school. I went shopping all over town with the Bob Sutton on Veterans' Day after we held an awards ceremony on the ship. I ate the fruit of the cashew for dessert that night at a place called Sandra's overlooking the harbor. Who would have thought the cashew had such a good tasting, sweet fruit? The locals generally throw it away in favor of harvesting the nut for export. An officer from the US Defense Attaché Office told me that there are over three hundred edible fruits in Brazil and that he had never eaten the same one twice in all his travels about the country.

We left Fortaleza on the 12th and headed northwest for exercises with small coast guard vessels of Barbados and St Vincent - we slipped between the Grenadines into the Caribbean. We anchored in the southernmost bay of Bequia Island before taking the *Trident* of Barbados and the *George Mcintosh* of St Vincent alongside for a briefing about the exercise planned for that night. USS *Gato*, a US submarine, was to simulate a drug-carrying submersible trying to close the coast and then surface and simulate launching rubber boats. *Preble* was to be the control ship vectoring the smaller coast guard vessels to intercept the sub.

Captain Sutton decided that I should exercise my operational expertise and be the Blue Force Commander which included *Preble* and the two foreign coast guard vessels. He would be in overall charge of the exercise. The operations officer, Stan Winner, and I ginned up a collapsing patrol box pattern and planned a collapsing barrier to keep the sub at bay.

On the 18th of November, we arrived at Port of Spain, Trinidad and anchored four miles out. I went ashore one day to a reception at the ambassador's home atop a hill overlooking the city. We had two officers and three enlisted men come down with hepatitis and sent them off to the US Army hospital in Panama in a DC12 "Nightingale." Luckily, that was the extent of our trouble with that disease.

We departed Trinidad on the 21st heading for exercises with allied ships from Great Britain and the Netherlands and entered Roosevelt Roads Naval Station on Thanksgiving Day. The next two days we were underway for a round of shore bombardment qualifications off Vieques. When we pulled back into Roosevelt Roads the next day, thirty new men were on the pier. We had requested that they be sent to us so that they would have some time on board before we returned to Norfolk for a long period of inactivity. We were underway for another gunnery exercise, which we had to repeat the next morning before we shot two missiles at an aerial target in the afternoon. We were then off for a port visit at Fort Lauderdale via the Northwest Providence Channel of the Bahamas.

Visiting a continental US port on the way home from deployment seemed an entirely foreign concept to me, but that's what we did. Sister Kathy and husband Bill and baby Eric came to visit, and I went down to North Miami one night to have dinner with them.

Underway for home on the 6th of December, I scattered the ashes of three former military members as a visiting chaplain officiated. We also carried 35 male friends and family of crewmembers with us on a "Tiger Cruise." The weather picked up to 6–9-foot seas as we headed north, but the seas were on the bow and not too bad.

We arrived home to Norfolk on the 8th of December 1982 in weather just cold enough for me to specify pea coats for the crew. It was so good to be home two days shy of six months after we had deployed.

Before returning to the life of an XO trying to survive the in-port grind, we drove to Pensacola for Christmas and bought a piece of waterfront property on Innerarity Island.

The usual round of "assist visits" and inspections restarted with a Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) scheduled for February 7th being the biggest bugaboo a ship can face. The INSURV is a congressionally mandated comprehensive inspection of each US Navy ship conducted every three years. Dozens of civilian and naval personnel descend on the ship and pick it apart for days.

Somewhere along in this time, I received a call from my detailer at BUPERS to discuss options for my next assignment. It became apparent that I was not going to a shore billet in the area. In fact, it was a sure thing I was going back to sea even though I had a good bit more sea time than most officers in my year group. One option offered was a full commander XO job in a to-be-commissioned destroyer tender. That would have been a thoroughly detestable job as far as I was concerned. All the dregs of the fleet being kicked off destroyers and cruisers went to the destroyer tenders on their way out of the Navy, and one of the XO's jobs was to ride herd on them. Tenders also had women aboard, and I did not want to get involved in administering that program. Nope, I wasn't at all interested, I told him. Then he brought up the idea of being a department head (operations or weapons) of the soon-to-be recommissioned battleship, USS *Iowa*.

The results of our INSURV were very disappointing as the inspectors "uncovered" some significant problems we had already reported and some new things all of which contributed to a finding of "unfit for service." This grade might have been inevitable given the condition of our starboard engine's low-pressure turbine, but the chief inspector apparently said some unkind things about us to the Deputy COMNAVSURFLANT, specifically something negative about cleanliness. I did not agree with this evaluation, especially since the ship's cleanliness was one of my specific responsibilities. Nonetheless, we were informed at 1700 that the COMNAVSURFLANT medical officer would be aboard the next day at 1000. I turned every person aboard to in a frenzy of cleaning until the wee hours of the morning, and the medical officer pronounced us an above average ship for cleanliness. The efforts of those aboard could not have made a really dirty ship improve that much overnight; so, I felt vindicated that we were not so dirty in the first place.

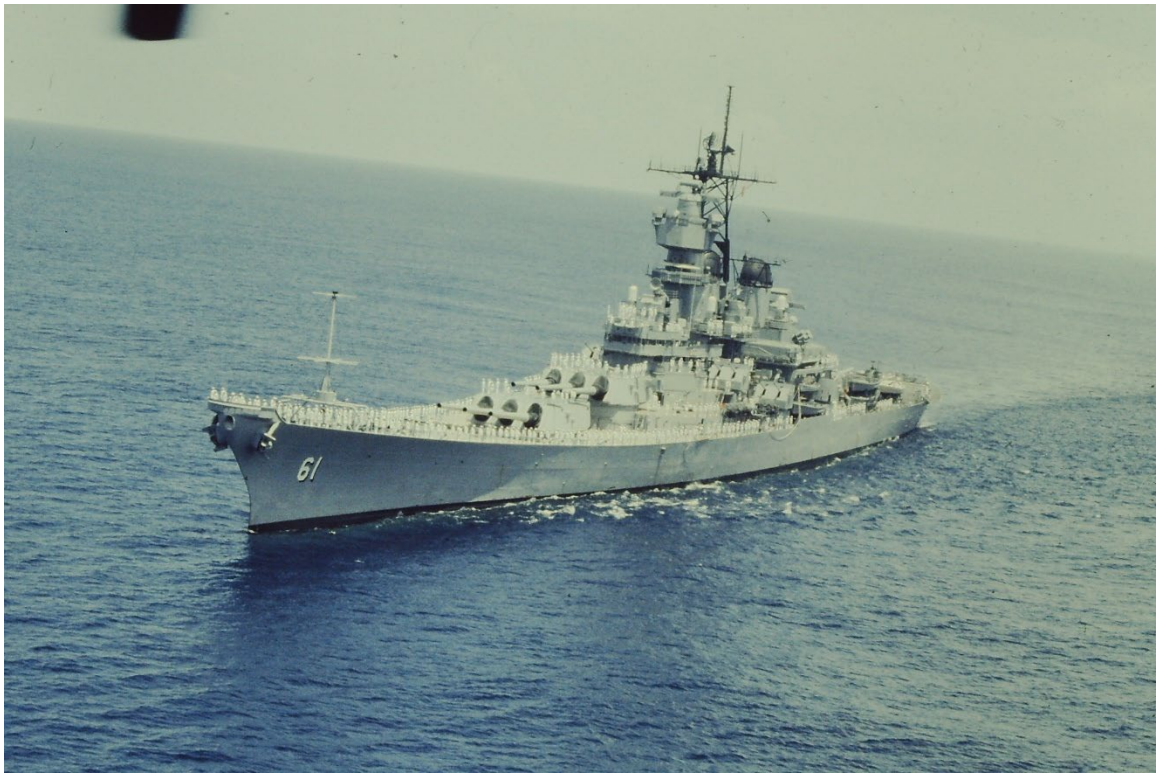
The upshot of all this was that we were to be assigned a restricted availability (Navy-speak for a slot in the schedule of a repair activity) to fix the turbine problem plus any other things we could talk our way into getting done. The ship would then have to be certified as ready by our destroyer squadron commander.

During this period, my orders to USS *Iowa* as Weapons Department Head were solidified, and I had dinner at breezy point O-Club with Captain Gneckow, the prospective commanding officer, CDR Joe Lee Frank (Operations), and LCDR Chris Martin (Deck). Gneckow seemed low key and potentially easy to work for – if only it had worked out so!

Problems with repairs to our forced draft blowers ended up being the long pole in our repair tent, and *Preble* languished in repair status never getting underway for the remained of my tour aboard, which ended on the 14th of May, a sad follow-up to such a successful pair of deployments. As I left, Captain Sutton told me he had considered commenting adversely in my fitness report about the INSURV results until he saw how hard I took it and worked to correct the issues. His final report on me was flattering, but the tour of duty really wore me down.

LCDR Tom Frohlich (lately chief engineer of *Farragut*) relieved me as XO on 14th of May 1983. He seemed a rather dour sort, and I later heard from crewmembers that wished I were back.

USS *IOWA* (BB-61) 1983-1986



I reported to the Pre-Commissioning Unit (PCU) IOWA at the Fleet Training Center on Naval Station Norfolk after a few weeks of sightseeing in England and Scotland to where Lila and I had caught a free ride from Dover Air Force Base on a Military Airlift Command C-141 cargo plane. On our return I found out from a Navy neighbor that I had been selected for promotion to full commander.

The four *Iowa*-class battleships with their 30-knot plus capability were the only US battleships that could keep up with the fast carriers in World War II. They spent the war in close to the carrier as anti-air gun platforms. *Iowa* could point 80 anti-aircraft gun barrels into the air when the Japanese aircraft attacked. Before transferring to the Pacific theater, *Iowa* had carried President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the allied conference at Casablanca. A tub was installed in the captain's cabin for his use and remained there giving the ship the distinction of the only ship in the Navy with a bathtub. All dignitaries visiting the ship were shown into the captain's quarters to view this simple appliance.

In order to steal a march on the expanding Soviet Navy and to show the Soviets that the United States was determined to remain militarily superior (and probably as a direct response to their new Kirov class missile cruiser), the four *Iowa* class battleships were pulled from the mothball fleet and re-commissioned with upgraded weapons systems including thirty two Tomahawk anti-ship/land attack missiles, sixteen Harpoon anti-ship missiles, four Close-in-Weapons System anti-missile Gatling guns. Six of the ten original twin 5"/38-gun mounts of the "secondary" battery were retained as well as all three of the original 16"/50 turrets of the "main" battery with their nine massive guns. The ship was 888 feet long, 108 feet wide and weighed in at 58,000 tons with a 1500-man crew, all of which dwarfed these same features of any of the five previous ships in which I had served. Re-commissioning a battleship cost as much as building a new frigate.

I left home in Newport News on the 5th of July and following a couple of days in Pensacola, looked around the *Iowa* for the second time in my life, the first time being when I was a Midshipman when she was in mothballs. The only weapons mounted on the ship were the massive main battery turrets – all other gun and missile systems were either off the ship for overhaul or not yet available for installation. While the turrets and their six level deep

components were in good shape, every other space I visited was in dirty and in disarray with industrial work going on, with passageways lighted with strings of temporary working lights.

I met the *Iowa*'s Executive Officer, Commander (later promoted to Captain) John Chernesky when I checked back into the PCU in Norfolk. I had briefly met Chernesky in BUPERS and didn't much care for him then. He had once been a diesel submarine officer who had to "surface" when the diesel boats were all decommissioned. He immediately made CDR Joe Frank and me aware that he would be the XO and that we (both now former XOs and quite glad to be so) were to adhere to our assigned places in the ship's pecking order. I was taken aback by his thought that we would be other than loyal subordinates. We both said we felt we had plenty to do without presuming to interfere in his area, but he had not finished making his point and said very sternly, "Look, you two, you don't understand. ME XO, YOU department heads, GOT IT!" Well, a cheery "aye, aye" is all that was in order, and Joe and I left and later eyed each other with a look that said, "What was THAT all about?"

Relations with Chernesky for the couple of years I had to endure his poor leadership were never good as he was wont to lead the thirty-plus officers of this 1500-man crew by intimidation and play their cheerful friend to the enlisted men. In a way, he had not heeded his own advice to us in not regressing to XO mentality from CO of the frigate he had just left. We latter acquired a junior officer addition to the crew who had served under Chernesky's tyranny on that frigate, and his tales pretty well comported with what we already knew. This style placed the officers in an awkward situation. He was not above berating any officer, including me, about some detail not to his liking in front of enlisted men, the ultimate leadership sin. Captain Gneckow, unfortunately, turned out to be a disappointment as well because he let this maniac do pretty much whatever he pleased to the point of standing between us department heads and the normal direct access to the captain that Navy Regulations gave us. I was required to eat with this guy and interface several times daily and to get his permission to leave the ship when in port (a normal requirement for a department head but galling because of his personality). His position over others gave him ample opportunity to employ his considerable wit to bully. There must have been a feeling of lack of self-worth, which made this man feel the need to bully those powerless to do anything about it. Adding to his sins were his alley-cat morals. He had a wife and at least one child who both lived somewhere on the eastern seaboard, and he spoke only in deprecating tones of her the very few times he mentioned the wife. I was surprised to see her once at some big deal function we had after the ship arrived in Norfolk. According to Bill Ernest, the chief engineer, who had known them as a young married couple in Hawaii, she had been quite lovely. I never saw her again. Later, the XO had to take some emergency leave, and the word was that his teenage daughter had tried to commit suicide. He called his child a weakling.

One time, after we had had a year or so of differences, I was sitting in his office when he told me he knew I detested him and his completely different ideas about leadership. I was happy that he knew I felt that way but was not dumb enough to rise to his bait because I had seen him bait and then pounce on many others less aware of his methods. On more than one occasion after receiving some idiotic order or errant chiding from him, I went to my room and screamed my frustration into my pillow. His methods were of a person too lazy to do the work required to lead men rather that to simply whip them. This was worse than CDR Stone, my first captain in *Preble*. Stone was just not trusting and not too bright, while Chernesky was pretty much just plain evil with a lot of native intelligence to guide his plots.

Balancing the insanity of the XO and laziness of the commanding officer were the marvelous 250 officers and men in my weapons department. We all were being introduced to systems, which were so old they were not in the Fleet anymore, which made parts hard to come by, or they were so new that spare parts had not yet been made in sufficient quantity. Nonetheless, my men were extremely proud of their position on the most powerful warship afloat and never slacked in their duties ensuring all systems were as ready as possible at all times. We were often hampered in our efforts by the demands of the XO, but I took it as my job to stand between my men and him. I was later rewarded by them for my loyalty and for taking the heat for them when I left the ship in 1986.

Modern cruisers and destroyers have been built with and have adopted the Combat Systems approach where the Combat Systems Officer (CSO) is the Combat Systems Department Head and has under him the gunnery, missile, anti-submarine (SONAR), radarmen, fire control men, electronic warfare operators, and electronic technician divisions, essentially everything needed to handle all the weaponry because it is built to function like that – i.e., the Aegis Weapon System. I think the Weapons Officer in these ships has the guns and missiles under him and works for the CSO. I think the Missouri organized like this, and maybe the Wisconsin and New Jersey did too, but I am not sure.

The Operations Officer in a Combat Systems ship is a far less influential and usually junior department head and handled the radiomen, signalmen, and the deck divisions of boatswain's mates.

Prior to the Combat Systems concept, the Weapons Officer was the Weapons Department Head and had the boatswains, gunners, gunner's mates missile, fire controlmen missile, fire controlmen guns, and sonarmen under him in six or so separate divisions. The Ops Officer had the radarmen, electronic repairmen, radiomen, electronic warfare operators.

We in Iowa elected not to be pushed into the Combat Systems concept because we felt the ship's systems were not conducive to this arrangement. That was the first decision and being long used to the Weapons and Ops department concept in my first five ships, I was content with this.

Then LCDR Chris Martin, the First Lieutenant in charge of some six divisions of boatswain mates (several hundred young men), came to me and stated that he figured with all that responsibility (all six boats, underway replenishment equipment, and care of most of the exterior of the ship clear down to the waterline) that Deck should be considered a department of its own. Remembering all the trouble those "deck apes" got into when I was a destroyer Weapons Officer and how I was always having to deal with them at XO's mast and Captain's Mast, etc, etc, I was more than happy to support him when we went to talk to the prospective XO at the pre-commissioning unit in Norfolk.

Thus, it was done that we had a departmental organization quite similar to every other ship in the Navy before Aegis with the addition of a Deck Department.

The Weapons Department itself was organized into three functional areas of Gunnery, Fire Control, and Missiles, each headed by a LCDR or LT. We initially called these areas branches, for lack of a better word, but the XO refused to allow us to use the word "branch" because he just didn't like it. Nobody ever came up with a better descriptive word; so officially there was none, meaning that the Gunnery Officer for instance could only describe himself as the head of the four gunnery divisions rather than with a functional title like group head or branch head. It was just another XO "contrary moment." Gunnery was divided into three main battery turret divisions and one secondary battery 5"/38 division, each with a LT in charge. Fire Control was divided into Main Battery Fire Control Division (two turret directors, radars, and associated analog computers in two plotting rooms) and Secondary Battery Fire Control Division (four 5-inch gun directors, radars, and associated analog computers in two plotting rooms). The Missile section was where all the new weapons systems were agglomerated due to the small number of men involved and was composed of a single division, which included the Tomahawk and Harpoon cruise missile fire control technicians as well as the CIWS fire control technicians.

After some miscellaneous schools at Norfolk, Operations Officer CDR Joe Frank and I wangled a two-week orientation visit to USS *New Jersey* then operating off the Central American coast. *New Jersey* was the first of the four *Iowa*-class battleships to be recommissioned, probably because she had been the only one brought out of retirement to fight briefly in the Vietnam War while her sisters slumbered on in mothballs. We arrived in Panama City, Panama on the 1st of September to meet the ship as she moored for a day at Rodman Naval Station. It was a thrill to look out over the Pacific Ocean the next morning and see the *Jersey*'s squat shape approach.

I was delighted to find my old friend, Tom Ellis from our 1972 department head course in Newport, as chief engineer in the *New Jersey*. Unfortunately, I found CDR Ed Messina, the Weapons Officer from whom I had hoped to glean useful hints to be most inhospitable and promptly handed me over to his subordinates who filled me in on what a jerk he was to work for. He apparently had a Navy-wide reputation for being unlikable. I resolved to simply strike out on my own talking to his officers and men when he was not present. I will never understand what he thought the Navy had to gain by his behavior, but ever since I joined the *Preble*, I had certainly begun to meet some strange senior officers.

As the ship prepared for a visit by the Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, and President Magana of El Salvador, I saw my first ever firing of a 16-inch gun on the 6th of September 1983. A couple of the guns misfired probably due to faulty or aged primers, which was something I would also have trouble with aboard *Iowa*. I was in 16-inch gun turret number three the next day when a broadside was fired for the state visit. There is a lot of noise inside a turret from the ventilation blowers and numerous hydraulic systems. The noise of gunfire was not too loud.

On the 9th of September, *New Jersey* was ordered to return to the Panama Canal and to be prepared to transit the canal to the Atlantic side. The captain believed that this move meant the ship will be sent to the coast of Lebanon to support the US Marines trying to keep the peace there. Joe and I offered our services but were predictably turned down with the excuse that there were plenty of officers to perform the assigned duties. Joe and I returned to Norfolk. We came away from our visit thinking the ship had been hurriedly commissioned and that a lot of things were made to look good at the expense of functionality.

I was intent on getting back down to Pascagoula where I thought I would be of most use in organizing the Weapons Department, but I ran into opposition from the XO who probably had it in mind to use my administrative talents in organizing my department as the men showed up in Norfolk. However, I found that the crew would not be arriving as he had thought, and I wrote a long rebuttal to the captain via the XO with all my sound reasoning as to why I should be allowed to move to Pascagoula. I was probably surprised to hear him generally agree, but he managed to object to parts of my letter and told me I'd be surprised at who (meaning me) would be yanked back to Norfolk if things did not go well there. He never gave in graciously to superior reasoning, especially from a subordinate.

I left the house in the care of some excellent renters on the 12th of October and headed for Pascagoula where we rented an apartment, and I got to work getting ready to train my arriving men on the old original gun systems. On the 16th of October, the captain and I boarded a flight for two weeks of Tomahawk Missile training at Point Mugu Naval Air Station in California where we met up with the XO. I turned out to be the designated driver for the captain and XO who routinely buddied up to booze it up nightly. I hate bar hopping, but these two degenerates had no such objection. I could see their connection through bad behavior was going to be a bad thing for the rest of the crew once we were all boxed up in the same hull.

During this period, we heard about the bombing of our Marines on the 23rd of October at their barracks in Lebanon where 223 were killed. Two days later, we invaded Grenada to kick out the Cuban-backed Marxists who had taken the place over.

As we parted ways at the airport for our return flights to Norfolk and Mobile, the XO asked me to be a "moderating influence" in Pascagoula where he had heard Joe Frank was driving everybody nuts with his own brand of intensity. How odd for him respect me and my leadership methods enough to make such a request!

Above: In the Pascagoula shipyard, late 1983

By the 14th of November, I'd been named "trials coordinator" to ensure the Dock Trials, Builder's Trials, and Acceptance Trials associated with INSURV went off smoothly. I either had to take this onerous job or lose one of my department's officers to this task for months. Then the captain informed us that higher authority had asked whether we could push the commissioning date forward by three months to April from the currently scheduled 14th of August 1984.

By early December, we were told that we would commission on the 27th of April and be ready six frenetic weeks later to deploy on the 15th of June. The object of all this effort was to provide relief for the *New Jersey*, which still sat off the coast of Lebanon. My fellow department heads and I had been busy sending as many of our men as possible to *New Jersey* for temporary duty to help relieve their counterparts in that ship so that they might have some leave to come home. This was a wonderful training opportunity.

In January 1984, we picked up the pace to work six and a half days a week. The first sixty-plus ordinance crew showed up, and we began a customized course in our gun systems taught by a team of instructors from the Naval Technical Training Command. The first Tomahawk launcher and CIWS were placed on board.

Iowa went into "in commission special" on the 13th of February, and I stood the first Command Duty Officer watch. Some of the crew had moved aboard from the barracks on the 11th and 12th. I brought my own tape player aboard for the playing of bugle calls over the 1MC. The watch managed to erase Taps from the tape just before that evolution, and I camped out in the dental officer's stateroom for the night because mine had inadvertently been stripped bare of its original furniture and had to have all new installed. In the end, the yard obtained a suite of what they called "Aegis furniture" from the set intended for an unfinished cruiser. With the exception of the new transom bunk, which converted to a settee by flipping the bunk pan replacing the original installed bunk frame with wire frame and springs to support the mattress, I couldn't have cared less what furniture they put in there. I really liked that bunk because the state room seemed so

much larger when the bunk was up. I had a real desk which I had placed so that natural light played on it through the port hole looking out onto the main deck abreast turret two.

Time flew as we all went into overdrive to get everything ready for our April commissioning date. Imagine every detail of what it takes to have a crew move aboard a ship strange to virtually every man aboard and having every man get oriented to his surroundings while shipyard workers still swarmed about many areas of the ship. I often got home around 8-9 PM, and I only lived a mile or two from the shipyard in Pascagoula.

At some point in handling this impossible workload, the captain decided that he wanted all guns test fired sometime during the sea trials. This had the beneficial effect of getting us deeply involved with all of the ammo handling systems that had lain dormant for decades and had not been addressed in the original work package. I guess everybody assumed all that old stuff would just work. We found numerous deficiencies, including the need to weight test every piece of ammo handling gear, which resulted in a lot of head scratching well above my pay grade. While that was going on, my gunners had to trace and clear all the air supply lines that served the gas ejection air and recoil charging systems.

We decided that three rounds from each gun would be sufficient to test them. This meant 27 rounds of 16-inch ammo and 36 rounds of 5”/38 ammo. The projectiles would all be non-explosive, but the powder charges had to be the real thing. Each 16-inch powder charge consisted of six 110-pound bags of powder. Since no live ammunition is ever allowed in a shipyard, all sorts of approvals from God on down the chain of command had to be obtained, and shipyard workarounds had to be devised. With our “sledgehammer priority,” things were moved along – it was fun being important in the Navy for a change. It was decided to bring the ammo aboard on a Saturday when the shipyard would be empty of its workforce. The ammo would be picked up in Charleston, SC by trucks and spend the night before delivery to us at Pensacola Naval Air Station. Among other things, the Coast Guard had to close the Intracoastal Waterway to all traffic at each point the route crossed a bridge over it.

Our ammo arrived on the 17th of March and because I had only a few gunner’s mates, who were mostly inexperienced in handling this type ammo and the associated hoists, it took us from 0830 until 2000 to complete the task. At one point, a few strands of one of turret two’s projectile hoist

wire parted, and we replaced and weight-tested it in the amazingly short time of two hours – great to be in a shipyard with all of the necessary parts and skills at hand. And so now a new daily task officially began – taking and reporting magazine temperatures to the commanding officer.

The next day, with the XO's girlfriend (a long-legged shipyard secretary) aboard under the guise of performing some official function, we got underway for our first sea trial after a dense fog cleared. Many dependents and townsfolk were lined up at various vantage points. My sea and anchor detail was on the lower navigation bridge on the 0-4 level with a standby helmsman and engine order telegraph operator ready to take control of the ship if a malfunction occurred and control was lost from the upper control station on the 0-8 level in the tower structure above me.

Pre-fire checks on all guns had to be completed within 24 hours of firing, and we got started on them as soon as possible after clearing the sea buoy. Because most of my department's officers were occupied on watch, I was up until 0200 conducting the required officer checks of the twelve 5-inch guns. Once the complete crew was aboard, these checks would happen much faster, but for now, we only had about 25 gunner's mates and 25 fire control technicians.

I got up at 0500 and went up to the top layer of the conning tower on the 0-5 level just above the main navigation bridge and manned the sound powered phones. With only the few gunner's mates aboard (a full-up turret crew numbered around one hundred men) and all but two of them new to the guns, it took a long time to get the first gun loaded. Our first 16-inch round went off at 0630 amidst much cheering by the crew and civilian workers aboard. Each of the three big guns in a turret was fire once followed by two 3-gun salvos from the turret. During the lulls, as turret crews were shifted, we fired the 5"/38 secondary battery guns. Later we fired hundred-round bursts from our four CIWS mounts – at 3,000 rounds a minute, that didn't take long. My parents, in Pensacola, 50 miles away, said they heard the rumble of our big guns on that chilly March day. A seagull flew in front of one of the single-gun salvos from turret III and was engulfed in the orange fireball before landing featherless but alive and squawking. We found a seagull stenciled on the turret the next morning.

The gun shoot took until 1530 that day, but the captain was well pleased with our professionalism.

The next day, we anchored off Pascagoula and took on the infamous INSURV Board headed by RADM Bulkeley. As trials director, I had my hands full, but old family friend CAPT Ed Froehlich, the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) Battleship Program Officer, was there and helped us over a few bumps.

One inspector seemed to take a rather dim view of our fire control readiness and relayed it to RADM Bulkeley and RADM Davis at NAVSEA. We quickly organized a demonstration for the next day to change his mind. Using all of our own available talent plus some Ingalls Shipyard personnel, we manned the two "Spot" directors high in the fore and aft superstructure as well as the four "Sky" directors of the secondary battery and tracked a tanker and a rented airplane. We even had the CIWS mounts track the plane. At the end of the day, the gent's mind was changed. Such are the things one must go through for one misinformed INSURV inspector, and it made me think of my previous experience with INSURV in PREBLE.

Another sea trial was conducted on the 13th of April for additional main engine checks.

The recommissioning of the battleships drew much attention throughout the world, and many, both in the Navy and out, wanted aboard. A number of retired enlisted people with relevant experience volunteered to be recalled to active duty for the honor of serving in a battleship. We did not have many of these "retreads" aboard, and most did not fare well. It had been too many years since they had retired, and the modern Navy was a faster moving place than they were used to. Within a year or so, they had all returned to civilian life.

I happened to be out alone on the fantail in the middle of the helicopter landing area on foggy morning before the ship's commissioning when I heard the distinct sound of radial aircraft engines overhead. While visibility was very limited horizontally, the fog was not very deep, and I looked up to see a World War II era B-25 circling overhead, its pilot clearly intent on viewing his plane's WW II compatriot coming back to life. It was an almost eerie moment.

Our commissioning ceremony was a big deal and included the Vice President of the USA, George H. W. Bush and admirals too numerous to count. Mom and Dad were there as were Kathy and Bill, and Johnny Stewart. After the speeches and delivery of the ship's official commission by the VP, the crew all ran aboard from their formations on the pier and manned the rail at attention. The final official event, once the crew had manned the rail, was the ship "coming alive." Since a lot of this event involved my equipment, I was in charge; so, I missed all the speeches and official activities because I was in Combat Engagement Center on the 0-3 level coordinating the second-by-second coming alive schedule we had worked out and rehearsed until we were blue in the face.

First, the ship's whistle was given a long booming blast, and the band struck up "Anchors Aweigh." Then, the radar antennae were started rotating high up on the mast, and colorful flag hoists were run up each halyard. We worked our way down the ship with the secondary battery directors turning toward the crowd in unison with the three 5"/38-gun mounts on the side of the ship facing the pier. Then the barrels of the big guns were raised from the horizontal to about 30 degrees into the air. The crowd was "oohing and aahing" as all three big turrets were simultaneously turned toward the crowd and their barrels lowered and raised as if bowing to the people before being rotated back to centerline. The ship's whistle was sounded one more time to complete the ceremony.

The day after commissioning, *Iowa* got underway for underwater sound signature trials off Andros Island in the Bahamas (a place I would come to know well in my post-Navy career) and shakedown training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. With the possibility of running afoul of Castro's gunboats with our magazines empty as we passed through the Florida Straits, an ammunition ship, USS *Butte*, was sent to meet us the day after we left Pascagoula. So here we were with about five or six total days underway time with this huge ship and new crew (many had not even been aboard for the sea trials) being asked to come alongside an ammo ship for two 12-hour long periods over a two-day period for underway replenishment of gun ammo by highline forward and by helicopter aft.

Many years later, I still marvel at how well this two-day evolution went. I cannot say how in the world it was carried off so well by a crew with so little experience as a team, but one thing the Navy does well is to provide its newly commissioned ships the best people available. We loaded over 3,600 rounds of five-inch gun ammo (each round consisted of a 54-pound projectile and a 35-pound powder case), over 2,100 16-inch powder cans (each weighing over 330 pounds), and 300 high explosive projectiles for the 16-inch guns (each weighing 1,800 pounds). I probably had over 600 men and officers involved, pretty much everybody not on watch, and nobody was hurt, and no equipment was damaged as projectiles and powders moved in many directions at once while broken up pallet retrograde material was toted back to the helicopter deck for transfer back to the *Butte*.

Five-inch ammo came aboard aft slung in pallets under the thundering twin rotor H-46 helicopter, which dusted all who were in the area with salty spray. The pallets were moved forward from the helo deck and broken down whereupon each powder and projectile was passed from man to man until they reached the ammo hoists in the upper handling rooms under each of the six 5"/38 gun mounts. Then the ammo was sent below to the magazines via the "dredger hoists" where crews removed the items from the hoists and stacked them in powder and projectile rooms.

High explosive 16-inch projectiles weighing 1,800 pounds apiece came two to a pallet, while the armor-piercing and blank practice shells weighing 2,700 pounds apiece came aboard singly.

Pallet jacks were pushed under them, and crews moved the heavy loads to the turrets where the pallet was broken open and each projectile fitted with a lifting collar. The projectiles were then hoisted in the horizontal position clear of the deck where they could then be rotated in their lifting collars to the vertical and lowered clear to the bottom level of the turrets. At this point, they were still outside the turret barbette and had to be connected by their lifting collars to an overhead monorail and pushed into the turret before again being lifted into their storage position on the projectile decks about midway up inside the turrets. The 16-inch powders were lowered from the weather deck and shunted off via more overhead monorails to the powder magazines surrounding the lower portion of the barbette. The loading crews worked well into the night each night clearing the deck of accumulated ammunition. When done, we were armed with a goodly portion of our gun ammunition and no missiles.

As we approached the Florida Straits, we loaded up two CIWS with 20-mm ammo and manned one 5-inch gun mount per side and Sky 1 director in anticipation of being intercepted by a Cuban gunboat. Sure enough, one followed us for a few miles, and the director crew tracked it all the time ready to instantly order the gun mount to swing onto the target if it showed any hostile intent.

By the 4th of May *Iowa* was off AUTEC running sound signature trials, a process with which I would become intimately familiar years later while working for ManTech in Panama City, FL

At 2315 on the 5th of May we rendezvoused with USS *Savannah* for fuel and stores. I didn't have a duty assigned for this event and remained in bed in my starboard side main deck cabin abreast of turret 2. I was awakened at 0230 by the sound of wire rope rapidly running over the deck above me followed by a loud thump. The inhaul/out haul wire on the replenishment rig had failed.

As we headed south toward GITMO, my gun and fire control crews continued the required bore-to-sight alignments for the secondary battery and practiced call-for-fire radio communications. During this time, we were encumbered with some riders from the Fleet Training Group at GITMO who were busy trying to prepare us for the intense shakedown training period while we were involved in getting the equipment ready. It seemed we always did everything at once.

On the 7th of May we rendezvoused with a tug towing a target for a calibration shoot of our big guns. We were to use reduced charges (which were in actuality 8-inch gun bag powders) so we could shoot at shorter more easily observable ranges that could be photo-triangulated. The reason we needed to perform this shoot before entering training was because our shore bombardment exercises would be taking place at the politically sensitive island of Viequez off Puerto Rico. The islanders had long been campaigning to have the Navy range closed, and the Navy did not want any errant projectiles form *Iowa*'s long dormant systems going into the sensitive reefs. What we needed to prove was that the rounds would go where our extensive system alignments said they would. The result would be a calculation of the difference in the photographed splashes with the position of the towed target to give us a system ACTH, which stands for accumulated correction to hit. We were pleased that we had consistent initial velocity (IV) from our powder (as measured by velocimeters, newly mounted on each turret) and little shot dispersion.

That evening, I conned the ship to anchorage in GITMO. We had a stiff quartering breeze and were going at a mere 5 knots to allow CIC to participate in a low visibility navigation drill. I believe the outboard starboard engine was down for some reason making slow speed maneuvering a bit problematic. The speed was not enough to control the ship's head well, and at one point I had to back down on one side to avoid getting any closer to shoal water because I could not control the ship's head. Seven knots is about the minimum speed needed to control a battleship, especially with a lot of crosswind.

I conned into another anchorage in GITMO on the 9th without the constraint of the imposed five knots and had no problems with controlling the ship. Underway later that day, we performed

successful firing exercises with the CIWS mounts and secondary battery (non-firing) tracking the target.

While the CIWS mounts with their modern closed-loop tracking systems required just one person to watch the control board in CEC, the old secondary battery 5-inch guns and directors required scores of people to man them. Starting at the bottom of the system in the magazines, we placed people from other departments (mostly Deck and Supply) as ammo passers. They would break out the powders and projectiles under supervision of a Gunner's mate and move them to "dredger hoists," which lifted the ammo to the upper handling rooms directly under the guns where more people lifted the ammo and placed it into powder and projectile hoists attached to the rotating gun mount. Each of the six gun houses required 13 men to feed ammo into the guns and to train and elevate them.

High in the superstructure were the four Sky directors with up to four men and one officer inside. The director officer was the guy responsible for pulling the trigger on the guns under his control. We could put all six gun mounts under control of any Sky director or mix and match them any way we chose via a wall of ancient rotary switches in the two gun plots below the main deck on either end of "Broadway," the wide passage running down the middle of the ship connecting to the entrances of all four fire rooms and engine rooms. There were four MK 1A 5"/38-gun computers down below, one for each director, which used the radar range and director azimuth and elevation fed down from the Sky directors to calculate speed and direction of the target before sending train and elevation settings to the guns. All of this was referenced to a gyro "stable element" which resulted in the gun barrels moving slowly up and down as the ship rolled while tracking the target.

To make this all work for both main and secondary batteries required an immense amount of equipment maintenance and training time. The main battery with its mostly two-dimensional world and bullet-proof (literally) equipment was easier to get up and running from its twenty-six-year repose than the secondary battery with the added complexity of its three-dimensional threat. It is MUCH harder to shoot at air targets than surface targets. Besides some ongoing issues with the hydraulic-electric receiver regulators in a couple of 5-inch guns, which resulted in oscillating instead of steady gun barrels, we had the four MK-25 radars in the Sky directors which had been added in the 1950s and then subjected to high temperatures in radar equipment rooms alongside the smokestacks. When we opened radar equipment cabinets, particles of insulation would rain down. So, the radars were rarely effective, and we often watched airplane-towed targets pass overhead without being able to fire a shot.

After complaining about this oversight during the recommissioning project for over two years, a program was devised where two Sky directors at a time along with their associated radars were to be removed from the ship for total rehab. This program began to take shape as I transferred off the ship; so, the secondary battery fire control deficiencies remained an albatross around my neck for my entire tour.

It was not for lack of effort that the systems were troubled. We had been endowed with about fifty bright young sailors who were awaiting training in submarine fire control systems (the nuclear sub Navy always got the VERY best personnel). They were to help flesh out our personnel needs for a year before returning to the sub community. So now they were faced with ancient analog systems, which employed long-gone vacuum tube technology instead of the digital systems they were destined for. The fire control officer LT Tom Mumpower, a limited duty officer who had been assigned to USS *New Jersey* as a young, enlisted fire control tech in the late 1960s, was a marvelous leader and continually motivated his young sailors, and I often witnessed these men tearing down and rebuilding vacuum tube circuit strips in their airy shop up in the superstructure. Due in large part to Tom's leadership, a number of these guys requested conversion to surface ship fire control.

On the 10th of May we fired 60 rounds of BL&P (Blind-Loaded and Plugged) 16-inch with full powder charges at a towed sled. The 600 pounds of old powder we had to use for these BL&P projectiles, each weighing 2,700 pounds, gave initial velocities varying so widely that tight patterns are not possible. Our rounds fell all over the place. There was a lot of concern by the Naval Surface Warfare Center about this feature of the old 16"/50 powder. As a result, several grand lots of old 16"/45 powder were mixed together to form what was hoped to be a lot with a more consistent burning rate. The 16"/45 powder was only suitable for firing the lighter high explosive projectile (1,800 pounds), which composed most of our planned load out. The only other projectile we carried in the 16-inch size was the armor piercing weighing 2,700 pounds.

During this training period I conned the ship in and out of port a couple of more times and made the approach on the oiler USNS *Truckee*. Eventually, the LTs and LTJGs would be selected for these duties as they gained experience at sea in the ship, but initially, I was often tapped to handle the ship in channels and other restricted maneuvering conditions. I guess the captain and XO figured that if something bad happened with more junior officer conning, they'd be questioned about why one of the most experienced ship handlers aboard was idle.

By the 21st of May, we were beginning our shore bombardment qualification exercises off Vieques Island. Our secondary and main batteries both had to qualify in similar exercises. First up was the 5"/38 guns of the secondary battery, and despite some initial problems of premature detonation of some of our projectiles, we did well. I wished we could have done as well in the anti-aircraft shoot we needed to get completed with those guns, but the MK25 radars in the Sky directors were just not up to the job. I solved the premature detonation problem with a call to COMNAVSURFLANT getting permission to set the fuses on "safe" instead of the 3 seconds beyond impact specified in their regulation on the topic.

We really shined on our main battery qualification on the next day, as the first of several exercises was a perfect score. Our rounds seldom landed outside of 100 meters from our target at a range of around 12,000 yards. I told the XO that after this much-anticipated day that I felt five years younger. Tom Mumpower was largely responsible for our success. Shore bombardment qualification is always a stressful time on any ship as it runs through the numerous different exercises under the watchful eyes of the observers ashore grading every fall of shot and every word spoken in the radio link from ship to spotter. It is a precise dance which must be performed to a very high standard to just pass.

The one shore bombardment exercise I did not want to do and had tried unsuccessfully to have deleted from our requirements as a battleship because I thought it was ridiculous for a battleship to do was the "John Wayne" shoot where the ship is required to steam toward the beach at 25 knots or so while zigging about to avoid simulated fire from shore batteries all the while firing the main battery at the designated targets. At the end of the high-speed run into the beach, and I guess after the known target was supposedly destroyed, the ship is slowed to five knots and turned broadside to the beach a few thousand yards out observing for counterbattery. The observers ashore then fire a white phosphorous mortar round onto the beach area and call over the radio, "Counterbattery, counterbattery!" as the white cloud of the mortar shell blooms. This is a five-inch gun target and must be engaged in a very few seconds from the director with Gun Plot providing range to the beach on the bearing and the director officer adding spots to gain hits on the bloom of white smoke.

The big day eventually came, and I will always remember that charge toward the beach aboard a zigging battleship at 25 knots while standing on the 05-level above the bridge watching the six guns of the two forward turrets training back and forth across the bow as the big Spot I director tracked a spot of land and Gun Plot used offsets from the director plotted onto the MK-48 computer to track the target. To the best of my memory, we did end up switching to Turret II for a couple of the required rounds, but our drills bore fruit, and the counterbattery phase seemed anti-climactic after the big gun phase. We passed, and how well we passed was of no matter to me. I was happy.

Since I was so worried about this exercise, I had us practice it at sea over and over again with Turrets I and II (T-III would not play in this exercise) and the secondary battery mounts dry firing. I was particularly worried about our slow-loading main battery guns not being able to fire enough rounds to complete their phase before we ran out of sea room approaching the beach at high speed. Eventually, I worked out the distance off the beach we needed to start the run in based on what seemed like realistic timing with T-II backing up the primary firing T-I n case of a misfire or mechanical issue. I couldn't start too far offshore because nobody would be able to see the observation post from the turret officer's periscope (always a safety requirement), and our accuracy would suffer.

On the 24th of May, we had a fun time shooting all the starboard 5"/38 guns at a surface target, one of the few times when dealing with the secondary battery was a rewarding experience. The next two days we spent a lot of time alongside the ammunition ship USS *Santa Barbara* taking on the rest of our allowance of gun ammunition.

Shakedown training eventually came to an end, and we headed to Norfolk for a three-week visit (our first) to our new homeport. Tens of thousands of people came to see the ship when it was opened to the public, and hundreds of Navy and civil service personnel found their way to us as work of all sorts was performed on our systems. Our big guns had their oil sumps cleaned out, and all the five-inch guns had their oil polished. A continuing issue with the center gun of turret 2 oscillating in the automatic mode was addressed but not resolved. Some elevation errors were discovered in the secondary battery.

I was in the very bottom, five levels down, of Turret II one day all by myself before the gunner's mates normally working in the turret had returned from lunch when the lights went out. Stygian does not begin to describe how utterly black it was down there. We were in Norfolk and on shore power which had just failed. I normally liked to take this quiet time of the day to walk around inspecting various of the spaces under my cognizance. One this occasion, I happened to be standing in the middle of the large open space of the powder flat in between the surrounding circular bulkheads and the powder hoists at the bottom of the rotating structure of the turret. I knew there were open hatches in the area which when closed, to remove tripping hazards for deckmen carrying the powder charges across from the powder passing scuttles in the bulkheads to the powder hoists, were flush with the deck; it would have been easy to step into the hole since there was no warning vertical hatch coaming. If the deck had not been a little bit greasy, as many things in a turret are, the smart money would have been for me to get down on my hands and knees to make for the vertical ladder in the center of the turret structure to start my five deck climb out, but I would have ruined the khaki uniform trousers I was wearing. The doors in the surrounding bulkheads were locked for security making the ladder my only option. Since I had just come down that way, I had a little bit of muscle memory to go on. Luckily, I had been facing the center of the space where the ladder was when it went dark, and I very slowly slid one toe at a time forward a few inches with my hands extended until I felt metal. I recognized the smooth brass surface of a powder tray and knew the ladder to be a few feet to one side. Once at the ladder, I slowly climbed up two of the five levels through the two projectile decks (other turrets only had one projectile deck) arriving at the upper projectile deck where I had to negotiate the electric motors and hydraulic pumps associated with the projectile turn table and the six winches on it to change over to the next ladder which lead up to the electric deck where the large waist high electrical motors driving the turret train and elevation hydraulic pumps resided. One was required to slide over the top of one or two of these motors to find the next ladder going up and though a hatch into the gun pit of the center gun of the three-gun turret. Once there, I saw a minute amount of light coming through the approximately four-inch porthole in the gun house door. This light was being reflected off the teak deck outside the turret and coming through the open normal access hatch in the underside of the back end of the turret "booth," the uppermost compartment of the turret where the turret officer and chief and their phone talkers ran the turret. It was now a simple climb up the ten-foot ladder to the small platform at the door's level from which I entered the better light in the booth. I always carried a flashlight when inspecting the turrets after that.

By the 20th of June, we were underway for a two-and-a-half-month deployment to the Caribbean with the first stop being Caracas, Venezuela. I was dreading this time at sea mostly because it meant being cooped up in the same ship 24 hours a day under the thumb of the XO.

Gun shoots on the 21st to check system calibration were marred by equipment problems with ammunition hoists and fire control. Old equipment continued to be a pain to deal with.

We anchored a half-mile off the breakwater of La Guairia, the seaside connection with Caracas, on the 26th of June in company with some of the ships of the UNITAS group, but bad weather forced us to suspend boating and head for a more sheltered site at Puerto La Cruz, 120 miles east. I was OOD with my Turret 3 Officer, LT Joe Harris, conning as we fought to provide a lee for the retrieval of our personnel and liberty boats. At one point we circled around a US submarine to get in close to the breakwater to retrieve our whaleboat. Later that night we arrived at Bahia Bergentin and anchored. I happened to be on the bridge as we entered the bay when the captain asked the senior watch officer, Joe Frank, the Ops Boss, which officer he (as senior watch officer) had chosen to conn the ship to anchorage. He responded that I was to conn. Surprised and with no preparation, I took the conn and anchored the ship – something I was getting used to by now.

On the 28th, we moved to the fueling pier at Puerto La Cruz. As we threaded our way between a few outlying, almost barren, islands in the morning, I noticed our shadow being cast across some shabby fishing villages by the rising sun. The channel was so narrow that I was looking down on these places and noticed a few inhabitants being surprised by the shadow passing over them as they turned to shield their eyes and view this other-worldly hulk with its huge guns sliding silently by.

I enjoyed a walk into town for a meal and ambling along the wide promenade limning the waterfront. An English-speaking local hailed me over to his small beachcomber bar and translated to his friends as we exchanged information. Later that night, a few of us took the captain out for a dinner to celebrate his birthday. There I enjoyed a meat dish called churasco composed of steak, tripe, blood sausage, etc.

Our escort, actually the captain's bodyguard, was a Venezuelan junior naval officer who told us that all officers were required to carry the sidearm they had been issued when they were commissioned and that losing it would jeopardize their career. We nonetheless prevailed upon him to leave it behind when we went out to dinner.

Iowa got underway on the 29th of June and headed west to catch up to the UNITAS group. RADM Taylor, the current COMSOLANT, and a Venezuelan admiral flew over by helicopter to witness our first-ever firepower demonstration. We managed to get seven of the nine big guns to go off in a "broadside" (nobody could tell the difference).

These demonstrations were to be a constant thorn in my side for a number of reasons. We, being relatively inexperienced in being battleship sailors, were always under the microscope trying to make our antiquated equipment perform to the zero tolerance standards of the modern Navy, which it wouldn't. When the captain voiced some mild form of recommendation for a better performance, the XO took off running with the idea and made out as if the Weapons Department was composed of a bunch of idiots. Additionally, the coordination of a firepower demo took a lot of time away from the business of training the crew to fight the guns. The goals of having a well-trained crew ready to fight the ship and a crew capable of delivering on a finely tuned firepower demonstration were simply incompatible because the gun crews were not being trained to deliver rapid and accurate gunfire while firing a few choreographed shots into the water for bigwigs.

After a relatively steep learning curve during the early firepower demos, we developed a well-oiled drill which generally went off with few glitches considering the hundreds of people and millions of moving parts involved. From the very first, the firing plan included all permanently mounted gun types which were 16-inch, 5-inch, and the Close-in Weapon Systems (CIWS). The choreography of getting off a well-coordinated demonstration with as few lags as possible in the performance took some doing. For instance, our first effort consisted of firing a couple of bursts out of one of the starboard side 3,000 round per minute CIWS followed by five rounds of 5"/38 from each barrel on that same side in rapid and continuous fire, followed by three rounds of 16"/50, followed by a fifteen-gun broadside of all 5-inch and all 16-inch guns firing one round each simultaneously to starboard. Unfortunately, when we began the 5-inch part of that first demonstration, we did not take into account that if all six guns were loaded and ready for the five-round string each gun was going to fire there would be a big bang as they all six went off when gun plot pulled the trigger and then an awkward delay of five or more seconds was the various gun crews reloaded at their various speeds, and we on the bridge could hear the shouted loading orders coming up out of the gun house hatches. As each gun captain hit the rammer level on the top of the gun, the rounds rammed and fired in a sort of hiccupping fashion until about the third round when there got to be a pretty good barrage going.

My solution to the sarcastic criticism this performance generated from above was to only have the projectile and powder in the trays of all guns except left gun Mount 51. I personally briefed each of the three gun mount captains and six gun captains of Mounts 51. 53, and 55 that after gun plot pulled and held the trigger down and left gun Mount 51 went off, the right gun captain would slam his fist down on his rammer leaver thus firing his gun. The left gun captain in Mount 53 would hit his rammer leaver after he had heard the other two guns go off and so on down the line with each gun firing at about two-second intervals. If for any reason a gun had a misfire in this initial sequence, the next gun scheduled to fire would wait for five seconds before going ahead and hitting his rammer leaver. Each gun was immediately reloaded and fired for four more rounds which meant that Mount 51 was firing its left gun just about a second or two after the right gun of Mount 55 went off and so on giving us a very respectable looking rolling barrage.

Our Marines manned Mount 55 and, being the gung-ho crowd they were, prided themselves on reloading faster than any other gun mount. So, despite getting started last in the initial rounds, they rapidly fired off their allotted ammunition and began cheering the Marine "ooh-rah" as the last round went off. We could always hear them clear up on the 05-level where we controlled the firepower demonstration.

So finally, we get to the finished product of the dignitary visit and firepower demonstration. The VIPs were normally flown on by helicopter and given a tour of the ship by the captain along a well-scrubbed route followed by lunch in his cabin. I was often included along with other department heads to help fill out the captain's table for twelve or so – I think I ate lunch with no less than nine heads of state in my three years assigned to IOWA.

At a previously specified time, usually about a half hour before lunch was expected to conclude, I could faintly hear the word being passed to "Man all gunnery stations." If the helicopter was still aboard, "Flight Quarters" were also called away to get the bird off the deck to avoid its destruction by concussion from Turret III. A few minutes later I would excuse myself from the captain's table and join the Gunnery Officer on the 05-level wearing his sound-powered headphones and telling me were manned and ready. We overlooked the 04-level navigation bridge where the VIPs and CO/XO would witness the demonstration.

I would nod to the captain when he appeared that we were manned and ready, and I would listen to him give a generalized description of what was to ensue. When he directed the attention of the VIPs to the CIWS, Gun sent the order the CIWS technician in CEC to fire off two 200-round bursts to hit the water a couple hundred yards to starboard.

Then as the Captain gestured toward the five-inch guns, I would nod to the Guns who had already given the orders to gun plot for Mounts 51, 53, and 55 to shift to remote control. The three mounts were trained forward, their normal underway condition, and that was where plot's MK-1A computer was set so that the gunfire control technician there could then very smoothly rotate the wheel on the MK-1A to simultaneously train all three mounts out to the starboard beam. As they trained out, I told Guns to LOAD left gun Mount 51 and load to the tray all other guns in those mounts with ABLE-ABLE Common set to air burst at 10,000 yards – we could hear the round being slapped down in the trays with a loud metallic clunk reminiscent of the sound a bowling pin makes when hit by the bowling ball. When I got the nod from the Captain, I gave Guns the wink, and the five-inch gun rolling barrage went off for thirty rounds.

As the five-inch guns were loudly barking. We were busy giving orders to Turrets I, II, and III, and Gun Plot was in control of all three turrets ready to train them to starboard. As the VIP was recovering from the five-inch barrage the Captain would tap him on the shoulder to look around forward to see the two big gun turrets slowly training out together to the starboard beam and then to glance aft to note the ends of TIII's barrels also training out. As the turrets completed their movement, all three guns of TI were loaded with 2,700-pound BL&P (Blind Loaded and Plugged) rounds with a full charge of six powder bags (660 pounds of pounder in total), and at the Captain's nod we fired each gun of T-I at five second intervals starting with left gun, then center, then right to get the VIP sort of conditioned to what was coming.

As the right gun of T-I was firing, we gave the orders to load all main battery guns and Mounts 51. 53. and 55. This always took a minute or two and the Captain would be talking to the VIP until I nodded our readiness to him. He always got the VIPs standing all the way out against the starboard bridge wing where the conning officer stood during alongside replenishment to get the full effect of the coming broadside. Guns and I and the other personnel on the 05-level always backed up to shield ourselves behind the armored citadel and stood mouth open and balanced on our toes when the fire order was given. When the guns went off there was a noticeable ripple effect like Mohammed Ali fast punching your body because the three big guns in each turret were set to fire at two tenths of a second behind each other, Left, Center, Right in order that the big projectiles would not interfere with each other in flight. Now that the VIP was dazed, the Captain would point out the huge white splashes of the dud 16-inch guns at the 10,000 yards (about the shortest range we could shoot) with the six five-inch AAC rounds bursting black about 1,000 yards in front of them of and lashing the water with white shrapnel splashed.

The next thing I wanted to hear from Guns was. "All bores clear, no casualties." If we had a misfire, and it was not TIII, the VIPs would be escorted aft to the helo which was just landing whisked away with a tale to tell their grandchildren or their impressed followers who had not made the cut to fly out to witness the biggest guns on earth in action.

We anchored off the Columbian port of Cartegena on the 3rd of July with me once more at the conn. I was beginning to wonder when any of the junior officers were going to start conning. Our visit to this port was plagued by liberty boat problems and the long ride to shore through an entrance studded with reefs that chewed up boat propellers. I was able to get ashore one day and wander around with our dentists, Wayne Labore and John Schreiber. Another day, I went on an abortive snorkeling trip, which ended when the boat we were in had mechanical problems and we ended up at one of the small forts on an island guarding the main port. We ended up getting a ride to the city on a ferryboat.

Just before we were scheduled to get underway for our next port of call in Montego Bay, Jamaica, we discovered that there was an old US destroyer that had been sold long ago to the Columbians about to be towed to sea and sunk as a target. Luckily for us, there was a MK-37 fire control system aboard that the Columbians were willing to let my men scavenge. They took one of the 40-foot liberty boats and disappeared for hours, only returning just before we were scheduled to get underway with a boat full of radar parts including whole consoles.

We anchored in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on the 8th of July and departed on the 10th. While in this port, some of our crew sort of adopted a nearby motel as a base of operations. Sometime after this visit, the Marine Corps detachment commanding officer, Captain Rich Benjamin came to see me with a report from one of his young, idealistic, and impressionable Marines. It seems that while hanging around the pool late one night, this young man had seen a light come on through the sliding glass doors of a first-floor room. In walked the captain and XO of USS *Iowa* (both married men) accompanied by two ladies of the evening. The two couples proceeded to "couple" on the beds without concerning themselves with pulling the drapes. The poor disillusioned Marine was not sure just what to do about this "vision" and had felt the need to unburden himself on his C.O. Rich, who at the time was part of my department, felt impelled to tell me this sad tale, but we both realized that these two "gentlemen" were far from our personal definitions of an officer and a gentleman and that there was nothing we were going to be able to do about that.

Iowa went from Jamaica to St. Thomas after a 40-hour Tomahawk Tactical Qualification conducted by Captain John McHenry and his San Diego-based team who had boarded us in Montego Bay. The ship anchored off Charlotte Amalie Harbor with the XO navigating because Russ Bauer was down with some ailment, and ENS Costello conned – they missed by a couple of hundred yards.

Members of the Navy League treated us very well while we were in St. Thomas. Mr. and Mrs. Larry O'Brien invited the wardroom to their several-acre estate, which overlooked Charlotte Amalie Harbor. Their tropical home was right out of some movie set with its house composed of several "cottages" joined by covered breezeways. There were several German shepherds lying about which were probably let loose at night inside the walled compound.

Another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Kist, befriended several of us and invited us out to their vacation place at Sapphire Beach where we had a much-needed relaxing day.

By the 18th of July, we were at sea again getting ready to do some more shore bombardment exercises off Vieques. That night we did a practice illumination gunnery exercise at sea where we fired at a floating target. Illuminated firings were the most complex we had to perform because the secondary and main battery fire control teams had to work together with the five–inch guns providing the illumination rounds (there being no illumination round for 16-inch guns) while the 16-inch guns shot the destructive rounds. With the 5-inch gun having significantly less range than the main battery 16-inchers, we were required to maneuver the ship within range of the 5-inch illumination rounds, shoot the illumination so that the flare's parachute popped upwind of the target and drifted over the target as the 16-inch round (fired roughly 15 seconds after the illumination round) impacted the target area. The five-inch gun barrel was pointed well up into the air for these shoots, and the 16-inch guns barrels were almost level because of the shortness of the range for the big guns. The flashes of the 5-inch smokeless powders we were using were so bright I could see the bones of my fingers through my closed eyelids. Then the 16-inch gun blast was a large angry orange fireball – quite an experience.

The next day Harold Jones of Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren observed us shooting 36 specially prepared blind-loaded and plugged (BL&P) lightweight (1,800 pounds) projectiles to help determine what the true initial velocity variations are for the main battery powder. This series of test firings was extremely important to the Navy because Congress was apparently holding re-activation funds for the next two battleships (Missouri and Wisconsin) hostage over the issue of main battery inaccuracies due to old gunpowder.

With the new installation of velocimeters atop each turret, battleships could now measure the initial velocity (I.V.) of each round fired from the big guns, and what they had found with the *New Jersey's* qualification firings at San Clemente Island was that the IV with the powder made for our 16-inch guns in 50-caliber shooting the heaviest round (the 2700-lb armor-piercing or blind-loaded and plugged) was varying by as much as 120 feet per second. At a medium range on flat terrain, that much variation from shot to shot could mean thousands of yards difference in the

impact point of the flat-shooting 16”/50 naval rifle. But in the modern world without opposing battleships those heavy projectiles now constituted only 60 of our 1,200 rounds of 16-inch projectiles with the 1,800-lb shore bombardment round making up the rest.

The 16”/50 powder was not designed to be shot with the 1,800-lb projectile; so we were outfitted with 16”/45 powder. To improve the IV performance and thus the accuracy of the guns firing the lighter projectile, the Navy got together the three remaining lots of 16”/45 powder and mixed them together into one large grand lot.

The problem was that the lighter round did not come blind-loaded (blank) and thus could not be fired on the Navy’s shore bombardment ranges. So how were we to prove the accuracy of our guns firing the most likely projectile with the most likely powder? This question came to us in the form of a message from the Secretary of the Navy, and the captain asked for me to formulate the response. After gathering my experts together, we came up with the request for a number of 1,800-lb practice rounds all weighing within 20 pounds of each other.

Our request was speedily complied with by the order to Naval Weapons Station, Crane, IN to steam the explosives out of a bunch of 1,800-lb projectiles followed by refilling with vermiculite followed by express shipment to us in the back of a C-5 cargo plane. When we anchored off Roosevelt Roads to receive our special projectiles, the commanding officer of Crane, a full Navy captain, was aboard the large landing craft to ensure this high priority got to us. He stayed with us throughout the trial shoot.

I had the rounds split evenly between turret one and two to ensure that some casualty would not prevent the test going forward. That night, we fired a few rounds at sea to get the feel of them. Of course, the velocimeter in turret one failed to register an IV on the first shot; so we fired a few more until we realized the damned thing was kaput and that we had no spare parts for it. Now we had wasted test projectiles and still had no idea how the IVs were varying. I refused to allow one of the other turrets to be cannibalized of its velocimeter to fix the faulty one on the grounds that we could just end up with two broken instruments. So, we crossed our fingers and fired one from turret two, and the velocimeter there worked. Rather than waste more valuable and scarce rounds, we hoped for the best the next day on the range and spent a few hours that night running a bunch of these projectiles from turret one to turret three down the full length of the overhead monorail in “Broadway” to turret three at the aft end of the ship because as far as we could tell, its velocimeter worked. The powder we wanted to test was already pretty evenly spread between all three turrets; so at least we did not have to mess around moving actual explosives.

The next day, we showed up on the range at Viequez full of doubts and hope, and I stationed myself down in Forward Gun Plot rather than my usual station beside the gunnery officer above the bridge. Our first fire mission of the day was to shoot a few of the test rounds using reduced charge (8-inch gunpowder) just see that our basic setup was correct and that we could plop those rounds in exactly the placed called for at 10,000 yards. The gun barrels we elevated as far as I had ever seen them as we were firing like an Army howitzer rather than like a naval gun.

Next, we shifted to the test powder and moved out to 20,000 yards. With the gun barrels now lower because of the full power powder we were firing, we again placed the rounds right where they were called for with only 50-yard spots form the observer on the mountain overlooking the range. I don’t remember paying a lot of attention to the IVs we were getting because we were shooting well, and I was more interested in the results at the target end of things.

Finally, we shifted out to 40,000 yards, almost our maximum range. As far as we knew no battleship in WWII had ever fired shore bombardment at such an extreme range. In fact, most of the time, you see film of them shoot with guns almost level over the top of landing craft. One of the range requirements was that the turret officer had to visually identify the tower where the observation post (OP) was located in order to confirm his guns were not trained on it. His periscope was of limited power, but eventually Joe Harris in turret three decided that the tiny

speck he saw twenty sea miles away was indeed the OP. It all seemed a near-run thing in development.

The commanding officer of Weapons Station Crane was standing next to me in plot as we fired the first shot and we had to wait several minutes for the projectile to hit and be marked by the OP. We were just hoping it would land somewhere in the spotter's field of view when the radio blared out the spot of "drop 350 yards." We were all ecstatic because a 16-inch explosive round that close would have been almost a hit. The next shot would tell the tale about how consistently the powder was shooting and how well our fire control system worked. We applied the spot to the computer and fired. The spotter came back with a 50-yard spot, meaning he was just playing around with shot placement in the bull's eye because he would never have been able to tell a 50-yard difference with an exploding sell.

The test was a huge success. I took all the spotting information and plotted each round we had fired that day onto a sheet of paper. Then I went to the radio room and had the radiomen type out the message to the Secretary of the Navy saying we had conducted his test for him and that the plotted data was included below. In order to make the radio message format match my plotted sheet, the radiomen and I adjusted the "Xs" on their printout until their data overlaid mine. Then I had them print out the scale of yards to inch of paper in each dimension so that the data could be plotted in Washington.

The next day we received a "well done" from DC. The Secretary took the data and plotted it over the capitol building and took it to the senators who were holding up battleship funds. It was clear that at 20 miles we could have obliterated the building in short order and that the big guns were highly accurate. The funds were soon released.

We pulled into Martinique on 23 July 1984 to offload some Midshipmen. The wardroom rented a room at one of the supposedly better hotels, but it seemed seedy to me. Dr. Jack Briggs and I were detailed to lead a contingent of officers to the French Navy repair ship La Garonne on the 25th where we ate lunch with the captain who spoke excellent English. While there, we got word of the *Iowa*'s plan to leave port to avoid some tropical weather blowing into the area. We ended up leaving sixteen people ashore. After rolling around a little bit at sea, we returned the next day to pick them up.

Iowa arrived at Bridgetown, Barbados on the 27th of July, mooring to a tanker pier seaward of the breakwater using only one tug. At one point we were perpendicular to the pier as we got the number one line over to a buoy inland of the end of the pier, which was only 240 feet long, but the tug managed to get us straightened out. The US Ambassador hosted an elegant dinner for the head of state and several other ambassadors under a large awning up on the spacious 01 level outside the captain's cabin where liquor was served by special authority from the Secretary of the Navy. I was talking to the ambassador's wife, a charming woman about my age, when she asked me to make sure the "Brigadier" (head of Barbados armed force) had a drink. Everybody else seemed to have had sense enough to get their own, but I did her bidding and thereafter remained clear of her as I enjoyed dinner amongst a group of Midshipmen who were invited. Jack Briggs and I made off with the captain's car and driver at one point to tour the Atlantic side of the island where we saw lots of sugar cane fields, old plantation houses, and ruined windmills from colonial days. I also made good use of the wardroom "admin" at a local hotel where I enjoyed relaxing in the surf and listening to steel drum band music.

Iowa got underway for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (GITMO) on the 30th to join guided missile destroyer USS *Conyngham*, frigate USS *Groves,* and two hydrofoil gunboats, USS *Aries* and USS *Hercules* for transit to the Panama Canal. We loaded stores all day and got underway from GITMO on the 2nd of August arriving at Colon on the 5th. Enroute, we put on a ragged firepower demo for the other ships thanks in part to the XO's pushing us too hard to perform.

We got the crew up at 0400 the next morning to start our transit of the canal to the Pacific side. Joe Frank, the Operations Officer conned the first half of the transit, and I did the second half, not that there was much discretion on our parts. We would snuggle up to one lock wall and give the ship a 10-knot bell just to get it moving into the basin. Before my time to conn up on the 08-level, I was hanging around the main navigation bridge on the 04-level as we neared the end of our run across Gatun Lake, where a dramatic turn occurs in the waterway. All of a sudden, I saw a large car carrier coming from the other direction emerging from the turn. Two large vessels meeting at a sharp bend in a channel is never a good idea, and at one point all I could see was car carrier in every window of the bridge! Somehow, we both made it through the turn without incident. At the last descending lock, I gave a 10-knot bell to start the exit, but the ship would not move as the propellers thrashed the water at our stern. The ship's almost square mid-section so completely filled the lock that water could not get by it to the stern to force us out. The pilot called the lock operator for a "flush" which entailed opening valves to let some water in to push us out. We were up on the 08-level conning station in the tower just forward of and above the forward stack. With a tail wind during some of the locking, we were almost asphyxiated, and our tropical white uniforms were turned light gray.

I was left in charge of the ship all day the 7th as the captain, XO, and Operations Officer went off to attend briefings all day long - a nice quiet day during which I got a lot done.

Our mission in the Pacific was to go up the coast on a show-of-force/surveillance run. To help us in this mission, several Army Huey helicopters were detailed to us. After they landed, we stowed them closely around turret 3; they had to be in the air to avoid being damaged before we did any big-gun firing. We fired off a broadside on the 10th of August for some low-ranking US and Salvadoran military and CIA people, probably the first time all fifteen guns went off as planned. El Salvador was in the midst of a civil war, and we were trying to show support for the elected government and let Nicaragua, their next-door neighbor, know we were in the area.

President Duarte of El Salvador and some of his cabinet arrived on board by helicopter for lunch and a firepower demo on the 13th of August 1984. I was invited to the captain's cabin to fill out the lunch table and enjoyed the President's company. He spoke excellent English and after the firepower demo jokingly asked me if I could do it again with the guns pointing to Nicaragua, his pesky communist neighbor. He had mentioned during lunch that he intended to announce a new plan to politically attack the Nicaraguan government. A broken wire in mount 55 contributed to a misfire there, and the right gun cradle of turret 3 malfunctioned meaning we did not fire that gun either during the broadside – nobody noticed.

When President Duarte flew aboard, we had the rail manned with hundreds of sailors in their whites. He was so impressed with this display that he asked the captain if he could see the laundry that could clean so many uniforms. His itinerary from the bridge, where he witnessed the firepower demo, to the helo deck had been planned very carefully to include a brief tour but certainly nothing as deep in the ship as the laundry. We were all standing around the helo deck to see him off and wondered where he and the captain and their Marine escort were when they emerged from a nearby hatch.

Sometime before the 20th of August we pulled back into Balboa, Panama and offloaded another contingent of Midshipmen and took on fuel before returning to our presence mission farther north. On the 19th we put on a firepower demo for the US Ambassador to Costa Rica (a Mr. Windsor) and some media types. Center gun turret 3 had a binding breech plug and was not fired.

The XO and Operations officer flew into Costa Rica with the ambassador leaving us a quiet night. Skin flicks were shown in the wardroom. The Ops officer, Joe Lee Frank, USNA 68, was also the senior watch officer and had by now acquired a reputation as a bit of a "screamer." Although a year junior to him and to a limited degree subject to his rule (with CO/XO approval) over watch standing issues, we were more or less equals. We enjoyed our carpool times together when we were in Norfolk where we could both tell each other how much we hated the XO and what a dope

the CO was, but Joe was by and large a “company man” and prone to a leadership style I would never personally employ. We all began to call him “the round mound of sound,” commentary on his stature as well as his stentorian voice. I would witness the adverse effects of his style in later years.

We operated in the Gulf of Fonseca off La Union on the 21st of August conducting a firepower demo for a group of Hondurans. We were also sending small groups of sailors in our 40-foot utility boats into La Union for goodwill projects like painting and repairing schools. At one point, I was tapped to lead a group of 48 men on this project but was replaced by the First Lieutenant, Chris Martin, at the last moment. This was fine with me, especially since we got an emergency medical call relayed to us from a US merchantman, the *Star of Texas*, 280 miles away. Our captain had flown ashore at the invitation of the US ambassador, leaving the XO in charge. With the First Lieutenant also gone with the utility boats, the XO placed me in charge of the upcoming seamanship evolution. USS *Conyngham* was tasked with taking care of our boats and men with the plan being to tow the boats astern for the night. I met with all the Deck and Medical Department people concerned to ensure we had our ducks in a row.

We met the *Star of Texas* at 2000 on the 22nd of August, and I was the boat officer in the whaleboat we sent over. The water was smooth, which helped a lot. I went up the lowered accommodation ladder to find two deckhands lounging about a bit forward of the ladder as if nothing in the world was the matter. I had to ask them where the patient was - a very strange and indifferent greeting given the circumstances. I sent Dr. John Harmon and a corpsman to attend to the patient who it turned out was suffering from a couple of stab wounds while I went up to the bridge to find the ship’s master, but, oddly to me, he was not there. I finally found the elderly mariner in his cabin. It was quickly decided that we would take the patient back with us and later helicopter him ashore to Guatemala. The XO, ever the show-off, sent an invitation to the master for a courtesy visit which he accepted, necessitating more boat trips back and forth. He bored the master, who was in a hurry to move on with his cargo, with the details of our mission before I took him back to his ship.

The next two days, we were back off Guatemala to perform our usual lunch and firepower demos for the US ambassador to that country and some Guatemalan officers.

The XO picked me to be the helicopter escort officer on the 25th for a pickup of the head of the Salvadoran Navy and their entire supreme court. It seemed President Duarte was so impressed with us he wanted those worthies to come out for a visit as well. Two Hueys lifted off with me in my tropical whites and my Smith and Wesson .38 snub-nosed revolver and a 13-man medical assist team. The gun was for self-defense if we went down over rebel country. After dropping off the medical folks, the two helos continued on over vast forested areas interspersed with tall volcanic mountains headed toward Ilopongo Airport in capital of San Salvador. The pilots generally stayed at 3500 feet or more to avoid rebel ground fire except when we fluttered down into a small red tile roofed village call San Michel for fuel. I couldn’t see anything like a helo pad as we descended, and the veteran Army warrant officers put us down in a small clearing outside of town. Then a teenaged boy dressed in camouflage jumped up out of nowhere dragging a fuel hose – amazing. As we continued our flight, I could hear in my headphones what the pilots said was rebel radio chatter some of which taunted us about coming down lower.

Ilopongo was a military airport surrounded with barbed wire and gun emplacements. There seemed to be a fair amount of activity, no doubt involving secret US activities to support the government of President Duarte. There were armed aircraft of varying types and vintages.

Arriving back at the ship at 1100, we circled to view the manned rails and then landed for the usual lunch and firepower demo. The firing circuit in turret 2 was lost when a matchbook cover that had been placed between two contacts (doubtless by some dopey shipyard worker) fell out, and the windshield of a variable-time projectile was crushed into the bore of mount 55, probably through overzealous handling by the Marines who manned that gun.

After leaving the ship with our guests, I noticed a downed bridge as we flew back to Ilopongo. This damage to a key national artery by the rebels had made US national news the year before.

The pilots were in a tee-shirt buying mood when we landed at back at Ilopongo. The small canteen run by a Salvadoran had shirts with mottos like “Death to Communism,” and the pilots had the kiosk operator not knowing whether he was coming or going during their wheeling and dealing.

While this was going on, I bumped into a National Guard pilot who had just flown a C-123 Caribou into the country. He said while he was flying along over the water (at what must have been some sort of surveillance-avoiding altitude) the whole ocean erupted in front of him causing him to have to swerve to avoid the columns of water. I managed to conceal my USS *Iowa* nametag while asking him what time this had happened. I told him that gee, I couldn’t imagine what was going on out there and quickly climbed back into the Huey. He was no doubt flying arms into El Salvador on a hush-hush mission, and we had nearly shot him down with a firepower demo. I later informed Joe Frank, whose job it was to ensure the air and sea space into which we shot was clear, about this discussion but kept it from the XO who would have probably overreacted in some dumb way. What a near-run thing that had been, both the gun shoot and my near discovery by the pilot!

We arrived in Balboa, Panama again on the 28th of August where the XO got us department heads together. He told us he was leaving for a “liaison visit” to Cozumel (it turned out he had a rendezvous there with a mistress) and that after the ship passed through the canal back to the Atlantic, I would remain in Panama to fly to Honduras to arrange details of a planned visit by the ship to La Ceiba in that country.

Reveille on the 30th was at 0430, and the lieutenants conned the ship (yippee, finally) as I was assigned to escort the US ambassador (Mr. Briggs) to Panama and his party around the ship during the canal transit.

I hitched a ride back across the isthmus from Colon to Balboa with our liaison officer at midnight and spent a few hours in the guest house at Rodman Naval Station before getting up again at 0430 to go out to Johnson Air Force Base where I was to hitch a ride to Tegucigalpa, Honduras on a C-12 twin-turboprop aircraft belonging to the Commander-in-Chief Southern Command (CINCSOUTH). CINCSOUTH and Ambassador Briggs were headed north for a conference, and we stopped in El Salvador to pick up Ambassador Pickering. There we had to discuss whether or not weight limits for flying over the mountains to Tegucigalpa were going to get me booted off. There was discussion that I could hop a H-47 Chinook helicopter for that portion of the trip. I was not looking forward to being stranded in war-torn El Salvador and was luckily allowed back onto the plane.

Lieutenant Commander Bob Hopkins of the US Military Group Honduras met me in Tegucigalpa, and we took CINCSOUTH’s plane and flew down to La Ceiba on the coast where we were met by Randy Fleming, an ex-SEAL and currently manager of the Standard Fruit Company banana operation there. He introduced us to the local powers-that-be so I could begin to make arrangements for the *Iowa’s* visit. Then Bob and I hopped a commercial flight back to the capital to sew up loose ends and send a message to the ship about our findings in La Ceiba.

Bob was having a fine time as a swinging bachelor in Honduras and rented a nice home on a hill overlooking the capital. The house was on an approved list of rentals because it had a steel-gated safe room in which he was required to keep an Uzi submachine gun and other lethal weapons to hold off possible kidnappers. So maybe duty there was not all that great. Anyway, we went out to a local restaurant with his Honduran girlfriend and enjoyed the evening.

The next morning, we were off to visit the Honduran Navy headquarters at Puerto Cortez, about 220 miles away over twisting, pot-holed mountain roads. We drove in a bulletproof SUV so we

could not lower the windows – thankfully, the air conditioner worked. We stopped in San Pedro Sula, a fairly modern looking area, to get a hotel room before continuing on to the base about 40 minutes farther on. The base was a neat and orderly affair with a number of patrol boats moored at the piers, but the nearby town of Tela was a real eyesore. We discussed a medical assist team visit to the base with the base commander and dental care for the local orphans with a Peace Corps worker named Jay Bol.

After our work around the Navy base and Tela, we traveled back down the coast to La Ceiba where we checked in with the fruit company to take advantage of their kind offer of a guest house. We found ourselves at an old but well-kept wooden building. Inside the front door we encountered a long sitting and dining room with a row of doors along the back wall admitting to a kitchen with stocked refrigerator and about five bedrooms.

La Ceiba was a relatively small city/large town with its economy depending in large part on the fruit company, making Randy Fleming the power behind the throne in town. He worked very hard to get along with the local leaders so as not to step on any toes. The place was obviously not a rich town meaning there were many things that strong and capable hands could help with. By the time the *Iowa* arrived a few days later, I had a list of goodwill jobs for our troops to get involved with. Several hundred officers and men trooped ashore in their work clothes to begin the projects. There was much more accomplished than anybody probably expected due to the inventiveness of the American sailor. With only a small banana boat pier in shallow water to serve the town, the ship was required to anchor about a mile offshore.

Tours were run out to the ship using our own boats for several hours each day, one day being reserved for school kids and another for the students from some nearby college. We had dropped in on the local army commander at his base a during the preparation phase and had spoken to him about security, and he had agreed to assist at the pier. Unfortunately, one never quite knows what may transpire in a central American country with all that Latin blood flowing, and the college students became a bit rowdy when people clearly not students began filtering into the lines with pushing and shoving ensuing in the vicinity of the steps down to the boat landing. I was farther out on the pier doing something else when, the troops got tired of dealing with them and started shooting (maybe a hundred rounds) at the wooden pier decking in front of the crowd and over their heads to get them under control. What they failed to note was that there were railroad tracks laid down on the pier, and bullet fragments ricocheted off the rails into the crowd. Nobody was seriously hurt that I could tell, and the crowd swelled back to its former size after a brief period. I finally took a bullhorn and explained through an interpreter that everybody on the pier could not be accommodated with a ship visit that day. When a minor rush started on the boat landing as I loaded the last boat, I got the shore patrol and beach guard into a boat and stood off the pier until things quieted down and I could reestablish some control – discretion being the better part of valor. Another near-run thing kind of day in the life of a naval officer.

After all the commotion, I went to dinner at Ricardo's with Ray and Joy Machall who run the fruit company-sponsored school.

On another day, I was the escort for the Honduran President-designate Mr. Marcelino Ponce to and from the ship for a state visit. He seemed much moved by the 21-gun salute the ship gave him from the 40-millimeter saluting battery as we departed in the captain's gig.

Sunday, the 2nd of September was a quiet day, and I accepted an invitation by the Fleming family to accompany them to a nearby river beach for a swim and picnic. They had a pet otter that also came along and enjoyed romping with the kids in the water.

Finally, the port visit was over, and with the end of my duties as the advanced party I reported back aboard the ship to find the atmosphere much relaxed with the XO gone. The proposed visit to Cozumel was cancelled over some spat the US and Mexican governments were having over

immigration issues meaning that the XO would not be able to return to the ship until we got to Fort Lauderdale.

I went to see the Captain Gneckow several days after we left La Ceiba to complain about the domineering and imperious methods the XO had been using to cut the department heads off from their authorized direct contact with the captain. He said at one point that he intended to be less cut off from the department heads and would talk to the XO about easing up on micro-managing details that could run themselves. He asked me if I thought my talking to the XO would help, but I told him I could not communicate with a crazy person. Enough time had passed that we could all tell that nobody but a superior could tell the XO anything. In the end, he told me that the only consolation he could give me was that the XO was not scheduled to be around that much longer – he was with us until January the following year. Not too long after the XO returned, he told us that he knew about people complaining to the captain about him, and that was the last time I trusted Captain Gneckow.

We were delayed in Fort Lauderdale because of Hurricane Diana, which was pummeling the Atlantic coast. So, we relaxed a bit and took advantage of a Navy League invitation to the wardroom for a reception at a pub with the improbable name of Brooklyn Navy Yard Canteen in Deerfield Beach. The *Iowa* was built in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. There were various and sundry obsolete ship-related items on the walls as decoration, and I spied a firing circuit bull's eye light that we needed for turret 3. One of the Navy League ladies approached the owner who gladly parted with the item in exchange for a plaque and some items we could spare. Pictures were taken for the local paper. On another evening, I took myself out to a theater to see the movie E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial.

On one of the several trips north along the US Atlantic coast running toward Norfolk that I took aboard *Iowa,* maybe this one, we had a US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) aboard. These detachments, led by a USCG LT, ride US Navy ships of opportunity and act as the law when any drug smugglers or other illegal activity is discovered. US Navy personnel, being military, cannot be used to enforce the laws of the United States, but the "Coasties" can. So when a law enforcement action is contemplated and a LEDET is aboard, the US Coast Guard flag is run up the mast and voila, the ship is officially a Coast Guard cutter with the LEDET officer-in-charge and running the show.

Thinking, "What trouble could we possibly get into on a leisurely cruise from Florida to back home in Norfolk," I let the Marine officer-in-charge (OIC) liaison with the USCG LDET, and I think at some point they roped either the Gunnery Officer or his direct junior in the chain of command, the Secondary Battery Officer (in charge of my 5"/38 guns and all small arms), into their scheme of maneuver for handling encounters with possible drug smugglers. At some point I guess I got the thumbs up that Weapons Department was well represented in the thoroughgoing support of our sister service's efforts and protecting our coasts. Good enough for me because I knew my guys were the best!

So, one calm, clear day oof the Carolinas, our lookouts spied a small "head boat" fishing off the Carolina coast, and the LEDET decided to check it out. When I remember this episode, I always think of a cartoon I once saw of a battleship with its big guns trained out toward a small vessel with the ballooned caption from the bridge saying, "Pull over!" I heard the call, "Away the LEDET," and thought I'd wander out onto the main deck to watch the unfolding events.

So here was the battleship, pulled to a stop about a quarter of a mile away from this fishing boat with a bunch of scruffy looking Carolinians with their poles over the side. All of a sudden, a bunch of Marines came boiling out of the superstructure and plopped down prone on the teak deck while above me a couple of decks I heard the unmistakable "kerchunk" of the bolt of ma-deuce (.50 caliber M2 machinegun) slamming home on a belt of ammo as gunner's mates loaded and pointed this awesome weapon at the hapless fishermen. Shortly, our heavily armed motor whaleboat, with LEDET embarked chugged off from our side headed over to board and search

the fishing boat. I can only imagine what the innocent fishermen were thinking as I stood aft on the main deck watching this circus. Finally, I thought that discretion was the better part of valor in case the fishermen were the shoot back kind or more likely the captain might be staring down from the bridge, and I departed the scene for my officer safely out of sight and behind the armor belt on the second deck.

On the 17th of October 1984 I got the *Iowa* underway from Norfolk as OOD for Brooklyn, New York, the ship's birthplace. The XO was busy with numerous visitors including the press we had for this trip meaning his overbearing presence was absent from the bridge making events flow better.

As usual, our MK37 directors could not track an aircraft-towed target, but we put of a decent firepower demo (center gun turret 2 had a switch issue).

One of my main duties during the transit north was to entertain and guide embarked reporters around the ship. One of the ground rules of introducing a reporter into a military environment where they may interview people like me was to ensure that the interviewee, i.e., me, was informed of whether the reporter was hostile. This was not done leaving me exposed to probing questions from an unfriendly reported from the New York Times. We got into a discussion about 16-inch gun accuracy while we were touring gun plot, and I mentioned the issue that the Navy had had with the highly variable initial velocity of the old 16"/50 powder that had been issued when the battleships were re-commissioned. I mentioned the recent shelling of a mountain-top hideout of bad guys in Lebanon by the USS *New Jersey* and the fact that it took 290 rounds to take out this target and that this seemingly excessive number of rounds may have been the result of using this old powder IF indeed they were actually using the old powder. Well, the reporter took this as a positive statement that the *New Jersey's* bombardment had been the result of inaccurate powder, bad shooting or whatever else and questioned the Navy's wisdom in bringing back the battleships. His slanted report later went nationwide.

In the meanwhile, I was chosen to conn the ship into New York harbor in initially poor visibility, but traffic was light, giving me a clear channel. It was a good thing because the air was full of buzzing news helicopters making for a great amount of noise on the bridge. The bridge of a battleship is actually a fairly compact area because it was sized so as not to interfere with the arc of fire from turret 2. I ended up standing at the centerline gyro repeater with the pilot on one side and somebody else on the other side trying to hear the navigator from around the curve of the 17-inch-thick conning tower where the helmsman and engine order telegraph operator stood. I had to turn and look through the small battle vision slit in the conning tower's armor to loudly call out engine and rudder commands and watch as the two men there acknowledged. It was impossible to get out on the bridge wings to check the port and starboard quarters.

We steamed under the Verazanno Narrows Bridge on the 19th of October and fired a 21-gun salute to the city of New York abreast Fort Hamilton and then moved on up the Hudson River to fire another 21-gun salute to the USS *Intrepid* before turning back down river to anchor near Staten Island for a while to allow dredging to be completed at our Brooklyn pier. Several hours later, two mooring pilots assisted us as we moved to the pier almost under the Brooklyn Bridge. With the XO busy with his public relations duties, I enjoyed the day of unmolested ship driving. The captain was his usual "lump on a log" self except when he was pulling the handle to the ship's whistle to respond to the NYC "three-whistle salute" from the loaded ferries. As we pulled into the pier under the control of the docking pilots, I had a chance to look at all the faces peering out of windows of the tall buildings all around us. Later, I was interviewed on deck by a radio station WOR reporter on my reaction to the proposed anti-nuclear demonstration, which wished us to leave port and about general ship information.

On the first night in port the wardroom was invited to a Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce reception at the City College. We were informed that the local longshoremen were happy to have us

visiting because of the extra jobs and work involved and that they might “knock heads” with the effete anti-nuclear demonstrators hanging about outside the gate.

I can say now, many years later, that the *Iowa* never carried nuclear weapons while I was aboard, and I have no idea if she ever did thereafter. What I can say is that her Tomahawk missile system was capable of launching a nuclear-tipped version of that missile, but we had not yet been certified to carry nukes (that happened a few months later). We were working toward the certification but had not yet achieved it. None of this could be told to the press, and the anti-nuclear weapon demonstrators could only assume whatever came to their minds. The idea of a protest in NYC seemed to be taken in stride by the dozens of police stationed in the area, but the predicted presence of Jesse Jackson, the hypocritical black activist, seemed to swell the crowd.

In the end, their demonstration was a bust. The “great man” arrived with his entourage and said a few obligatory words before coming aboard for a tour! Imagine the cheek! Of course, since the captain was off the ship, our brown-nosed publicity hound XO took him all over the ship in places the public was not allowed. I was stuck below in the wardroom where I was helping host a Navy league luncheon and missed all this. Later, about 160 of the demonstrators got in line with the rest of the public who wished to walk our decks. They were easy to spot from their quirky clothing, and the cops and our Master-At-Arms force kept a good eye on them as they split off from the flow of humanity after coming aboard at the aft gangway. They then proceeded to form up in a circle well aft on the helo pad to chant some drivel before sitting down, probably anticipating a forced removal which the hovering press would no doubt happily video. What they did not anticipate was that we would do nothing but reroute the crowd of authentically interested visitors around them and then forward to the gangway at the bow where they exited. Once they saw they were being ignored, the protestors got up and asked to go on the tour, but they were escorted off the aft gangway. That was that for the much talked about protest. What a joke.

That night my sister Jean picked me up and took me to her home in Westport, CN. I had not seen my nephew Randy and nieces Meg and Abbey in a good while and enjoyed the overnight. Randy was quite interested in becoming a naval aviator and would graduate from the Naval Academy in 1990 and go on to fly E-2 Hawkeye early warning aircraft off carriers. The next day, David and the kids took me back to the ship where I gave them a tour. We probably had nearly 100,000 people visit the ship during the time we were in New York.

I was again the conning officer of choice as we got underway from New York on a fast ebb tide. The docking pilots had five or six tugs on hand to get us turned around and headed fair down the East River. Again, we could see many folks looking out of windows in the surrounding buildings as we left.

During the transit back to Virginia, we treated some distinguished visitors to a successful firepower demo. I was assigned to escort several Chinese dignitaries including an admiral who was director of their navy’s equipment and technology, their naval attaché in Washington, DC, and a civilian shipbuilding official. I also had dinner in the captain’s cabin with a party including Congressman Charlie Wilson (later to achieve fame via a book and movie entitled “Charlie Wilson’s War” depicting his role in defeating the Russians in Afghanistan) and Congressman John Murtha (who became infamous for graft and corruption in office). They talked at length about esoteric military procurement issues.

The ship arrived in Norfolk on the 25th of October after getting two secondary battery exercises accomplished.

It was during this period that the Iowa became a part of an intelligence deception plan to fool the Russians into thinking *Iowa* was far more ready for war than was the reality. No actual Tomahawk missiles had been delivered to us because the supply of them was rather thin on the ground in the early months of production with the existing missiles reserved for deployed Tomahawk ships. Navy intelligence knew the Russians were flying photo satellites over the

Norfolk Naval Operating Base to glean any secrets which might be revealed. The “spooks” also knew the times the photo birds flew over. So, they hatched a plan to install some fake missile canisters into our Tomahawk launchers. With the armored box launchers raised up to the inspection/launch position, only the outer few feet of the missile-containing canisters were visible, but one would not be able to discern whether the contents were armed with nuclear or conventional warheads. Missile Officer Bob Owen was given some specifications for the manufacture of a batch of lightweight, fake canister ends for the local machine shop to make up. Nobody was told the purpose for these sheet metal cans. On a satellite-free Friday afternoon, after work hours with nobody around, a machine shop stake truck pulled up on the pier with a bunch of these fakes which were quickly brought aboard and taken to the missile deck to be inserted into the open launchers there. When asked what we should call these things, Bob said “nunyas” a shorthand term for what he told anybody who asked what they were for, “none ya business.” During the following week on clear days and when Soviet satellites were expected overhead, we made sure the launchers were raised showing off what looked like Tomahawk canisters.

As we returned to Norfolk from New York, we got a message from Commander Naval Surface Forces Atlantic detailing the story the hostile New York Times reporter had filed after my discussion with him about 16-inch gun accuracy. The captain asked me what I had said and then filed a message back telling the higher command that I had told nothing but the truth and that he supported me. It was about the only time I ever truly respected him. A staff public affairs officer visited me on board one day to get a feel for what had actually happened during the interview, and that was the last I ever heard of the matter officially.

Iowa got underway from Norfolk on the 1st of November for a 20-day exercise off the east coast and Puerto Rico, including another visit to St. Thomas. We ran about at the generally inept direction of a carrier group commander and Destroyer Squadron 22 until tropical storm Klaus (later hurricane) started bouncing the group around. We even had to secure the main decks for the first time due to foul weather. When we arrived at St. Thomas on the 13th, we saw a number of sailboats blown up on the shores of Charlotte Amalie Harbor.

We came back to the Puerto Rican Operating area after the hurricane passed and got busy with some secondary battery shooting including one called a quick draw where I was using the IMC to announce targets of opportunity to the individual gun mounts. It was a demanding exercise, and the gun crews did well at it. A day or so later we were in a line of ships to fire at a sleeve towed behind a jet. This had been our nemesis exercise for the five-inch guns because of the poor performance of the MK25 radars mounted on the MK 37 directors, but this day Sky four managed to stay locked on the target as we fired one port and one starboard side gun mount at it. On the next pass, the captain told me he wanted all three gun mounts to fire. This meant we needed to throw a bunch of rotary switches in gun plot to get all the mounts under control of Sky four with communications established between the three mount captains and the director. The previous day’s drilling produced good results as all three mounts quickly responded to control changes, and their six guns pounded away in a bright orange blast of color making it look like we were ablaze on that side. We ended up getting about thirty rounds out with a number of target-triggered bursts (meaning hits) on the target. A cruiser astern flashed us a signal to the effect they hoped we never got mad at them.

Topping this performance off, we scored well on a surface target shoot with the secondary battery the next day.

One the 8th of November, we were informed that an ammo replenishment scheduled for several days hence was to take place the next day. We were all rigged and ready by 0700 the next day and took on 402 cans of 16”/45 powder and 48 projectiles plus several hundred rounds of 5”/38-inch ammo by noon. After getting it all stowed, we came back alongside USNS *Nitro* to send back the retrograde material by 1600.

The next day, we were assigned to shoot main and secondary batteries at Viequez in support of spotter training. There was some fumbling around here and there and we had to shift to aft plot because of a MK48 computer problem forward, and we ran out of time to get all our rounds out. The day ended well as the captain and I were invited to celebrate the Marine Corps birthday with our 60 Marines on the mess decks.

I am not exactly sure why I was invited, but it may have been because from time-to-time Captain Rich Benjamin and the XO would have a run-in over something the XO wanted the Marines to do but which Rich thought beyond their responsibilities. When these disagreements boiled to the surface, the XO would call me into his office and tell me that from here on Rich was reporting to me rather than directly to him. After a month or so of me carrying orders to the Marines from the XO, Rich would come tell me that I no longer had to run interference with the XO and that he was reporting to him again. I think this happened a couple of times. Poor Rich, a mere O-3 up against one of the premier overbearing jerk O-6s ever to roam the decks of a naval vessel. I hated it for him, but I also hated to have to deal with this idiot XO over one more thing.

Part way through the birthday event the decks began to rumble as all four screws picked up speed to 25 knots as we headed for the end of the runway off St Thomas to help search for the remains of a Lear Jet that had crashed there. Our small boat found nothing, and the next morning, we moved to anchorage off Charlotte Amalie Harbor.

On the 15th of November, as we headed north toward home, we had more secondary battery radar and personnel error problems as we attempted to shoot another aerial towed target exercise. We also got tangled up in a time crunch trying to get the last main battery shoot done for the competitive year. I would have gladly heaved the whole useless secondary battery over the side.

Iowa arrived in Norfolk on the 21st of November where we entered a “restricted Availability” maintenance period. We finally got a new hydraulic “A” end installed in the elevation mechanism of the center gun of turret 2 to solve the long-standing problem of oscillations in this gun when it was shifted to automatically follow elevation orders from the computer in gun plot. We had been required to have a gunner’s mate at the hand control deep in the turret manually follow the pointer indicator on a dial generated by that computer. It worked OK, but the center gun was always left in firing position after a salvo while the other two guns of the turret automatically moved quickly to the load position.

On the 17th of January 1985, *Iowa* got underway with 150 guests aboard. The day started out poorly as Joe Frank picked me up at 0615 in a snowstorm, but skies later cleared. We fired a pre-action calibration from the main battery and some rounds from the CIWS gun mounts.

The ship was due to be dry docked in April and spend several months in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard as part of its post-commissioning work. However, it was decided that it could be used in its presence mission off Central America again during the intervening weeks rather than just sit around waiting to offload ammunition before going into the yard. After some dithering about, our prospective boss during the mini-deployment, Commander Cruiser Destroyer Group Eight (in USS *Ticonderoga*), decided that an advanced liaison officer should be sent ahead. Thus, on the 4th of February 1985, I, having again been dubbed the advanced liaison, watched the *Iowa* get underway from Norfolk without me.

I arrived at the Marriott Hotel on Panama City, Panama on the 5th of February, and after an uncomfortable night moved to the BOQ at Rodman Naval Station. There I checked in with Commander Naval Forces South, Captain Ryan, and ended up with a desk in the Latin American Programs office where I help draft some logistics messages related to the ship’s activities. I also called to the US Defense Attaché Office in Costa Rica to arrange the next leg of my trip.

I left Panama on TACA International Airlines early on the morning of the 6th of February and landed in San Jose, Costa Rica at 0630 to be met my US Army Lieutenant Colonel Chip Maldonado. We went downtown to the US Embassy where his assistant and we worked on a summary message for a port visit by *Iowa* and USS *King*. Before leaving work for the day, we got a call from the United States Information Service, which was coordinating the visit of Miss America and her retinue, wondering what Chip might have in mind for activities. We quickly replied that we had a battleship full of American sailors pulling in during her time in Costa Rica and that she would be welcomed aboard for lunch one day while the ship was in port. I knew we had done well!

That evening I enjoyed the company of Chip and his French wife, Jeanine in their palatial Spanish-style home. We went to dinner at Warrant Office Duane Deacon's home, another very nice place. One of the things I noticed about their lives, as I did on all my visits to this part of the world, was the intense attention given to security. The windows in the embassy had ant-bugging vibrators attached, and the family residences were secure and watched, and the men carried concealed side arms. Part of this heavy emphasis on security was no doubt attributable to the gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in the third world. Unfriendly political factions doubtless contributed their fair share to the mild paranoia. I was never completely comfortable wandering around in Central and South America.

The next day, Chip and I got up early and headed down to the Caribbean-side port of Limon, a three-hour ride down roads similar to Honduras. There we ran about checking the port facilities and talking to the local government. Limon reminded me a lot of La Ceiba.

Back in Panama, I met the ship as it pulled into Colon on the 9th of February and quickly sought out the face of LCDR Bob Flenniken, my Gunnery Officer to get a feel for how things had gone in my absence. A long-delayed local-control main battery surface shoot had been scheduled to occur during the trip down. We had never let the turrets "loose" under the control of their own turret officers to shoot at anything, but this exercise was a required drill. Usually, their targets were way too far away for them to see through their low-powered periscopes, but this exercise was designed to be shot at relatively short ranges. Bob, knowing what was on my mind, gave me the thumbs-up sign and later told me that the exercise went very well, and that captain had gone down into the turret gun house for the first time during a firing. He said he learned a lot, and the XO typically quipped that the secret to passing these exercises was apparently to put the captain in the turret and leave me ashore! Funny guy, ho, ho.

LCDR Bob Owen, my Missile Officer, who had been nominally in charge of the department while I was gone, said the XO was atypically not leaning on everybody in the department possibly because he knew it would be hard on them without me to protect them from him, a strange dynamic indeed. Anyway, I spent some time clearing out my "in" basket.

At the recommendation of Captain Ryan's staff at Rodman, I invited Mr. Jimmy Rojas, manager of the Brazos Brook Country Club in Colon to lunch aboard. The benefit was that later on, the ship's officers got a chance to enjoy that fine establishment.

I went back to the Rodman BOQ on the Pacific side of the canal on the 10th of February to continue my liaison duties. A cancelled flight on the 11th had me a bit worried about getting to Honduras on time, but I got to Tegucigalpa to rendezvous with Bob Hopkins again after a stop in Managua, Nicaragua. That unexpected stop was a decidedly uncomfortable experience for me as the Marxist Sandinista government under Daniel Ortega was not on our county's list of friends. I was in civilian clothes and hid my ID card in my shoe on the off chance anybody wanted to check my identity. Only passengers destined to Nicaragua got off, and the flight resumed unhindered.

Bob and his date Maria Antonia took me out to eat at an open-air place called Mr. Gaucho. She spoke very deliberately to help me with my rusty Spanish.

Bob and I flew down to San Pedro Sula to avoid the long hazardous mountain roads down to the coast. There we rented a car and drove an hour to the shabby city of Puerto Cortez to arrange for the Ticonderoga's visit later in the month. Our rooms in the best hotel in town were austere at best.

We flew back to the capital on the 14th of February to write up a message to the *Ticonderoga* about the arrangements we had made for them before returning to Bob's place. There we found Maria Antonia and several young girl friends at Bob's place with a cake to celebrate Valentine's Day. This was an interesting situation to find myself in. Despite the immature girls' initial boredom, I think we all got on well.

The next morning, I hung around Bob's place until it was time to board the Honduras Defense Attaché's C-12 for a quick hop to Limon. Enroute, I could see the *Iowa* approaching Moin, and we landed in time for me to see our two Army Hueys loading up our medical assistance team for a visit to an Indian reserve.

Iowa was unable to moor at the pier in Moin because at the last minute, the pilot lost confidence in his ability to control the ship with the two tugs at his disposal. I could see the tugs backing off as the ship headed out to anchorage a bit down the coast at Limon. This development put a bit of a crimp in the ship visit plans.

I remained in the Moin/Limon area for a day or two hoping to get some word of the ship's next port visit, but I had to fly back to Colon in Panama to brief the *Ticonderoga* and the Cruiser Destroyer Group staff on the arrangements for that ship's visit to Honduras. The XO told me to go to Jacksonville and fly out to the ship with Vice Admiral Mustin (who had commanded *Henry B Wilson* until just before I go there), COMNAVSURFLANT, if I missed the *Iowa* before it left Central America.

On my way back across the isthmus to Rodman, I was twice stopped by Panama's notoriously corrupt police force for trumped-up traffic violations. I had once before been stopped for a shakedown by these crooks when I had just arrived in town and now knew the drill. If you gave them any trouble, the police would threaten to take and hold your license for a period longer than your anticipated stay. The two things to do were to convince them you were a permanently assigned officer and to have little cash on your person. When I opened my wallet to dicker with the first cop this day, he reached right in and took my six dollars. The second one I just bribed with a USS *Iowa* bumper sticker. Yes, we have corruption in our own country, but at least the police at the patrol level can be usually counted upon to be honest in their dealings with the public.

On the 20th of February, I found out via a several person chain of calls that *Iowa* was headed for La Ceiba, Honduras for its next port visit. Naturally, I found this out two hours after the last airliner left Panama for Honduras for two days. I ended up catching an early morning Taca Airlines flight to El Salvador on the 21st with a nine-hour layover in San Salvador. At least Taca had a deal whereby passengers with long layovers were given a free ride to town and lunch at the Sheraton Hotel. Despite the threat of rebel violence along the airport road I had read about the previous year, the 20-mile ride was without incident. I got a room for a few hours and felt refreshed when it was time to go. What I saw of San Salvador was clean and well-constructed.

In Tegucigalpa, I stayed with Colonel Glen Young and his wife Dotty before flying down to the narrow landing strip at La Ceiba. There a US Army counter-intelligence officer, Captain Angulos Kostas helped me to arrange details for the ship's visit. Bonnie Fleming was also helpful as she introduced me to a very helpful American named Margaret Beckman who was also La Ceiba's woman of the year. By dint of a bunch of running around and hard work, I got the schedule for the ship's visit completed at 2200 the night before its arrival.

Weather intervened to cancel boating to the ship at some point of every day the ship was there, and I was forced to seek assistance from Randy Fleming in bunking 21 stranded crew members one evening, and he came through by opening his guest house. Others slept on the pier or doubled up in a hotel. The next day, there were even more stranded ashore, and Randy opened up his "abajo" under his house where hammocks were strung for the "strandees." I took a few with me to the company guesthouse I was in and had them sleeping all over the floors and furniture.

The ship visiting schedule was almost nil due to the bad weather. I had made up a bunch of tickets and distributed them to various organizations and told the local radio station "no tickee, no ride" to avoid a situation like had happened last time the ship visited. Colonel Young flew a group of Honduran military personnel from the capital in his C-12 on the 25th and also had a H-47 helicopter bring in a bunch of reporters. All were told on the pier by the captain that bad weather was preventing visits to the ship. Unbelievably, a reporter or two complained that we were hiding something; so, I mentioned to the captain that we should give them a ride around the ship to show them how rough it was. A few got seasick (served them right), but they all came away convinced.

After this fiasco, we took them on a tour of all the civic action teams we had working in La Ceiba. The ship's previous civic action experience in La Ceiba had been used to advantage in that the ship had prepared well with tools and materials necessary to carry out these projects. As we arrived at the Atlantida Hospital, our chief engineer, Bill Ernest, and his men fired up an emergency generator that had not run for years to the sound of Navy and local citizen cheers. Our Deck Department head, Chris Martin, and Barbara Beckman moved from project to project to keep the wheels greased while I watched over VIP and press issues.

On Sunday, the Flemings again took me on a family outing to a nice beach about 10 miles east of town. Randy had a rubber boat in which he took the kids out into the surf where it would regularly overturn. He and I counted heads before tossing the giggling kids back into the boat for another go around. They had lost their pet otter the year before but had acquired another and named her Aughty.

I was finally able to in some small way repay the favors that The Flemings and Margaret Beckman and others had bestowed on the ships by getting them aboard for a visit where they were received by the captain. As my new friends left, my advanced liaison duties came to an end, and I got back to the by now familiar duties of a battleship weapons department head.

By the 27th of February 1985, we were off Belize and got off a really good firepower demo for some Belizean big shots riding the *Ticonderoga* despite an earlier poor rehearsal. We and the other ships passed in review for the Belizeans. That was the only time in my naval career other than when marching in formation at the Naval Academy I was part of a pass in review.

We returned to Norfolk, and by the 25th of March we were at the Yorktown Ammunition Station to offload all of our ammo. We made a dependents' cruise out of the half-day trip up and had to get them all off the pier before we could begin offload operations.

Being in charge of an evolution like this kept me on the move from dawn to dusk for five days. I had six or seven hundred men and officers moving two kinds of missiles, 16-inch ammunition, five-inch ammunition, 20-mm ammunition, small arms ammunition, and flares, sometimes all at once. With the civilian workers on the pier being union, we were able to keep well ahead of them as they took their frustratingly frequent breaks. Another problem arose when it was discovered that the pier gantry crane could not reach our outboard Harpoon missiles. We occupied ourselves with other ammo while a barge crane was ordered up from Norfolk.

As part of the never-ending *Iowa* public relations blitz, we took on several hundred shipyard workers for a joyride on the way from Yorktown to Norfolk Naval Shipyard, where we arrived on 4

April 1985 for a four-month long Post Shakedown Availability (PSA). My major objectives for this period were to get some modifications necessary to support certification for having nuclear-tipped Tomahawk missiles aboard, rework of the troublesome secondary battery (5"/38) fire control systems, and many essential magazine sprinkler updates installed.

On the 26th of April 1985, the ship was moved into dry dock. Looking at the ship in the dried-out basin reminded me of that November day in 1967 when, as a Midshipman, I wandered about the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard while waiting to form up for the Army-Navy game march-on and happened upon the USS *New Jersey* (BB 62) in dry dock during her recommissioning for the Vietnam War. I recalled how impressive the ship looked and how much of it was below the waterline. One day we were allowed to go down into the dock and walk around under the *Iowa*. Her bottom was as flat as a billiard table.

Along about this time I received a letter from the Oceanographer of the Navy asking for all officers up to the rank of commander with a 49P code (oceanography subspecialty, mine) to consider conversion to fulltime oceanography officer. I thought about this because by now, I was beginning to see that Surface Warfare held little of the allure for me it had fifteen years earlier. I'd had my own command and had also seen poor officers like Tom Stone and my current commanding officer and executive officer being promoted to positions of authority they had no business occupying. As an oceanographer, I'd have little to no more arduous sea duty serving under willful and unqualified officers. In the end, I realized that it was too late to switch horses and that despite my poor luck in a few cases, the senior officer corps of the Surface Warfare community was mostly composed efficient and intelligent and honorable men. However, because of the anticipated years of drudgery serving in Washington DC in support roles rather than being actively employed as a fleet officer, I really felt no desire to rise to the highest levels of the Surface Warfare profession. I began to seriously consider how to arrange my career moves for retirement at the end of twenty years of commissioned service.

But for now, I had a job to do, and, as if to put a cherry on top of my disenchantment cake, the hated XO announced that his replacement was delayed and would not report aboard for another few months. Ugh!

On the 18th of May the captain held a wardroom picnic at his house where we said farewell to fifteen officers who would be leaving over the summer. The Chief Engineer, as self-absorbed as ever, gave the most long-winded and maudlin goodbye speech I ever heard. He was a limited duty officer with a bit of a chip on his shoulder about anybody who was not in engineering, and I was glad to see him replaced by a regular line officer.

As July 1985 ended, so did our yard period. Rampant mismanagement was evident as completion of critical jobs was crammed into the last two weeks. I found myself down in the magazines up to one hour before getting underway observing sprinkler tests in the 16-inch powder magazines. Those same sprinklers would figure significantly in saving the ship during the tragedy of the turret 2 explosion in 1989.

On 31 July and 1 August, the ship was at anchor in Hampton Roads to receive a limited ammunition on-load of 5"/38 and 16-inch powders and projectiles to support sea trial firings. We also successfully demonstrated the Harpoon and Tomahawk missile at-anchor loading systems.

Iowa got underway on the 2nd of August for sea trials during which we had numerous non-firing gun drills leading up to a firepower demo for some congressional staffers. We then conducted shock trials on the Tomahawk Armored Box Launchers (ABLs) of which we had eight with four missile tubes each. The technical community wanted to know if firing turret 3, the closest to the aft ABLs would exceed the limits of shock for a nuclear Tomahawk. To do this, the ABLs were instrumented, and turret 3 was trained all the way to the forward firing limits and fired at different elevations. Our favorite techie, Mr. Harold Jones from the Surface Weapons Development Center was on hand to supervise.

It was noted that some white-colored debris was flying around during one of the shots, and the crew was most upset to discover that the overpressure from the gun blast of a 16-inch gun firing nearby had blown the basketball backboard to smithereens. Sometime later, I think a week or so after we finished another ammunition on-load, we pulled back into Norfolk Naval Station only to find Harold on the pier with a new backboard he had had manufactured out of inch-thick armored plate, a battleship-rated backboard he called it.

During the rest of this underway period off Virginia, we fired a number of different exercises with all the gun systems from the 20mm Close-in-Weapons Systems (CIWS) to the big guns of the main battery. We even fired a broadside for the USS *Mississippi's* dependents cruise. As the underway period ended, we headed for Yorktown to conduct a complete ammo on-load.

The ammunition on-load went better than I would have expected, and we finished at midnight of the third day giving us plenty of time to prepare for the 1,946 invited guests for their several-hour ride back to Naval Station Norfolk with us.

At one point during our visits to Yorktown, we received word that the first man to occupy my billet when the ship was commissioned during World War II, now in his eighties and a retired Rear Admiral who lived nearby, wished to visit the ship. During earlier incarnations of the ship, the job only included the oversight of guns, so he was called the Gunnery Officer. Admiral Penny showed up during a lull, and I was honored to be his escort as he slowly walked along the main deck one last time. During our stroll, he informed me that while the ship was steaming at Condition III (partial battle stations continuously manned) in hostile waters the captain required his Gunnery Officer's presence on the bridge twenty-four hours a day. A hinged bunk was welded to a bulkhead on the starboard side of the bridge. After the admiral left, I went up to the bridge, and sure enough, there were the smoothed over weld marks just where he told me the bunk was. It was not a long time later that I learned of the Admiral's death.

Iowa got underway for Exercise Ocean Safari at 0700 from anchorage on 27 August 1985 in company with a number of other US and UK warships. This trip would take the ship to several ports in northern Europe via a circuitous route north of Iceland. We would entertain royalty and powerful elected officials, eat lunch with a king, and transit historic pathways of battleships of yore.

While at sea on the 4rd of September, the Supply Officer wanted to get the wardroom mess attendants geared up and trained for the formal serving expected while in Europe. To lend an air of solemnity to the occasion, the XO, Chief Engineer, and I, unbeknownst to the rest of the wardroom, dressed in our finest mess dress uniforms complete with cummerbunds and bowties. We entered the wardroom together from our rooms in senior officer country just forward of the wardroom, and after the initial wonderment wore off, we were applauded.

Later that night, our escort, the frigate USS *Halyburton*, gained contact via its helicopter with what it figured was a Soviet nuclear submarine. We hung around until contact was lost.

By the 6th of September, *Iowa* was off the coast of Greenland to hide amongst the icebergs so that Soviet long range Bear reconnaissance aircraft would have trouble spotting us. We knew they were searching for us and could see their tracks on our Tomahawk missile consoles as they were transmitted to us from shore stations. All of our own transmitters were shut down to avoid being picked up by Soviet satellites.

Our arrival amongst the icebergs was serendipitous in that we were all primed for some gunnery practice. We went into optical tracking mode and hit a berg at six miles with eleven rounds of shore bombardment 1,800-pound projectiles as well as eight rounds of 5"/38. The director officer in Spot I high atop the superstructure said he saw some avalanches created by our big guns, but from my perspective above the bridge, all I could see were black blotches against the white ice where the big shells had explored.

As there was a fierce storm to the south beating up the other ships of our task force, we asked permission to continue northward through the Greenland Sea and the Denmark Strait to loop around to the north of Iceland. It was in these waters in May of 1941 that the German battleship *Bismarck* sank the pride of the British Royal Navy, the battle cruiser *Hood*. I took the opportunity of a slack day to conduct some secondary battery pre-action calibration firings. The crews in the port side guns got to shoot five rounds in rapid continuous mode.

On the 7th of September, we crossed the Arctic Circle becoming Blue Noses. We saw the Aurora Borealis, the northern lights which appeared as a luminous curtain slowly undulating across the sky occasionally fading in and out with tinges of pink on a field mostly of the color of firefly lights.

By the 8th of September, having been refused permission to circumnavigate Iceland, we were back in heavy seas south of the island nation. The task force commander wanted us with him; I guess misery loved company. Seas were around fourteen feet as we neared the Faroe Islands where the make-believe war was to start.

We were scheduled to shoot a firepower demo for Admiral Mustin and other dignitaries on the 12th, but somebody on the staff forgot to get us clearance. Apparently, there were too many submarines operating in the area. So we had about an hour or rushed tours for some foreign press before their helo came to retrieve them.

Seas continued to build, and I climbed all the way up into Spot 1, the forward 16-inch gun director high atop the superstructure to photograph the bow crashing down into the seas. The fifty-knot relative wind made it difficult to breathe up there. We crashed through heavy seas all night while ducking into the Irish Sea to avoid the storm, and the noise in my room was like being in a can under a waterfall. I finally resorted to earplugs to get some rest as water continued to cascade over my head.

Most people think of a battleship as being able to ride along fine in just about any sea, but the truth of the matter is that the ship can take damaging boarding seas because it is so heavy and low slung, it tends to go through the sea instead of over it. At some point the seas boarding the ship forced the starboard motor whaleboat up into the bottom of the captain's gig. There was a lot of other miscellaneous damage topside, but nothing critical.

We sailed downwind for a while in order to receive some vertical replenishment (helicopter's dropping loads on the deck) from USNS *Sirius*. I went out to lend general support to the Supply Officer, CDR Frank Kalas.

We had a very good firepower demonstration on the 19th for the ships of the Standing Naval Force Atlantic and a Dutch Admiral and English press. Visibility was not very good, but we shot anyway. We cruised at about five knots as the ships of STANAVFORLANT closed in forward and aft of us to get an eye full. One British frigate swung in ahead of us so close I could not see its hull over our bow from my vantage point five decks above the main deck. Close!

The ship next went to Le Havre, France for a port visit. There is not much to see there, but I went to a nice restaurant called Le Beau Sejour with the captain and a couple of other senior officers. About 18,000 French citizens visited the ship during our stay.

The next day, I took a day trip to Paris on a charter bus tour. I got to wander around the Louvre (where I saw the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo), visited Notre Dame, got a close look at the Eiffel Tower, and walked the Champ Elysees. I even walked into the lobby of the Ritz Hotel just to say I had been there.

Continuing my tourist ways, the next day I took a tour of Normandy and the D-Day landing beaches as well as the US Military cemetery there. The area is not much changed since the war,

and every town seemed to sport a US Sherman tank in the town square. The town of Saint Mere Igles even sported a dummy dressed as a US paratrooper hanging from a chute snagged on its church spire just as it happened on D-Day (the actual trooper survived).

From Le Havre, the ship ran north through the English Channel and into the North Sea before turning east to transit north up the Skagerrak to a turning point off the northern tip of Denmark and then southeasterly through the Kattegat as we wended our way toward Copenhagen where we anchored on the 27th of September. The US Embassy wanted us there a few hours earlier than scheduled to avoid the possibility of anti-nuclear protesters blocking our way. None showed.

Copenhagen lived up to all my preconceived notions of the place. The photos one sees of the gaily painted buildings along the quays of the port area are accurate, but the bronze statue of the "Little Mermaid" perched on a rock is much smaller than photographs would suggest. It is quite close to a shoreline park rather than well out in the harbor as one might assume.

The city was clean, and the architecture was interesting to look at. I went all over the shopping district with Missile Officer, LCDR Bob Owen, and found everything to be awfully expensive. We bought Greek fisherman style hats and wore them everywhere we went. I also took a bus tour of the city and at one point stopped in at the famous Tivoli Garden. English was widely spoken making things quite easy for us tourists.

As usual, in foreign ports, the wardroom officers ganged together to rent a hotel room, which we always called "the admin" as a place to relax when ashore. I had reindeer steak (we joked about eating Rudolph) in the hotel restaurant – it tasted like venison.

The ship hosted many visitors (tourists, actually) during our time in Copenhagen, and being at anchor with some fog now and again, made transportation and boarding a bit of a challenge. The King and Queen of Denmark were aware of the interest of the populace in *Iowa* and although their two sons, the 18-year-old Crown Prince (later to become King) and his 16-year old brother, wanted to visit the ship, the sovereigns did not want special treatment for them, nor did they want the boys missing school. The problem was that visiting hours were over before school was out. So we were asked if the boys could come directly to the ship after school provided it was no problem for us – it was stipulated that if the visit went off, no side honors (bells sounded and royal announcement) were to be given.

Naturally, we assented and naturally, I and the other major department heads were kept on board to conduct tours in our specific areas of responsibility. The XO, being the celebrity hound that he was, had the princes up on the bow for the usual celebrity shot in front of turrets 1 and 2. He managed to place himself (I don't know where the captain was) between the boys, and just as the ship's photographer was about to click the shutter, he stretched out both arms and clasped the surprised princes by their shoulders hugging them to him while smiling like a Cheshire cat. Good grief! I did my usual VIP turret tour in turret 1 and have a picture that was taken of me at a respectful distance explaining the operation of the guns.

Next stop was Aarhus, Denmark where we again arrived several hours early on the 1st of October 1985, this time to avoid fog. This time we had the luxury of a berth alongside a commercial pier after a couple of days at anchor. We had 13,000 visitors in one day at the pier. While friendly enough, Aarhus had none of the character of Copenhagen.

I met a gentleman named Jorgen Meyer at a reception on board one day and was invited to his country house a couple of days later. I think he was an architect but was unsure of his connections that resulted in his being at the reception. He and his son arrived on the appointed afternoon, and I gave them a personalized tour before we set off the meet his wife Vibeke at their apartment where they loaded the car with foodstuffs and the two children before setting off for about an hour into the largely treeless countryside.

Our first stop was a quaint coastal village called Ebeltoft to collect some food items after which we took a brief look at an 1860-vintage frigate named Jylland (Jutland) in the process of restoration. This ship is the last screw propelled steam frigate and the largest wooden ship in the world. The ship participated in action against the Austro-Prussian fleet in 1864 at the battle if Heligoland. When I saw her in 1985, the ship was a mass of unpainted wood under a long shed. Later research shows a picture of her in all her three-masted glory after restoration was completed in 1994. Who would have thought that twenty-five years later I could sit at home with a laptop in my lap looking all this up on the internet?

Then we were off to the Meyer seaside cottage for a long Danish lunch consisting of cold smoked fish on dark bread, fried eel, sardines, cheese, akavita (45% alcohol), and Tuborg beer. The Meyers informed me that this was a very traditional Danish repast. It was pleasant to enjoy the company of this nice family after the hectic pace of battleship life afloat.

Our next stop was in Oslo, Norway where we moored alongside Akershus Fortress on October 7th, 1985. The daylong run up the fjords to Oslo was very interesting to me from a historical perspective. During World War II the Nazis invaded Norway via this waterway in a very daring nighttime transit. As I looked out at the narrow waterway, I was imagining the near impossible feat of running a cruiser-sized ship through there at night without radar. Those Nazis were some kind of seamen. They did not get away without some casualties as Oscarsborg Fortress, the old fort along the way, fired a pair of obsolete 28-centimeter guns (Moses and Aaron) and some torpedoes into the side of the heavy cruiser Blucher, the leading ship, at very close range. Blucher eventually sank, and the invasion force was delayed long enough for the royal family and the national treasury to be evacuated.

It was a crisp and clear day as we rounded the last turn in the fjord to view the open bay and the city. Off in the distance could be seen the large waterfront building housing the Fram ("Forward" in Norwegian) a ship that was used in expeditions of the Arctic and Antarctic regions by the Norwegian explorers Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup, Oscar Wisting, and Roald Amundsen between 1893 and 1912. A later visit to that museum revealed that the old wooden schooner with its triple expansion steam engine was in pristine shape.

At some point, several of us were allowed to take the captain's car and driver for a tour. We saw the ski jump where the 1955 Olympics were held as well as a museum housing excavated Norse longboats. Looking at the real thing gives one a real feel for the strength of character of the old Norse raiders.

In the first three days in port, we hosted just about every officer in the Norwegian military and had King Olaf V aboard for lunch on the 9th. There were just a few of us senior officers at lunch using one of the long wardroom tables. I sat across and two over from the 84-year-old King who's nervous giggle seemed to detract a bit from his regal bearing. He was a very popular sovereign and was known to walk about Oslo with little if any security. As he arrived, the castle next door and we fired 21-gun salutes. Upon his departure, one of our gunners thought an empty round had gotten into the ammo box and therefore did not put the last round in and did not think to inspect it; so, we fired only twenty rounds. Nobody seemed to notice.

I was able to get free of the ship for an afternoon and evening on the 11th as Elsa and Odd Heldre and their three sons picked me up for a visit and meal at their home. Elsa was a friend of Vibeke Meyer in Denmark, and Vibeke had called ahead to make sure I was treated well in Norway. The Heldre family had just returned home after five years in Connecticut and, except for the middle son, really missed the USA and speaking "American." After sitting around in candlelight for a while due to a transformer problem, Elsa was able to put on a nice meal as we all enjoyed each other's company.

I was lucky again the next day and got loose to walk around the city for hours finally ending up at our "Admin" room in the Ambassador Hotel where I enjoyed an excellent dinner alone in the restaurant in the bottom of the establishment.

We were underway for Baltic Sea operations on the 12th and took aboard 45 VIPs from Germany and Denmark on the 16th by helicopter. I was assigned a group of five or six Germans including the female equivalent of our Speaker of the House. The flag-rank officers in my group added up to fifteen stars. We were about "toured out."

Our firepower demonstration for these people did not go really well as the CIWS fired rather late after the countdown, and the 5-inch gun elevation synchro power circuit suffered a burned-out fuse as we commenced the 30-round rapid-fire portion of the exercise. I watched as all six gun barrels moved in elevation, and at one point, we put a round in the water close aboard.

We had several other invited allied naval vessels watching our firepower exercise as well as an East German amphibious warfare vessel that crashed the party.

Our next port of call was Kiel Germany where we anchored in the harbor and took a barge/pontoon alongside to act as a boat landing. On the 21st of October, I went with other crewmembers on a tour of Berlin. This day trip required a 0500-muster followed by a liberty launch ride ashore followed by a bus ride to the Hamburg airport where we boarded a charter flight of 40 minutes to Tegel Airport in the French sector of occupied Berlin. I imagine this flight was arranged in part to avoid the necessity of transporting us through the Soviet checkpoints in their sector surrounding the city.

Once in Berlin, we were treated to a 3-hour bus tour encompassing downtown, Check Point Charlie, the Bundestadt, the Brandenburg gate, and sites associated with Kaiserien Germany. We were turned loose for seven hours of free time in the city after the tour, and several of us attached ourselves to Ensign Gemmer, an escort officer from the German DDG Molders.

We jumped on the subway and traveled out to the site of the 1936 Olympics, which had been presided over by Hitler. The construction of the stadium was reminiscent of Nazi Germany in its heavy, gray stone construction. It was in good shape and still being used. We made a quick stop in the Spandau area to view the prison where the last Nazi war criminal, Rudolph Hess (Hitler's deputy in the Nazi party before WWII), was still being held. It was demolished two years later after Hess died. From there we journeyed back into the city and had dinner in a Bavarian style restaurant.

Before we left Kiel, I got off by myself for a day of shopping and touring. I jumped aboard a coastal ferry at the Bellvue landing near the naval station and took a 50-minute ride via several stops to the village of Laboe at the mouth of the Kiel fjord. There I went to the naval memorial, which consists of a Type VII C U-boat from WWII and a small museum and a memorial tower where I took the elevator to the top. I toured the interior of the sub and was impressed with the Spartan living conditions including the captain's quarters, which consisted solely of a curtain around a bunk.

Iowa got underway for Norfolk, VA in poor visibility on October 26th with arrival scheduled for November 5th.

I relieved Joe Lee Frank, scheduled to depart the ship soon, as Senior Watch Officer on October 29th and then had a surreal conversation with Captain Gneckow. As senior watch officer, my duties would be to administer the watch organization of the ship and to ensure properly trained and qualified personnel were on watch at all times. I was sure the captain was now going to give me general guidance on the performance of my new duties. Instead, much to my amazement, he proceeded to tell me that he was concerned that there were officers standing watch as officer-of-

the-deck underway who should not have been because they were pets of the XO. He went on to tell me that once he and I were in charge (meaning after the XO had been relieved), I should not expect to do business as before. Since September of the previous year when I had told him that Chernesky was crazy and a hazard, he had to be well aware of my feelings toward the XO, and now he chose this time, with the impending departure of the XO, to unburden himself. I was stunned and felt like telling him he should simply assert himself as the Commanding Officer, but apparently Chernesky was simply too powerful a force for Gneckow to reckoned with. Any tiny bit of respect I might still have had for him after he betrayed my September comments to Chernesky simply ebbed away. I knew that when a new XO came aboard, I would be in a bad position between the CO and XO.

On the 1st of November, the XO pushed his way into requiring me to shoot the main and secondary batteries. There was no specific training required, nor was a specific required exercise goal in mind. He just wanted to shoot guns. We had a misfire in Turret III and a brake closure issue in a gun mount.

By November 19th, we were at sea for the second night with the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) headed by gnarly old Admiral Bulkeley and his military and civilian hatchet men. The XO insisted on trying to impress the inspectors (many of whom were civilians on temporary assignment for the inspection) with a firepower demo. Ships NEVER fire weapons as a part of an INSURV inspection and as Admiral Bulkeley's assigned escort for this inspection, I can say with certainty that he wanted NOTHING to do with this shoot. I listened as he told his assistant to order all of his military personnel aboard NOT to witness the firing but that if the civilians wanted to watch, there was nothing he could do about it. As usual, the XO got his way, and the captain simply went along with whatever he wanted.

As an aside, Admiral Bulkeley was the LT Bulkeley who in 1942 as Commanding Officer of PT-Boat Squadron 1 evacuated General MacArthur from Corregidor in the Philippines to the island of Mindanao where the general caught plane to safety from the advancing Japanese. Bulkeley's efforts, for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor are very accurately depicted in the book and movie "They Were Expendable."

As it turned out, we had three misfires, and I got the opportunity to tell Admiral Bulkeley that our biggest problem with the turrets was the damned firing primers, not the machinery. I am sure the INSURV inspectors came away thinking we as a ship were a bunch of idiots. We basically failed the inspection from the engineering point of view and partially from the combat systems perspective because of the secondary battery MK 37 Gunfire Control System, which I had been complaining about since day one. The miserable condition of the MK 37 systems was a major failing of the Navy in hurrying up the pre-commissioning overhaul, and now we were being blamed.

Finally, J.J. Chernesky exited my life, or so I thought, as he departed the ship in January 1986. Typical of his churlish and childish ways, he forbade any ceremony on his departure. I made it a point to be lying down in my room as I heard him going down the passageway outside my room protesting to several officers who chose to say goodbye. He had always made fun of others at the gangway as they departed and probably did not want the same to happen to him. He did have to put up with a lunch with the captain and the department heads, but there was no wardroom party, as was the usual practice. I found out in about 2006 that he had died on cancer in 2001, and I must say that I felt no sorrow over the news. He was the worst Naval Officer I ever served under.

Andy Beck, who had been my detailer and whom I had met when we were both assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel was his replacement. Andy always seemed a bit on edge as if he was trying to not be consumed by the job of XO of a battleship. I cannot say that we worked well together during my remaining months aboard. I was determined not to let him shut me off from the captain as had been done by his predecessor, and he seemed determined to control more of

my actions than he had a right to. Besides, I had received my orders to depart the ship in June to be the officer-in-charge of the Tomahawk Tactical Qualification Team in San Diego the Monday after Chernesky left the ship. In the planning for who of the re-commissioning senior officers would leave the ship when, the XO had made it clear that he would not be wanting to break in a new Weapons Officer, and that there was no way I was leaving before he or the Captain left.

On the 28th of January 1986, I was walking by the wardroom TV area during lunch and saw several officers watching the liftoff of the space shuttle Challenger. We were all stunned as the rocket blew up, killing all seven astronauts.

Terrorist attacks on several airports, including Rome and Vienna, along with Libyan praise for the attacks raised tensions between the USA and Libya. Highlighting our importance to the nation, we were asked by very high-level command how fast we could get underway as part of a response. National news media even carried a story about the *Iowa* getting underway, but we did nothing. Instead, on April 15th President Reagan ordered air attacks on Libya including Muammar Gadhafi's personal compound, killing his daughter. Libya got quiet after that.

Ty Gieseman, the new Ops Officer, and I were detailed to visit Panama, Costa Rica, and El Salvador as advanced liaison for another upcoming Central American operation. I felt Ty as Ops should be able to tend to this duty solo, but the captain insisted I go because of my previous experience there.

We found out the captain would be relieved in April 1986. I had hoped to avoid what I thought would be the tension of preparing for a battleship extravaganza of a change of command ceremony in Norfolk with all sorts of big wigs coming down from Washington, but as things turned out, it didn't even happen in port.

Our advance trip to Central American turned out to be interesting. Ty and I were put up in the guest quarters at Fort Amador as we held conferences with the staff of Commander-in-Chief US Forces South and Commander Naval Forces South who were pushing Guatemala as a battleship port visit to show US support to the newly elected and about to be installed democratic government. So, we decided to bypass El Salvador and go to Puerto Quetzal, and newly constructed Guatemalan port on the Pacific coast.

Enroute, we stopped at San Jose, Costa Rica to arrange the ship's visit to Punta Arenas/Puerto Caldera. CWO4 Duane Deacon, whom I had met on a previous liaison trip drove us the two-hour run to the coast. Colonel John Lent now occupied the house the Maldonados (now transferred to Germany) had occupied on my previous visit and put us up for the night.

As it turned out, Puerto Caldera is a nice port with new facilities but a bit too shallow for the *Iowa* to moor alongside the pier. Punta Arenas, a nearby town, is a nice place by Central American standards with black sand beaches.

Our survey of Puerto Quetzal in Guatemala revealed a small and neat little patrol boat base with a few marines and a grungy little town called San Jose nearby. We decided that getting a bunch of buses to take the crew up to Guatemala City, the capital, an hour and a half away, should be a priority.

When I got back to Norfolk, we had our Nuclear Weapons Assist Team visit, which went pretty well. This visit was designed to set us up for our further nuclear weapon certification visits and inspections. I had not wanted to be away in Central America the week before, but the only issues were with the paperwork associated with the Personnel Reliability Program, which was the responsibility of people outside of my department and thus not under my control.

Iowa got underway on 11 February to top off on gun ammunition and conduct sea trials. We were back in port in Norfolk two days later after a cold and wet underway ammunition replenishment.

Good news: we did exceptionally well on a Nuclear Weapons Technical Availability intended to assist us in getting the ship ready for certification to carry nuclear-tipped Tomahawk cruise missiles. We did so well, we were certified on the spot. That just made my day! Adding to my joy was that fact that the dreaded re-inspection for INSURV would be delayed to a date after my departure.

Iowa got underway for Central America on February 18th, and as senior watch officer, I was dealing with department head bickering and over who had to do what. I was getting sick of having to be in the middle of everything. However, Chaplain Ferguson relieved the tension at a weekly Planning Board for Training meeting when he asked for a time in the schedule to conduct a burial at sea because a crewmember had brought aboard the cremated remains of his father!

While still at sea enroute to Cristobal, Panama, I heard from the Master Chief of the Command, Master Chief Bobby Scott (later killed in an unfortunate auto accident), that he had kicked a new man, one of my first-class fire control petty officers, out of chief's quarters after he arbitrarily moved himself in. This was aberrant behavior to say the least because not even officers entered chief's quarters (euphemistically known as the Goat Locker) without knocking. I called this man into my room and began a most unusual conversation. He quickly began a monologue which went on for a half an hour. He said he felt strong and that he was a cat and on and on until I felt uncomfortable being alone in the room with him. I informed the XO and got Doc Lou Krout to witness him in full flower. Doc took him to sickbay for observation and shipped him off as a certified loon when we reached port.

During our transit of the canal, I was assigned to guide General Gavin CINCSOUTH and the Rear Admiral who was CINCNAVSOUTH around the ship while they rode us between Gamboa and Pedro Miguel lock. This was a lot different than earlier transits where I had been conning the ship or involved in other "real" duties. We had by now trained up the junior officers to handle ship control matters.

Iowa headed northward on the 26th of February at 20 knots to get to Puerto Caldera, Costa Rica on schedule on the 28th. XO Andy Beck has been getting frustrated with the "mañana" attitude of the Central Americans as it applies to showing up for special events of which there have been many.

Recent news was that Corazon Aquino, whose husband had been the chief opponent of President Marcos, has ascended to the presidency of the Philippines after Marcos tried to steal the election there. Marco's government had been implicated in Aquino's murder.

On the 1st of March, we hosted the President of Costa Rica and his cabinet while at anchor off Puerto Caldera.

On the 4th of March we performed well through an exacting series of events. After anchoring at Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala at 0630 to receive some local dignitaries, we got underway to receive the President while manning the rail and rendering honors with a gun salute. Then we shot a firepower demo (left gun turret 2 misfired) and sent the President home and anchored again to offload the locals.

Also on the 4th, my faithful and diligent Gunnery Officer, LCDR Bob Flenniken, transferred off the ship. Bob had been my right arm in the gun world beginning early in the pre-commissioning period in Pascagoula, and he would be missed. At one point, he was having some alcohol abuse problems and we had to send him off for six weeks to a treatment facility. Part of the deal with sending a man to this facility instead of relieving him for cause and transferring him away was

that the ship had to accept him back. We did and were well rewarded with his fine performance thereafter. His transfer was to Hawaii (I am sure to the delight of his Australian wife) as XO of USS *Harold E. Holt*. LT Jim Joyner assumed his duties.

On the 7th of March 1986, we hosted President Duarte of El Salvador for the second time. Our firepower demo had a few glitches including a dropped program in CIWS mount 23, a late train out movement by 5-inch gun mount 51, a temporary failure in the rammer of left gun turret 3 due to a sticky valve, and finally, a misfire in that turret's center gun. Just another day in the life of the battleship weapons department. However, the whole show looked good, which is all anybody seems to care about. I shudder to think what would happen if the ship ever got into real combat.

After transiting the canal on the 10th of March, we stood by off the Panamanian Atlantic coast to host the President and his real boss, the head of the military Manuel Noriega (who was later ousted in the US invasion of 1990). The event was eventually cancelled when few of the expected guests showed at the heliport.

After a short delay in the Guantanamo operating area to track aircraft with the MK 37 gunfire control systems and the CIWS in preparation for a mini-INSURV inspection, IOWA arrived in Fort Lauderdale on the 15th of March. My sister Kathy and husband Bill came up from North Miami and collected me for a dinner at a lawyer friend's home. On the 16th, they came up with 3-yer old Eric and toured the ship before we went out to a restaurant called the Ancient Mariner. Kathy told me that our nephew, Randy Neisius, has a nomination to Naval Reserve Officer Training. We hoped that his application to the Naval Academy would be soon receiving favorable consideration, and it did.

We had our scheduled aircraft tracking exercises for the MK 37 and CIWS systems on the 19th while enroute Norfolk as part of our continuing torment from INSURV. The CIWS did okay, but despite two sessions with a Learjet, the MK 25 radars of the MK 37 Gunfire Control Systems performed miserably. I later took the chief inspector, Capt. Wilkinson, down to one of the four MK 25 radar rooms to show him the crappy state of the radars as illustrated by crumbling wiring insulation falling out of the equipment boxes when their doors were opened.

Probably because of the engineering portion of the INSURV re-inspection, the Commander of Surface Naval Forces, Atlantic, Vice Admiral McCauley, and Rear Admiral Bulkeley of INSURV were both aboard for this event. The post-inspection briefing to them went OK as far as I was concerned because the CIWS got a clean bill of health, and my campaign to get the MK 25 radars completely overhauled got a boost.

Iowa moored in homeport Norfolk on 20 March 1986. By the 31st, IOWA was at anchor in Hampton Roads for three days preparing for the latest inspection to be inflicted on us. In this case, it was an Engineering Department show called the Operational Propulsion Plant Examination (OPPE) foisted on us by the nuclear power community.

We suffered a setback with the OPPE because our remote valve operators were inoperative meaning that main engineering spaces could not be dewatered from outside the spaces. The OPPE has been rescheduled for the first few days of the Fleet Exercise in April.

On the 14th of April, we got underway for the FLEETEX 2-86/OPPE after coming into the ship the day before on Sunday in order to anchor the ship off the base awaiting the OPPE board. However, late repairs delayed us, and we all stayed aboard "getting ready for OPPE," as the XO said. I failed to see where cleaning the ship was going to help any in this inspection.

As we sat aboard awaiting the "next thing," we saw President Reagan explaining why it was necessary to attack Libya with Navy and Air Force aircraft tonight. We had attacked some of their anti-aircraft missile sites and sank a couple of patrol boats because the Libyans fired some

missiles at our carrier aircraft while we were conducting freedom of navigation exercises in the Gulf of Sidra. Then last week a bomb went off in a West Berlin discotheque, apparently set off by East German-based Libyans. The source of the information was a communication intercept from East Berlin to Tripoli. The targets, including Colonel Ghaddafi's tent home were attacked by F-111s from England and A-6 and A-7 attack planes from USS Coral Sea and USS America.

Our prospective Commanding Officer, Captain Larry Seaquist, arrived by helicopter on the 15th of April, and we passed the OPPE on the 16th. The admiral and staff of Carrier Group 8 flew on as the OPPE nerds left. We were busy looking for a hole in the fog to get off a live-fire CIWS exercise at a towed target. That finally happened with all four guns getting exercised.

During the transit down to the Puerto Rican Operating Area, I was scheduled one evening to brief the new captain on my department. He was full of enthusiasm and had all sorts of ideas to improve our performance. I was patient and forthright in my responses sometimes explaining how we had tried some of his ideas only to find that we had to return to the tried-and-true axioms of big ship gunnery to succeed. I had "been there, done that, and had all the tee-shirts." Fully aware of my few remaining weeks aboard, he finally looked at me and said, "You're tired, aren't you?" by which he meant I had been aboard battleship *Iowa* fighting personnel and equipment issues day and night for three long years, and it was time for me to go. I fully agreed.

On the 17th of April, we shot a coordinated illumination dummy run into the sea with mount 51 and turret 3. There were a few issues with faulty gun orders and powder door problems in the turret, but accuracy was good with only 1.17 foot/second standard deviation on the speed of the 16-inch BL&P rounds.

One the 20th of April 1986 I shot the one and only Harpoon missile in my Navy career at a 270-foot dredge in conjunction with a B-52 and a submarine (USS *Gato*). The range was 40 miles, and we got a hit with an S-3 aircraft providing spotting. As a side note, our cranky MK 25 and ancient gunfire control radars were able to track the outbound missile for some distance.

For two and a half days ending on the 26th we conducted a grueling shore bombardment re-qualification off Vieques Island. With a lot of new people in key positions, we eked out a mere 81.77 (80.0 required to qualify) – it was miserable compared to our earlier performances in 1984. We had our usual share of equipment problems plus interruptions due to VIPs arriving and departing via helo. It was frustrating that we could not get the good 16-inch scores we were capable of, in one case losing 30 points as we fired a round short because we were rushing. We only had enough BL&P rounds to repeat the exercise once, and had we failed the exercise, we would have been stuck with the score of the second attempt.

We initially set up to conduct the gunnery exercises in the forward plotting room but at one point had to move the whole operation to the aft plotting room when the MK 48 computer in forward plot commenced oscillating. The aft MK 13 main battery radar failed earlier on the 24th when we fired a pre-action calibration. Later, we were in forward plot when the MK 48 computer developed an X-axis problem just as we began plotting our track for a shoot.

The first day on the range, we wasted a bunch of time firing a pre-action calibration with the 5- and 16-inch guns for the benefit of Rear Admiral King, the British Naval Attaché in Washington (whom I had taken on a three-hour tour of the ship). Then we had to waste an hour getting his helo transportation arranged. Then we had to reposition the ship while also sharing the range with USS *McCandless*, a frigate. We didn't start a scoring run until 1400, and we finished for the day at 2200, all of it spent in the refrigerator-like climate of forward plot. I spent the entire time in there and emerged completely exhausted mentally as well as physically. I went straight to bed.

The 25th was another frustrating day as we suffered all sorts of turret casualties. First the left gun rammer of Turret 3 failed. Then Turret 3's center gun had a firing lock problem, and two attempts to fire the gun failed. I finally had to order the powder bags pulled over the objection of the turret

crew. We had already told the range we were clearing off, and we had turned the ship after the firing lock and primer had been pulled based on the crew's estimate that we could pull the powder. I went aft and climbed into the turret to share whatever fate I had ordered for the skeleton gun crew there to remove bags of gun powder from a very warm cannon's breech just as the last of the powders were being pulled to find the turret captain with burned forearms where they had contacted the hot sides of the gun chamber as he reached in to pull the powder bags back out. It was a sobering experience and maybe even a near-run thing.

Due to technical problems with the firing circuit, we were unable to fire the gun again later in the day and had to again pull the powders, but by then, then gun was in "cool gun" status. Again, I went aft to observe. I climbed into the turret, which had been evacuated of all personnel except for the turret captain and the turret chief. Even though the gun was supposedly cool, there was always the off chance of the in-rush of air causing a smoldering ember on the last powder bag (from several attempts to fire) to ignite hundreds of pounds of powder as the breech block was lowered. I was not overjoyed to be in the gun house as the gunner lowered the breech, but I had just walked by dozens of evacuated turret crewmen on the main deck and climbed in the gun house; besides, I felt morally obligated to share at least some of the risk with the people who worked for me. This incident has played through my mind many times as I later contemplated the turret explosion in turret two which claimed forty-seven men's lived April 19, 1989, several years after I had left the ship.

This day had been again full of interruptions as we flew on Vice Admiral Mustin, Commander of the Second Fleet, Rear Admiral Chandler, Command Caribbean Frontier, and the Undersecretary of the Navy, Mr. Goodrich and his Marine Brigadier General aide. I was in forward plot all day and only saw the Under Secretary when Captain Seaquist escorted him into plot.

Naturally, Turret 1's loaded right gun picked that time to run away in elevation in both automatic mode as well as hand control. We got it stopped at an elevation that we figured would completely overshoot the island. This calculation was accomplished by running out the range on the MK 8 stable element while watching the elevation match that of the gun. I took up the "JD" sound-powered phones to the turret, ignoring the VIPs while CAPT Seaquist explained the general operation of the plotting room.

The Under Secretary had earlier helped load the left gun of Turret 3 and was now in plot to pull the trigger on a 16-inch gun, but I had to hold him off while we worked the casualty. We were just about to shoot the round from Turret 1 over the island when the turret called in to say that they were able to get the gun to follow in hand control. The turret matched up with the pointer commands from plot, and the Under Secretary pulled the trigger with a big smile. I told him I was working on my ulcer but joked that he was now responsible if the round impacted the water, a very big no-no due to environmental concerns with the reef system of the island.

Despite all the previous restrictions about firing explosive 16-inch rounds at Viequez, later in the day we were nonetheless ordered to shoot a nine-gun salvo at the island for the big wigs with high explosive rounds. I went up to the bridge for this. Because of earlier gun casualties, we were only able to get seven guns into play. We were hoping to blast some yellow-painted target vehicles, including a school bus, to smithereens, but we were off a bit. Then we were shed of our VIPs until they pulled a surprise on us and requested another broadside while they watched from the observation post ashore – they were acting like kids in a candy store. This caught us flat-footed with unequally weighted (some high capacity 1800-pounders mixed with BL&P 2700-pounders) mixed in the projectile trains to the guns. It would be no easy matter to shift them around in a hurry; so we were able to get one gun in Turret 1 and three guns of Turret 3 to bear on the target and fire because Turret 2 had in the meanwhile developed a short circuit in its train motor controller. With all the distractions, I guess we were lucky to just pass the damned qualification.

The remaining shore bombardment exercise on the 26th was the one known at the "John Wayne" shoot. This was a daunting exercise requiring rapid and accurate fire for main battery while we raced toward shoreward at 25 knots then slowed after turning parallel to shore at close range and conducted a counter-battery shoot with the secondary battery. The counter battery section was signaled by a smoke round fired from the observation post. We had found that we needed a drop 350-yard spot in the computer to get on target, and after entering it, we scored a 95 on this demanding exercise.

With the accuracy error fixed, we wanted to re-shoot some of our earlier exercises. After failing to get the 5-inch scores we wanted, we decided to make one more attempt and take any passing score. As mentioned earlier, I talked myself out of trying to redo a low 16-inch shoot because if we failed, we'd have been left with a failing score and no more 16-inch BL&P to shoot (only VIP fun shoots seemed to allow us to use our far more numerous explosive rounds).

As the sun set, after the last 16-inch gun shoot, on the 25th of April 1986, with casualties leaving us only one operable 16-inch gun barrel, we held the change of command with the principals atop Turret 3 and the rest of the crew assembled on the fantail aft of it. The ceremony was followed by a formal dinner in the wardroom. By the next morning, all guns were back in working order thanks to the tireless efforts of my officers and enlisted men.

On the 26th, our former Commanding Officer, now wearing the uniform of a rear admiral, departed by helicopter. All officers were assembled in two parallel lines near Turret 3 for him to walk through as he headed for the helo. As he walked through, he spotted me and came over to shake my hand, the only officer he so singled out. I don't know whether it was because I was the last remaining department head from the re-commissioning or because, as my wife had directly informed him once at a party, he owed me his promotion to admiral, but that's what he did. I cannot say that I was sad to see him go because he had continually demonstrated a most uncaring attitude toward the welfare of the wardroom officers as he let a clearly unbalanced martinet of an XO ride roughshod over us and betrayed me to that crazy man when I went to him with clear concerns about his XO's stability.

The usual practice in *Iowa* while underway on a Sunday had been to work as if it was a regular workday, but the 27th of April was a treat because we held a cookout and boxing smoker on the fantail. I was getting to like Captain Seaquist's approach, but I was glad to be soon getting away from having to put up with his eager-beaver ways.

After our uneventful return to Norfolk, my relief, CDR Gene Kocmich, reported aboard on the 19th of May 1986, a wonderful day. He was coming from XO of the guided missile destroyer USS *Lawrence* (DDG 4). With twenty-three years already in the Navy because of previous enlisted time, he looked a bit more seasoned than I and seemed to have a calm outlook. I thought he'd make a good Weapons Officer.

During the last week of May, the captain was off in New York looking over plans for *Iowa*'s participation in the big Fourth of July celebration there, and the XO was on leave. I was thus in charge of the ship, including the loading aboard of three Tomahawk missiles.

Well after I had left the ship, *Iowa* got the honor of having President Reagan ride the ship down the Hudson River in New York for the 100th anniversary celebration of the Statue of Liberty July the Fourth. He sat in a glass, bulletproof enclosure atop Turret 1. I had been involved in planning discussions for this event clear back to March or so.

At one point the captain called me to take a call from a captain in the Chief of Naval Operation's office in the Pentagon. This man asked me if we could fire a 21-gun salute using the 16-inch guns as we traveled up the Hudson. All I could think was, "Ah, crap, of all the idiotic ideas!" The first thing out of my mouth was, "Who's gonna pay for all the broken glass falling out of the skyscrapers?" I went on to tell him how we had never shot only powder charges with no projectile

out of the big guns and that I was unsure how the guns would recoil suspecting that without the weight of a projectile the guns would not automatically recoil to the load position. I was also fearful of scattering unburned powder pellets, now unstable because of the heat of firing, all over our decks. Then, I pointed out the load times for 16-inch guns would not allow us to fire the salute with the necessary several second interval between guns. We would look silly firing nine guns and then waiting for thirty seconds or so to start firing again. He finally saw the light and left us to use the twin-gun 40-millimeter saluting battery we had installed for just that purpose.

As Gene Kocmich began to get a feel for the job as Weapons Officer and to gradually take on the day-to-day responsibilities, I became the special projects officer for the XO doing things like writing the ship's training plan. These were the days before my computer literacy, and the job was not made any easier by that deficiency. The first XO had caused a couple of Apple computers to be installed in an old 40-millimeter gun ammunition clipping room just off the wardroom for the use of the officers, but few of us knew anything about them. I think the junior officers used them occasionally, but there was no internet or email associated with them. Had I known what I came to know about computers many years later and had the internet access now available to every stateroom in every ship in the Navy, I cannot even begin to imagine how much easier my life would have been in the Navy.

On the 5th of June some people from Washington, DC came down to brief us on the installation of a remotely piloted vehicle (RPV) system. The general idea was that we would have TV monitors in plot showing us the video feed from the RPV flying over target areas. We would thus be able to see and correct our gun projectiles' fall of shot. Some years later, I saw a brief clip from an RPV launched from one of our battleships showing 16-inch shells hitting targets in Kuwait during the First Gulf War in 1991.

On the 9th of June, the commander in charge of the newly formed Atlantic Fleet Tomahawk Tactical Qualification Team came aboard with his assist team, and a day later Captain John McHenry, the man I would replace in San Diego as head of the Pacific Fleet Tomahawk Tactical Qualification Team, came aboard to observe the new team in action. The Atlantic team was already going in a new direction as the head of the team has also inherited the SURFLANT Combat Systems Mobile Training Team of 20-30 people. They would be certifying every Harpoon missile equipped ship as well as the Tomahawk ships. That was much more than the small team I would be inheriting in San Diego could do. There was a new Harpoon system hitting the fleet, which would enable the ships to input up to three waypoints for the missiles to fly to en route to their targets. It was a major advance, and it would be my job to certify each ship getting it in its use. The team was not likely to be hit with a whole bunch of ships to certify right off the bat because the systems were just beginning to be installed on the ships as a modification to the existing Harpoon systems.

On the 11th of June 1986, with a Meritorious Service Medal for my efforts, I was finally allowed to depart USS *Iowa* for the last time, thank God. I think it was earlier in the day when I was called to the top of turret 1 where all officers and chief petty officers of the Weapons Department (about twenty men) had assembled to say goodbye to me. I was gratified as they presented me with a teak helm with brass clock mounted in its center and was thanked for my efforts over the years in shielding the department personnel from the wrath of the previous XO, allowing them to excel in their jobs largely undisturbed by him. I had watched as one or more of my contemporary department heads had let the pressure from the XO get to them as they then tended to open the flood gates to his poor leadership tactics which flooded over their personnel ruining their morale as well as their effectiveness. I hated him enough and was stubborn enough to block much of his efforts at running roughshod over my people.

As usual with how things went on aboard the ship, some bigwig visit managed to interfere and some staff people from the Government Accounting Office (GAO) were expected to arrive on a boondoggle about the time I was trying to leave, and CAPT Seaquist was preoccupied with their

arrival obstructing my access to him for my exit interview. Then he stood around on the forecastle chatting these people up until the minute I was to leave.

Meanwhile my fitness report was being revised as I stood around at his cabin door. He apparently wanted to put some verbiage in an otherwise "not observed" fitness report. When that task could not be completed before the GAO arrival, I just went down to the forecastle and stood around nearby as he held forth with the staffers. When he turned to me, I told him he could just mail the fitness report to me. For some reason, he suddenly sought my advice on how things should be run on the battleship guessing that maybe after three years aboard I'd have some insights. I demurred telling him it would be like the horse advising the jockey, but he persisted asking me if I thought he was pushing too hard. I told him that all the officers had pretty full plates and that pushing too hard could result in a dangerous state of affairs if much more was piled on them. I have no idea whether piling too much work on the troops had anything to do with the subsequent explosion in turret 2 which killed forty-seven men in 1989, but I do know that the quality of the officers assigned to department head duties in battleships took a downturn before that tragic event.

The movers came to our house on the 13th, and the Giesemanns had us over for dinner that night. The following night, our next-door neighbors, the Ianettas, took us to Barret's in Williamsburg for dinner. The next day we met John Odegaard, friend from Hawaii days, and his fiancé at the Chamberlain hotel for brunch. That night we went to Lynnhaven to eat dinner at the Mumpowers'.

Staff duty with Commander Naval Surface Forces Pacific, San Diego, CA

We left for San Diego at 0640 on the 16th of June via visits in Charleston, Pensacola, Slidell, Fort Stockton, TX, Wilcox, AZ, Blythe, CA and to Jim and Jackie's place in Fountain Valley, CA on the 30th of June. The first time I traveled the southern route to California was in 1969 by myself in my Jeep, and I-10 had not been completed. Now we cruised along with two cars, a wife, a dog, and a cat.

We moved into a rental house on Coronado Island in San Diego Bay, a short couple of miles from where I would be working on the staff of Commander, Naval Surface Forces, Pacific Fleet at the Coronado Amphibious Base, home to the Navy's SEALs.

We saw an old friend, Chris Rafferty from the *Henry B Wilson* days, and his wife Sara and baby son Alexander in Rancho Santa Fe on the 6th of July. I had not seen him since September 1972 when he was studying law at Georgetown University in DC.

I reported for duty on the COMNAVSURFPAC staff on the 21st of July, and I was en route to Hawaii with CAPT John McHenry the next day to introduce me to the cruise missile folks on the staff of Commander in Chief US Pacific Fleet and for him to attend the quarterly meeting of the Cruise Missile Steering Committee.

During my arrival interview with the Vice Admiral Davis commanding, he noted my selection to command at sea in the rank of commander and told me how proud he was to have such a quality officer assigned to the staff. I was surprised to hear I was the only such officer on the staff. The admiral felt that my assignment there was a good omen and hoped to persuade BUPERS to send him more.

It was my singular good fortune to have as my direct boss on the staff in N5 the incomparable gentleman CAPT Lee Kaiss who had been sent ashore from command of the battleship USS Missouri with a bad heart. After several years of outstanding staff duty and an operation to correct his cardio problem, he was returned to command of the Missouri for his final tour in the Navy. He decommissioned the ship the day he retired.

One day Captain Kaiss called me aside and spoke to me about the other commander in our section and how he had not yet screened for command at sea, as I had. He felt the man was deserving but that he would not be helping him if he were ranked below me in the coming round of officer fitness reports he was required to submit. He asked me if I would be insulted if he ranked me number two and this other commander number one. At this point in my career, I was pretty sure that finishing twenty years commissioned service since graduation from USNA I would retire, I told him I would not mind, while not informing him of my retirement thoughts.

Because our duties on the CMTQT required so much time at sea training and examining ships' crews, our billets were designated as "sea duty," meaning we would all receive sea pay. At my rank and sea duty years, that meant about $360 a month in non-taxable money.

The task of the CMTQT was to regularly train and then later examine the competence of each Tomahawk Cruise Missile equipped ship in the Pacific Fleet. There were few such ships in the Fleet at that time, and we were able to keep up with them as they came out of new construction or conversion. The digital age had dawned in the Navy, and we were able to carry a laptop computer to the ships and inject various scenarios lasting as long as 40 hours directly into their Tomahawk systems to evaluate their performance.

While in Hawaii, I got out to Makakilo for a dinner visit with Mark and Sue Brynestad, friends from bachelor days in Hawaii when I commanded *Tawakoni*.

I suffered a profound hearing loss in my right ear on the 26th of July after getting back from Hawaii. I suffered some vertigo and general malaise for a week or so while under the care of the ENT specialists at Balboa Naval Hospital. It was initially assumed that the loss would be temporary. I found it very disorienting to lose the hearing of that ear. One-on-one conversation in a relatively quiet setting was no problem, but for a while I could not stand the noises of ordinary life in places like restaurants where it felt like somebody was banging away on a pot right next to my right ear. I began wearing an earplug any time I went out.

Most significantly, I found myself totally unable to discern what was contained in the usual verbal flow of information swirling around the Tomahawk Missile System consoles in the combat information centers of the ships my team and I examined. The ventilation fan noise mixed with the normal conversation level of the voices in the compartment caused me to be unable to understand anything being said. I thus could not make a judgment about how well or poorly the ships' teams were performing. I resorted to standing back behind my own examiners (a wonderfully proficient and dedicated group of eight chief petty officers and officers) and letting them relay to me what was happening.

Considering my Navy career at an end, I finally went to the Surface Force Medical Officer and told him of my problems. He assured me that the loss of hearing in one ear was not a disqualification for command at sea, something that surprised me given the importance of a captain's full understanding of what is going on about him and his ship. Since my next logical assignment would likely be command of a destroyer type ship, I came away with increased doubt about my particular ability to perform that duty well.

I now began to consider options such as remaining in my current position until I became eligible for retirement in three years. However, in my official arrival interview with Vice Admiral Davis he made it clear he wanted staff officers such as me to remain on the staff for only two years so as not to lose touch with the Fleet. What to do?

In the meantime, I bought the *Calypso*, a 42-foot wooden-hulled Grand Banks trawler yacht on August 14, 1986. On the 18th, I cast off from Shelter Island Yacht Ways and took the boat to its mooring at Naval Amphibious Base Marina in Fiddler's Cove of Coronado Island. This would be its homeport until April 1989.

I continued on with my CMTQT duties, which took me to meetings on Hawaii, Austin, TX, Washington, DC and Orlando, FL, training sessions at NAS Point Mugu, north of Los Angeles, and to ships in Hawaii, Long Beach, and San Diego.

Ironically, the ship visit in Long Beach was to USS *Missouri* with Capt J.J. Chernesky in command and CDR Joe Lee Frank as XO, two naval officers I could do without seeing ever again. J.J. did not try his usual bullying tactics on me now that I was able to judge his ship's performance. The hypocrite even told me it was nice that the two of us could meet in more congenial circumstances than had been possible in the *Iowa* – what a dope. The *Missouri* eventually passed our missile certification in October 1988, but not without its detractors in my examining team. While there, I had a talk with CDR Dave Carlson, with whom I was acquainted from Destroyer School. We commiserated with each other over the travails of being a battleship Weapons Officer.

In late March 1987 I found that CDR Kevin Nicolin, my ASW Officer in USS John Paul Jones, was to be ordered into the staff. I was surprised to learn from my detailer that he was to relieve me so that I could proceed in October to command of USS *Lynde McCormick* (DDG-8). That would have meant my staff assignment "ashore" was to last a mere fifteen months. So, in addition to my continuing hearing issues, the *McCormick* was the last of a dying breed of steam ships with old weapons systems suffering from lack of material support. I was not enthused. I informed the detailer that I would need a couple of months of continued evaluation of my hearing.

Soon thereafter I was fitted for a hearing aid in my right ear, but it was never a very good fix for my hearing loss.

By mid-June 1987, the family dog, an old German Shepard adopted in his old age, passed on and we had moved aboard the *Calypso* at the NAB Coronado Marina.

About this time, I finally made the decision to request removal from the command-at-sea list due to my concern about my ability to successfully execute the duties of commanding officer with reduced hearing ability. After receipt of the affirmative response from "BUPERS," I submitted a letter to my boss, Commander Naval Surface Forces Pacific, requesting that my tour of duty be extended to July 1989. My request was approved, and I was now set up for retirement in eighteen months.

In July 1987 I called Joe Lee Frank, who had by now paid his dues to J. J. Chernesky and had been assigned as captain of destroyer USS *Ingersoll* in Hawaii to tell him that my cruise missile team would visit his ship to give his crew some training (before we returned for the official examination) when we got off USS *Long Beach* (CGN-9), which was transiting from San Diego to WESTPAC. He confided that he was having a terrible time with a wardroom full of incompetents and that he would be happy to get back to Washington, DC. How typical of him, a petty tyrant and sycophant throughout his career. His poor leadership methods were on full display when we returned in March 1988 for the official cruise missile certification. Instead of encouraging his faltering team and lending his presence and considerable knowledge to help, he took his Weapons Officer outside of CIC and loudly berated him. Naturally, the team continued to perform poorly, and I had to make the decision to flunk them, the first time we had ever done so.

In November 1987 I began a course of study and examination by the U.S. Coast Guard, which would lead to my Unlimited Tonnage Master's license. There were many areas of knowledge in the civilian merchant marine world that I was not informed about, and I found the study interesting. After I got my license, I looked up the Navy's chief pilot for San Diego and talked my way into being allowed to ride with his pilots aboard Navy ships entering and leaving San Diego. My aim was to become a harbor pilot, but the move to Florida after I retired scotched that plan.

Sometime in early 1988, the CMTQT went aboard USS *Vincennes* (GC 49) at 32nd Street Naval Station in San Diego to conduct a Harpoon Cruise Missile Tactical qualification. Harpoons were a

ship-killer cruise missile with a range of about 75 nautical miles as opposed to the more complex Tomahawk with its 250-nautical mile range against ships and up to 1,500 miles in its land attack variant. The original Harpoon had been designed to fly directly to the intended target, but recent modifications had added the capability for the firing ship to send it along a track, which could include up to three waypoints. When this capability arrived, it was decided that the complexity of the system now required that ships so equipped should undergo cruise missile tactical qualification.

The rapidity with which ships were modified meant a lot more work for the CMTQT. Targeting ships with Harpoons was a bit different than the methods employed for the Tomahawk, and ships now had to utilize target motion analysis (TMA), a method more familiar to submariners. In this method, the fire control team uses a timed series of bearings gained from direction finding on the target vessel's radio and radar emissions to figure out the target's course and speed and distance for input into the Harpoon Fire Control System. We also had to become proficient in TMA so we could adequately judge the ships' performance.

While conducting the scenario (which always included friendly or neutral shipping in the area) aboard the *Vincennes*, we witnessed the captain, CAPT Will Rogers, cavalierly order his team to fire on the refined TMA solution of the enemy vessel without any consideration for what might lie between his launcher and the target. We projected a missile impact on an intervening neutral ship and thus failed the ship.

CAPT Rogers was irate and started making calls to my boss and anybody else he could on the premise that his ship was too important to be held up on some minor technicality. My command told him, "If Commander Gano failed you, you failed. Now get ready for a re-exam." We passed the ship a couple of weeks later but never forgot the captain's aggressiveness.

A couple of months later, I was required to pony up an officer for six months additional duty in the Persian Gulf as a Tomahawk expert on the staff of the Fifth Fleet. It seemed that the weapon's deployment had outstripped the expertise of our deployed fleet staffs, and they had nobody who could speak "Tomahawk" to their ships. I only had two other officers, LCDR Ron Routh and LT Troy Mellon and did not want to send either one of them for such a long period; so I brokered a deal in which each went for only three months.

One day we got a letter in the office from Ron who said that our old friend the *Vincennes* was now in the Gulf and anxious to shoot down everything that flew. Tensions were high with Iran, and several incidents had already occurred. The next day, July 3, 1988, the *Vincennes* shot down an innocent Iranian airliner killing 290 civilians due in large part to CAPT Rogers' over aggressiveness. He was criticized by CDR Dave Carlson, former Weps in Missouri, now in command of the nearby frigate USS *Sides*, for attacking a target even the lesser capable *Sides* knew was no threat. Ron called me to make sure his informal letter to me never saw the light of day as he wished to not be involved in the ensuing nightmare of recriminations.

I received my orders in August 1988 for retirement the following July. I began preparations for a civilian life by taking a required Pre-Separation Career Awareness course where I learned to compose a resume. I began to get some interviews lined up and also thought that I might be able to make some money delivering boats as a hired skipper. The two successful yet strenuous deliveries, including one from New Jersey to San Diego via the Panama Canal provided enough adventure to write a smallish book about, but that is all I would say here. In the end I found myself employed in several businesses conducting contract support to the Department of Defense the last of which involved me for sixteen years in my first love, driving destroyers where, guess what, near-run things continued to happen!

After the USS *Missouri* qualification in October, we passed a quiet winter of 1988-1989 at the NAB Marina, but on April 19, 1989, the center gun of Turret II on USS *Iowa* suffered an explosion

while loading killing 47 men. I saw no familiar names on the casualty list but fully expected to be included in the investigation in some capacity. Luckily, such did not happen.

In May 1989 my team and I rode the USS *Lake Champlain* (CG 57) up the west coast while conducting a cruise missile qualification, which the ship failed. We went aboard her again a couple of weeks later to pass them. This was probably my last official function in the US Navy before I retired on July 1, 1989. Before I was finished with active duty, my direct boss, Captain Lee Kaiss came over to our offices at 32n Street Naval Station and a presented me with my second Meritorious Service Medal for my direction and further development of the Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification Team.

There were sometimes near-run things happening in my career, well, actually quite a few, and through a combination of luck and skill I ended up an older and wiser and alive Sailor.

Teddy Roosevelt, fresh from charging up San Juan Hill in Cuba and into immortality spoke to a group on men in Chicago in1899 and said in part, "… I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."

In trying to sort my own proclivities between the ever-coupled influences of "nurture and nature" as I grew doing active duty in the Navy from my teens to early middle age, I have come to the conclusion that the lure of the "strenuous life" of a line officer in the unforgiving Fleet was something that sprang from within me and that the nurturing of my parents in my first eighteen years of life gave me the empathy and compassion to simultaneously effectively lead and loyally follow purposeful men trying to do their best under circumstances not always of our mutual choosing. I was and am still drawn to the long gray, deadly shapes that came to life as living entities through my own and others' efforts as symbols of the strong nation that forged them. My dreams at night are manifold and disparate lingering over various aspects of my life, but the most vivid of them will always take me on a journey back to specific or vaguely envisioned scenes of life in the Fleet living the demanding life of an officer aboard a warship.

Non sibi, sed patriae,

Rich Gano

Panama City, FL, September 2010-2021