A Four Year Hitch

Introduction

By Darwin Crum

In the fall of 1950 the situation in Korea was getting uglier by the day. President Truman was taking a hard-nosed position, and it appeared that an all out war was probably coming.

The closest thing to a boys club that most small towns in North Dakota have is the local National Guard Company. Grand Forks was no exception. I enlisted in Company M, of the 164th infantry regiment for two reasons; I could make about three dollars a week for attending a two hour meeting, and many of my friends belonged. I was seventeen years old when I signed up for a three year enlistment. Joining was a mistake. I realized later that a man should never join any organization which might be mobilized unless he is willing to be mobilized without complaint.

I served in Company M for two years and ten months, and became a corporal, quite proficient in handling a seventy-five millimeter recoilless anti-tank gun. Korea was crying for my skill, and I had bad dreams about carrying a one hundred and five pound gun up and down some hill in Asia while thousands of Chinese took pot-shots at me.

An old regular army sergeant was in charge of the armory in Grand Forks. Sergeant McCort had his 30 years service in and was about due to retire. In the meanwhile he kept things orderly around the armory and drank a little beer. The beer is what got me out of the National Guard.

Once or twice a month I would buy a couple of six-packs of Grain Belt and drop in on Sergeant McCort at the armory. I enjoyed listening to the old man shoot the bull. During his long career the army had sent him all over the world, and he could spend hours (and six-packs) telling stories about the places he had been and the adventures he had been through. He undoubtedly lied a lot, but it was still entertaining.

One Tuesday evening in November I made a routine stop at the armory and found McCort busily nailing tops on crates. McCort had little to do during the day, so he never worked in the evening. This puzzled me a bit so I asked him what he was doing. "Oh, just tidying the place up a bit, nothing special." He was obviously lying. "McCort," I asked, "is there something you know that I should know?" He shook his head. "No, I'm just getting things in shape." Another lie.

We drank our beer and I went home. The next morning I enlisted in the Navy for a four-year hitch.

President Truman mobilized the North Dakota national guard the following Saturday night.

"Going On Leave"

By Darwin Crum -1984

The Navy promises you thirty days of leave each year. That's a pretty good deal. The promise, however, has a few escape clauses.

I enlisted in Grand Forks, North Dakota...about as far from the sea as you can get in the United States. I signed up mostly to avoid being drafted into the army.

The Navy had only a small recruiting office in Grand Forks, so the Chief there told me that after signing a couple of papers, I would go down to Bismarck for my physical exam and the rest of the induction procedure, and then return home until my orders to report came through. Then I would go to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago for boot camp. It sounded logical.

I was sort of engaged to be married at the time, and my girl and I had figured that we would get married as soon as I finished boot camp and found out where I was going to be stationed. I would come home on boot leave; we would tie the knot, and start our married life together wherever the Navy sent us.

The Chief finally called me and told me to come down town and pick up my round-trip bus ticket to Bismarck and return. I did, and since I would be gone for only two days, I left all my affairs hanging. My affairs in those days were mostly dirty laundry, and an old car parked in the back yard. I didn't even tell all my friends I would be gone, after all, it was only for one night. I didn't even kiss my girl goodbye.

I reported in at Fort Lincoln in Bismarck, was examined physically, tested mentally, and found to be sound enough of mind and body to satisfy the Navy. I took the voluntary one step forward, raised my right hand, and I was officially a sailor. That's when the man asked to see my bus ticket.

He took the ticket, told me to wait there, and disappeared down the hall. When he came back after ten minutes or so he handed me a new ticket envelope, this one for a train. "What's this?" I hadn't looked at the ticket, but I knew there was no train service from Bismarck to Grand Forks. "That's a ticket to Great Lakes". "But I'm supposed to go home first, and wait for my orders!"

"Look sailor, they changed their mind, you're going straight to Great Lakes from here." I had a feeling I shouldn't argue, so I asked if there was a phone I could use. I called my girl.

"I won't be home tonight Honey, I'm going to Great Lakes, but I'll be home on leave in thirteen weeks, I'll write and explain." I got on the train to Chicago.

Boot camp was shortened to nine weeks to better handle the big build-up that the Korean War was causing, so I felt lucky, I wouldn't be gone so long after all. Then one day, the official word came down; "All boot leaves are canceled".

Everyone was bitching pretty loud, so our company commander told us to pipe down, and not to worry, we could get our leave as soon as we reported to our next duty station. Since my brand-new orders said I was going to Sonar school in Key
West, Florida, I was not overjoyed, but I could accept it, after all, there was "a war on".

I called home again. "Honey, it looks like I won't be home as soon as I thought, they're sending me to Key West, and I'll get leave when I get there.

I got on the train to Miami and then on a bus to Key West.

I reported in at Key West, got my berthing assignment, unpacked my sea-bag, and found out where to go to put in for leave.

"We can't give you leave sailor, you're scheduled to start classes, you'll have to wait until you graduate to get leave." Since the school would take at least six months, I figured I should call home.

"Honey, there's been a change, I can't get leave until I finish school. I'll see you in November."

I painted barracks, picked up butts around the base, washed trays in the scullery, and finally started school after a couple of months.

I graduated from Sonar School around the middle of November, and promptly found out that since my diploma meant I was no longer assigned to the school, there was no authority to grant me leave. I would have to wait until I got to my next duty station to apply for leave. I was also informed that I was going aboard the USS Dennis J. Buckley, DDR 808, in port at Boston, Mass. I called my girl.

"Honey, there's been a change, I can't get leave until I get to the ship. I'll call you as soon as I find out when I'll be home." I took a train to Boston and the Charlestown Navy shipyards.

The Buckley was just finishing a major overhaul when I reported aboard. She was the saddest looking ship I had ever seen, with her stacks off, draped with welding cable and compressed-air hoses, half painted, half rusted. I was feeling pretty low, except now I would finally get leave!

"We can't give any leaves now sailor. We're going to Guantanamo Bay for underway training as soon as they put the vessel together. We'll only be gone about three months, but you can get leave when we come back to the States."

I made another phone call.

"Honey, there's been a change, I won't be home like I said, we're going to Cuba for four months, but I'll get leave as soon as we come back".

The shipyard put the Buckley back together, and we went to Cuba. I was getting farther from North Dakota all the time.

The training at Guantanamo Bay was long and hot. The Navy had not yet heard of air conditioning, and a gray steel ship soaks up a lot of tropical sun, but we finally finished the final battle problem that signaled the end of our session, and the ship headed for the U.S. I made plans for my long sought leave. I went to the ships office, got the required forms, filled them out, and gave them to my division officer for his approval.

"I'm sorry sailor; we can't give any leaves now. We're going on a Mediterranean cruise as soon as we get squared away Stateside".

I called her from Newport, Rhode Island.

"Honey, there's been a change of plans, I have to go to Europe for six months or so, but I'll get leave as soon as we get back." I went back aboard and we sailed for Europe.

I enjoyed the Mediterranean cruise. We were sort of a utility ship, and we operated detached from the main fleet a great deal of the time, so when we went into port, we were often the only American ship there. This meant that the men with the shore patrol arm-bands were all shipmates from the Buckley, so things could be a little looser than if there were a bunch of strangers around. We were gone about seven and a half months, counting the time to cross the Atlantic both ways, with a two week NATO exercise during both crossings.

I was in the first boat ashore when we anchored in Newport. I had money in my pocket, and leave papers in my jumper!

I boarded the train in Providence. I had left home to be gone overnight in December of 1950. I was married three days after I arrived home on my first leave.

My wedding was on October Twenty-Fifth, 1952.

Darwin R. Crum, 1984

Paint
By Darwin Crum

Sailors spend much of their time painting things. The reasons sailors paint a so much two-fold. First, the old saw about the Devil finding work for idle hands probably originated aboard ship. Given nothing else to do, a sailor will get into trouble. The Navy keeps men from gambling or fighting with a paint brush. Second, an iron ship afloat in salt water needs painting constantly to keep from developing ugly red rust streaks. There is always someone painting something somewhere aboard ship. Except for the rust, shore stations are much the same.

So, by the time a man has put in a hitch, he will have learned both the rules and the proper vocabulary of the Navy way of painting.

Paint is "laid on". Brush strokes on an overhead run fore and aft, but on a bulkhead they must be vertical. Missed spots are called "Holidays". The first stroke with a newly-dipped brush must be at right angles to the direction of the rest of the strokes. The hull is painted “Haze Gray”, decks are painted “Deck Gray”. A quart of varnish mixed into a gallon of flat gray paint will produce a fair equivalent to gloss enamel.

I learned my first lesson about paint and the Navy in boot camp. We had finished our recruit training, and had been assigned to Out Going Unit, a kind of holding tank for men who had not yet been assigned to their next duty station. We spent a week in OGU, working for the Master-At-Arms, the man who kept things ship-shape. He had us painting.

Three of us were waiting for our orders to go to Key West to Fleet Sonar School, and we had formed a pretty close association. Frank Noonan was from a suburb of Boston, Bill Cinders was from a small town in the iron country of Pennsylvania, and I was from the prairies of North Dakota, but now that we were all in the same boat, so to speak, we stuck together pretty closely. That's how we came to be painting together.

The Chief Bos'n gave us each a new gallon of high-gloss white enamel and told us to go to building Thirty-Five, and paint in the head on the second deck until 1600, or until the paint was gone. There was a serious flaw in his wording.

High gloss enamel is the most difficult paint there is to put on well. It shows every defect in the surface being painted, it hides poorly, and it is difficult to apply smoothly. We didn't like the job. I was working on a bulkhead near the door, and Noonan was back in the area where the toilet stalls were. I heard him ask Cinders, "Didn't the chief say to paint until the paint was gone?" Bill agreed that our orders were precisely that.

There was the unmistakable noise of a three toilets flushing in rapid succession, and Noonan strolled out of the back, smiling and carrying an empty paint pail. "I think I'll go over to the barracks, and write some letters".

The kid was a genius.

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THE SKIPPER

By Darwin Crum

Navy tradition holds that the Commanding Officer of a vessel is addressed as "Captain" regardless of his rank. The Executive officer is likewise dubbed "Commander".

The Commanding Officer of the Buckley, when I reported aboard, was Commander Duncan Forbes Francis III. Captain Francis was a good skipper, and he carried a great responsibility well. I think that the having the lives and welfare of a ship and its crew on your shoulders must be a crushing load at times.

At least once a week, after the lights went out in the berthing space, the dialogue went like this;

First voice in the dark: "How do you like Duncan Francis?"
Second voice in the dark: "I don't know, I never dunked him"

The single thing I remember most about Captain Francis was how little he seemed to sleep when we were at sea.

When ships sail in formation, all of them are subject to orders from the Senior Officer Present Afloat, or SOPA. When the formation is steaming at night, SOPA usually announces his plans for any activity during the night as his "Night Intentions". Night Intentions are announced late in the evening as a courtesy to the other ship's captain and crew and to prevent unexpected course or speed changes from causing maneuvering dangers.

A typical Night Intention message is; "It is my intention to remain on present course and speed until 0600" Night intentions let the crews on the bridges of the ships in the formation breath a little easier, and help to keep things orderly and safe.

The Officer of the Deck has the responsibility for maintaining the relative position of his ship in the formation. He does this by keeping a constant bearing on the ship with SOPA aboard, using minor speed and course changes to remain on station.

Speed is changed by adding or subtracting turns from the speed of the propeller shafts. Usually it only takes a turn or two of adjustment to stay in position. Course is changed with a slight adjustment to the rudder. The changes were imperceptible to me. Captain Francis always noticed them.

On the Buckley, the Captain has two cabins. The "Captains Cabin" was just forward of the officers wardroom, on the main deck. It was not very big, and not very plush, but it was the best on board. The "Captains Sea Cabin", was on the bridge deck, just aft of the pilot house. It was tiny, much like a compartment on a train, only smaller. The sea cabin had a sink, a bunk, a pull-down toilet, and nothing else. Captain Francis lived there when we were steaming.

A typical scene would be at 0300. SOPA would announce a minor course change, perhaps only a few degrees, to adjust for wind or currents. The O.D. would tell the helmsman to "Come right to

090", or whatever the new course was to be. The helmsman would put on a little rudder for a fraction of a minute, swinging the ship slowly to the new course. A few seconds later, the skipper would appear, amble over to the log, read the latest entry on the course change, glance at the compass, and disappear back to his sea cabin. The men on the bridge would look at each other, shake their heads, and say "How the hell did he know?"

I never did find out.

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"I Can’t Climb the Goddamn Hull, You Stupid Bastard!"

By Darwin Crum

If it hadn't been for the time he almost shot the Captain, I probably never would have met Cat Engal.

People who have never served aboard ship have a hard time understanding how you can live less than 300 feet from a man in a crew of 275 for two or three years and not know him. It's not only possible, it's normal.

You see, I was in the Sound Gang and worked and slept in a compartment under the mess hall. Cat slept with most of the Gunners in the after berthing space, all the way aft, below the fantail. I might have seen Cat in the mess line now and then, but since I usually ate with my watch partner, I wasn't likely to strike up a conversation with a "stranger" anyway. It's a fact that a ship can be small and crowded, but not a bit intimate.

Now, about the time Cat almost shot the Skipper. We had just anchored in the Grand Canal in Venice and some very important visitors were coming aboard in an hour or less. The ship's honor guard was getting set to act as Side-Boys in the Navy tradition. There are normally twelve men in the group on a ship the size of a destroyer. The honor guard is decked out with dress-blues, white leggings, and M-1 rifles. It is the responsibility of the Duty Gunners Mate to draw the weapons, check them, and issue them to the men in the honor guard. The Duty Gunners Mate on that day was Cat Engal.

Cat had gone below to the armory, unlocked it, and drawn a dozen rifles from the rack. He carried them up to the main deck, issued one to each of the guards, and decided to go through some "Order Arms" drill that he had probably learned (and last used) in boot camp. The men in the guard were equally as ignorant of weapons handling, being from almost every rating group on the ship. Cat went down the ragged row, doing his best to act like a marine sergeant, taking each rifle from the man holding it and giving it a hasty once over. The
Final flourish was to throw back the bolt, let it slam it closed, pull the trigger and push the weapon smartly back at the bewildered sailor. Cat was very intent on doing a Number-One job of looking good because he could see the Old Man watching from the cigarette deck two levels up. Then the gun went off.

Someone had left a round in one of the guns, and when Cat pulled its trigger, a shot boomed out, 30 caliber hole appeared in the radar reflector on the number four gun mount, and all activities totally stopped for a few seconds.

The Captain re-appeared at the bulwark, looked down, and shouted,” Who fired that shot?" He sounded more curious than angry, which says a lot for his nerves since the bullet had only missed him by a couple of feet.

"I did sir, Gunners Mate Second Class Engal".

The Captain hardly raised his voice this time.” Gunners Mate Third Class Engal".

So, Cat decided to change his rating and be a Radioman. This meant he automatically moved into the same berthing space as I bunked in, and so we met.

Cat and I became friends in due course, but then everyone eventually became a friend of Cat's. The man had a talent for making friends that would have done a politician proud. Cat's ability to make friends was the Catalyst for his next notable deed.

We had left Venice and gone to Tangiers to take dignitaries out to witness the International Yacht Regatta. There were going to be some Ambassadors, Sheiks, Legates and such aboard for the day, sit-ting under the shade rigged on the bow, so two-thirds of the crew were given liberty to keep them out from under foot.

Naturally, Cat was ashore in first boat. It is important to know that since he left early, Cat failed to get the word that when he came back from his long day ashore, the ship would no longer be anchored out in the bay, but she would be tied up across the end of a long, T-shaped pier.

Cat spent the day as he usually did ashore. He drank quite a bit, checked out the town, chased a few women, drank a bit more, and enjoyed himself as a sailor ashore is supposed to do. Liberty for enlisted men expired at midnight in those days; we called it "Cinderella Liberty"

Cat was trying return on time. He was at the landing at half past ten, probably because he was out of money. He waited for the liberty boat to come. He waited and he waited. He would have waited all night, except for his ability to make friends.

Around 2300, a boat from a Spanish warship that was anchored out in the bay showed up at the landing, so Cat managed to con the coxswain into giving him a ride out to our ship. The Spaniards thought Cat knew where our ship was, and Cat thought the Spaniards knew. There was a problem with language, but not with Cat's ability to have a good time. By the time the Spanish boat was clear of the landing, Cat was standing in the stern with the tiller in his hand. The Spanish sailors seemed to think it was amusing to have the crazy American as a coxswain, and after all, since they didn't know where he wanted to go, so why not let him steer?

Cat didn't find the ship where he thought it should have been, but he did manage to spot it at its new berth. The trouble was Cat was now on the seaward side of the ship, and from there, he could not see that she was tied to a pier. Remember, the ship was tied across the top of a letter "T", and she was longer than the crossbar, so from the seaward side the pier was totally covered by the ship.

Cat managed to bring the Spanish boat alongside just as the movie was ending on the fantail. Our movies were projected on the side of number three gun turret during good weather. Since the weather was good, most of the crew that was not on watch was standing around looking at the lights of the city.

The Officer of the Deck was notified that a foreign boat was coming alongside to port, so he straightened his tie and crossed through the midships passageway to greet the visitors.

Cat looked up from the stern of the liberty boat and shouted "Sir, there isn't any ladder". The O.D. saw Cat, but not understanding the situation, answered "Engal, get on board...NOW!"

Cat, not knowing that the O.D. didn't know what he didn't know, thought this was unreasonable. He shouted again. "There isn't any ladder!" The O.D. became hostile. "Engal, get aboard now, or I'll write you up" This didn't seem fair to Cat. He was trying to get aboard, but did the O.D. expect him to climb up eight feet of hull without a ladder?

Cat got a bit hotter. The O.D. got furious, and the crew, who had had gathered after the movie, was in stitches. They could see the situation clearly. Cat and the O.D. were too close to the events to realize how ridiculous the mix-up was.

About this time, the Spaniards in the boat became worried. Here was their new-found Amigo, shouting at an officer, while everyone else was laughing at them. They put Cat down in the passenger well and took off around the fantail to where they knew the pier was.

Everyone in our crew was watching as the boat cleared the stern and Cat saw the pier for the first time. A wave of horror passed over his face first, and then look of sad resignation as he realized that...he had done it again! The Spaniards put him ashore at the foot of the pier.

Of course, the problem of how to get aboard before liberty expired was next. Cat was ashore, the irate O.D. was at the gangway, and there he would be until the end of the evening watch.

Cat hit it lucky, by the time the O.D. was due to be relieved and Cat was due to be late, the absurdity of the whole scenario had been digested, and Cat strode on board with perhaps just a hint of a swagger.

The rumor aboard ship the next day was that even the Old Man was quite amused.

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Coffee Cups

By Darwin Crum

Coffee is a Navy tradition. The American sailor probably looks at his coffee the way a British sailor looks at his tot of rum.

Typically, there are coffee pots scattered throughout a naval vessel, much the same as in an office building. Every coffee pot has its own group of users, each of whom will sincerely claim that his pot makes the best coffee on board, usually by virtue of the time interval since the pot was last washed.

Sailors seem to believe that if the interior of a coffee pot is allowed to remain unwashed, the coating of black crud that forms on the inside will give the coffee "Character", or make it "Real" coffee. "Real" coffee being a brew so strong and so bitter that the only reason to drink it seems to be pride in the fact that one can drink it.

All of these coffee messes have a common problem. Although the Navy supplies the grounds, the crew must supply the pot and the cups, and there are never enough cups. Cups from the mess hall are strictly taboo, and there is no other place to get cups on board.

The short life of coffee cups needs explaining. The sonar gang's cups were kept in a bucket of water in a corner of the sound shack. The water kept them rinsed off, but more importantly, it kept them from shifting around too hard in heavy seas and breaking.

It was our standard practice to take the cups and bucket to the head before the end of each watch to wash them before the fresh coffee was put on for the next watch standers. The trip to the head was fatal to many cups since there was no place to set them during the wash and rinse. Perhaps plastic would have survived a fall to a steel deck, but our cups never did. We always needed cups.

We were riding at anchor in Soudha Bay Crete when we finally got enough cups. Soudha Bay is not what sailors call a good liberty port. The bay is a deep, and well sheltered, but those are the only good things to be said about it. There is no civilization along the shore, only a landing with a small dock and a meandering path that leads a couple of miles inland to the village of

Soudha has no paved streets, electricity, or any of the things which attract sailors. No one goes on liberty in Soudha Bay, but there are a lot of soft-ball games played there. If you could get enough men together to make things look reasonably authentic, you could claim you had a ball game to play, and would be allowed to draw some soft-ball equipment and a case or two of 3.2 beer from the ship's recreational stores. It was always hot in Soudha, and there was not nearly as much ball-playing as beer drinking by the "teams".

Max Fogart came back from one of these games one afternoon, all ex-cited. There was a man at the landing selling coffee cups! Max would have brought some back with him, but he didn't have any money with him. However, the ship's boat was about to make another trip, and if we hurried, we could give some money to the cox'n, and he would buy cups for us.

We collected a couple of bucks from the sound gang, and Max took it to the main deck and asked the cox'n to buy us two dozen cups. That would hold us for a while.

We had an abundance of cups when the boat came back. The cox'n had haggled the man down to fifty cents a dozen, so our two bucks had been converted into forty-eight beautiful brown cups with little red flowers around the rims. They were very nice cups. They came packaged on straw ropes strung through the handles, a dozen to a rope. The cox'n had bought every cup the man had, since almost every coffee mess on board had given him an order to fill.

We decided to put one dozen cups into service right then, so we sank them in the cup bucket. The rest we stored in the locker labeled "Confidential Materials Only". We kept a lot of stuff in that locker.

It was about a half an hour after we had put the first dozen cups in the bucket that Noonan noticed that the water was turning brown. In fact, it was so brown that it was opaque. He reached down into the murk and fished around for a few seconds before he pulled out a slimy brown thing that had once been a cup handle. The damned cups were water soluble!

We looked for the man who sold us the cups on the next boat trip in, but of course he had disappeared.

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Joe's First and Last Stop

By Darwin Crum

The fleet landing was the foot of Long wharf Street in Newport. When the liberty boat landed, you climbed onto the dock and found yourself inside the shore patrol head-quarters compound. Since sailors don't care too much for the shore patrol, they made tracks for the gate and hence to the town. A guard at the gate was supposed to check liberty cards, but with a line of eager sailors making disgruntled noise and with nothing to really check for, the examination was only a glance and a wave-on.

The first building on the street after you passed through the gate out of the landing was "Joe's First and Last Stop". It was a weather-beaten old building built half on pilings over the water. The big neon sign down the front said "Joe's, First Stop". If you went on by you would find on your return that the sign said "Joe's, Last Stop" on the other side. Joe got them coming and going.

Joe's was not the spot for you if you were looking for decorum. The place had reputation as being reserved for those who were genuine Salts or authentic heavy drinkers. Joe's was also the second home for some of the most celebrated characters in naval lore. An Apprentice Seaman with his boot camp haircut still obvious was considered fair game to the regulars at Joe's.

One of these regulars was a woman know only as "Three-Way Sal". Sal was a not too unattractive brunette who always seemed to be on a bar stool at Joe's. She always had a drink in front of her, which was always compliments of some naive sailor who thought he was buying a chance at Sal's favors. Sal never got drunk, lost her poise, or went home with anyone, at least as far as could tell. She had a lively sense of humor and could tell a really dirty joke better than most of the men she attracted.

Sal had a routine she liked to do when things were just right. She only needed a young sailor with peach fuzz on his cheeks and a quiet spot in the conversation for it to really work well.

Sal would spot the lad sitting alone at the bar, trying to look like he belonged there, and eying the place for a possible pick-up. She would slip onto the bar stool next to him and quickly get a conversation started, to the delight of the unsuspecting boy. Then, when a lull in the noise hit, she would stand up, and indignantly blurt out "Blow you? I don't even know you!"

Since Sal's voice was strong and female, everyone heard her. Since the sailor hadn't said any-thing even a little suggestive (yet), he was at first baffled by her out-burst, and then over-whelmed by embarrassment from all the eyes staring at him in the now totally quiet saloon. Sal would give him a stony glare and walk away, leaving the poor lad all alone with a red face and a desire to leave. It took a few seconds for everyone to start laughing.

One of the other regulars at Joe's was "Rain Coat Charlie". Charlie always wore a tan, gabardine raincoat. There were a million stories about Charlie and that raincoat. The most common one held that underneath the coat, Charlie wore trousers that were minus the seat. The story went on that "Charlie wanted to get a sailor to throw apples at his rump, using an orange every fifth time for a

tracer". The fable was most likely not true, but it was fun to tell, and many of the younger sailors believed it.

A place like Joe's First and Last Stop was a magnet for men like Cat Engal. Cat was a drinker, and didn't see any use in wasting his liberty going beyond Joe's. Cat fit in at Joe's, and could tell you the raincoat story with a hundred details if you seemed ready to buy him a drink and listen. Cat would always laugh at the end though, so you were a little tipped off that he just might be putting you on. His expression was so serious, however, that you could never be totally sure.

One night, Cat married a girl he met in Joe's. It was after the shortest courtship in history, and for the worst reason in the world. Cat got married for money. Five dollars, minus expenses, to be exact.

Cat had been in Joe's for a couple of hours one night and things were just fine. He had gathered a table full of friends and they were swapping sea stories, jokes, and lies, at full steam. Cat was at his best in that atmosphere, a receptive audience made his creative juices flow. Somehow, the conversation touched on marriage.

After a lively discussion about buying a cow when milk is so cheap, Cat claimed that he always wanted to get married, but had never found the right girl. This statement immediately started an argument as to what a man really should look for in a mate. Cat had some strong feelings about this, as you would expect, and soon made the claim that he could be happy with, and make happy, any woman in the world. There was about twenty minutes of arguing before it was decided that Cat and the floozy next to him at the table would make a perfect couple, and that Cat was chicken if he didn't get married to her right then.

It all settled down to a five dollar bet. If Cat didn't marry her he lost five dollars. If he did, he would collect five dollars.

It took less than an hour to find a judge, get things legalized, and do the deed. If officials hadn't been so bribable in Newport, it would have taken longer and Cat would have had time to sober up a little and back out. He never had a chance.

The happy couple never had a honeymoon. After the ceremony, Cat and his bride went back to Joe's to be the center of attention for the rest of the night while they enjoyed more free drinks than they could handle. By closing time, most of the details of the courtship and marriage were pretty blurry to Cat, and when he came back aboard the Buckley, he wasn't even certain that he had done it.

It took maybe two months for the deductions to start coming out of Cat’s pay. The Navy is quite protective of wives, and there are strict rules on how much money sailor sends his wife at home. To make sure she gets her money, a deduction is made from the husbands pay, the Navy adds an allowance, and a check is promptly sent home. The process is inexorable.

By the time I got out of the Navy and lost track of him, Cat figured he had lost about twenty-five hundred dollars winning the five dollar bet. It did make a good story to tell at the bar though, so Cat made a lot of it back in free drinks.

Joe's First and Last Stop was blown into the bay during hurricane Hazel in 1954, and was never rebuilt.

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It’s Hornblower Again!

By Darwin Crum

There isn't much to do at sea. Passing time has always been a problem for sailors, especially on a ship as small as a destroyer. There isn't much room for anything physical and good reading material is always in short supply. Movies are good. The problem is getting a constant flow of new films on board. Ships trade films back and forth as often as they meet. When you are scheduled to transfer or take on mail or fuel or supplies, you always ask the other ship what movies they have to swap. It usually boils down to accepting anything you haven't seen before (recently) for anything the other crew hasn't seen too recently, but if you had a really good flick, you could get two or maybe three so-so westerns for it. This led to a bit of larceny on the high seas once in a while.

One of Gregory Peck's less notable roles was the lead in "Captain Horatio Hornblower". Mr. Peck is a first rate actor, but he didn't fit the role too well, and the action wasn't what it could have been. We had shown it four or five times, which was enough for all the men who had been on watch the first, second, or third times to see it. The movie that we wanted badly was "Stalag 17", with William Holden. No one on board had seen it, but we had heard good things about it from men on other ships or in our mail from home. It had to be only a matter of time until we got it.

When ships make a rendezvous at sea, they try to avoid going dead in the water if at all possible. A sitting ship is an easy target for a torpedo, and it isn't always possible to keep hulls on drifting vessels from scraping. Two or three thousand tons has a lot of inertia when it's heaving about in a rolling sea.

Transfers at sea are made by high-line. A man can sit in a breeches buoy and swing across nicely, if he doesn't mind the thought of getting dunked into a cold ocean at fifteen knots when the ships both roll toward each other. It happens quite often. The dunk is much more serious when movies are involved. A reel of 35mm film that has been soaked in salt water must be rinsed and dried immediately, or it will be ruined. The only way to do this on a Tin Can is to take it to the mess hall and wind it loosely around the mess tables, rinsing it with fresh water and wiping it dry as you go. It takes two men a couple of hours to do the job right.

We had been detached from the main task force for about a week, patrol-ling some zone that the brass thought should be covered, so we had not been able to swap movies for far too long. "Captain Horatio Hornblower" was the best we had on board, and things were to the point where the announcements for the evening’s movies were a contest in originality.

The duty boatswain had the responsibility for telling the crew what delights were in store each evening. We regularly heard some movies announced that Hollywood had not yet thought of.

"Now hear this! The name of the movie for this evening is 'Floating Down The River', with George Raft".

Or, "The movie for this evening is Marlon Brando and Andy Panda, together for the first time in "'Strange Love'".

Or," Tonight it's 'Knee Deep in Horse Manure', with Roy Rogers". Sailors can be very inventive sometimes.

Well, we were at the point where we were announcing: "It's Hornblower again", when we made sight of another U.S. vessel. After some signaling, we met and proceeded to swap movies. Before we had moved to within a mile of each other the word had come from the bridge that we were going to get "Stalag 17"! The news couldn't have been better if we had heard that Brigitte Bardot was coming aboard, since she would have ended up in officer's country anyway, but the whole crew could enjoy a top notch movie like "Stalag 17".

We took the canvas transfer bag aboard about 1700 hours. The mess hall was like the floor of the stock market that evening, with everyone trying to make a deal for someone else to stand his watch so he could go to the movie. About a ton of ice cream changed hands that day, believe me, and ice cream is not all that available aboard smaller ships. You can get two sets of whites ironed for your scoop of ice cream most of the time. The movie announcement is made after the real ships business is done for the day.

"ALL PRISONERS AT LARGE AND RESTRICTED MEN MUSTER ON THE FANTAIL".
"SWEEPERS MAN YOUR BROOMS; MAKE A CLEAN SWEEP-DOWN FORE AND AFT". "THE SHIPS BARBER IS CUTTING HAIR IN THE AFTER DIESEL ROOM". "WEATHER PERMIT-TING, THE FORWARD BERTHING SPACES WILL AIR BEDDING AT OH EIGHT HUNDRED TOMORROW".

And finally the movie.

I was having coffee in the sound shack when the button on the micro-phone clicked on. The Bos'n must have just been handed the paper with the name of the movie on it because he was as surprised as the rest of the crew to hear himself blurt out "NO SHIT! NOT AGAIN".

The Buckley had been diddled. They sent us Hornblower.

"That Stuff is Catchy, You Know"

By Darwin Crum

Whenever a new officer reported aboard the Buckley, there was a quick check to see how senior he was. There are certain duties that the officers assigned strictly according to time in grade. The first job title that the Junior Ensign aboard wanted to dump on the new man was Mess Officer, the second was Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer.

Since the Buckley was a radar picket ship, carrying an extra mast to hold all the radar gear, the Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer was not very important to her primary mission. The job ws not one that would do much for a man's naval career, so the sound gang always seemed to be breaking in a new boss? As soon as we got one half-way trained, we lost him.

Ensign D.B. Reed was typical of junior ensigns in those days. He had been an Iowa farmer's son less than four months before he reported aboard. The Navy was training officers in ninety days then, and it showed. The standing remark among the crew was "The sharp end is the front of the ship, sir". The "old" ASW officer brought Mr. Reed down to the sound room less than two hours after he came aboard.

The routine was standard. The old ASW officer made the introductions told the new ASW officer what a swell bunch of sailors we were, said goodbye, and left. You could almost hear him say "Thank God" under his breath as he left the sound shack.

Mister Reed stayed around for a cup of coffee, and very predictably told us that since he didn't know too much about ASW, he would appreciate it if we would give him all the help we could. This was totally standard procedure with all the new ones. Then he asked for any printed material he could borrow to read in his stateroom so he could learn what to do next. They always did that too. We wouldn't have minded helping, but the new officer always showed up a few days later acting as though he was an old hand at the game.

When General Quarters sounds on a warship, everyone makes a mad dash for his duty station. It is a serious breach of discipline to be on the wrong side of a dogged-down hatch when the rest of the ship has reported in as "Ready for action"

The excitement of the initial rush to stations is very soon replaced with total boredom. This is particularly true of the sound gang most of the time. If the crew is called to battle stations for anti-aircraft action, for instance, the sound gang has nothing to do except report "ASW Manned and Ready". After that, they just sit or stand around and hope their bladders don't explode. It's crowded in the sound shack, usually hot, and always boring.

Mr. Reed had been aboard for about a month before we really had to spend a long GQ together. By that time we had learned a quite a bit about him, including the juicy fact that he had led a very sheltered life, and he was quite a prude by sailor's standards. The description was; "He couldn't say Shit if his mouth was full of it". It was gross, but accurate.

We had been at general quarters for about an hour, when Bayles asked Mr. Reed; "Mr. Reed, did I ever tell you about the time I was in the whore house in Naples?"

Ensign Reed swallowed, tried to smile, and said that he didn't think so. "Well," said Bayles, "I was in this cat house in Naples, and I had just finished with this whore and we turned on the lights to make change". Mr. Reed was a bit pale now. "You should have seen her, Mr. Reed. When the lights came on, I seen there was these red, runny sores all over her!" The Ensign was near fainting by now, but he stuck it out pretty well. He looked at the overhead and murmured some thing like "My my". Bayles really bored in now. "I asked what the hell it was, and she told me it was syphilis!" Mr. Reed almost gagged.

"Yeah" smiled Bayles, was I ever relieved, I thought it was measles, and that stuff's catchy as hell!" I will give Ensign Reed credit, he tried to laugh. All of the rest of us did.

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"Now Hear This, All Hands Stand By To Darken Ship"

By Darwin Crum - 1984

If you have seen the movie, "The Caine Mutiny", you may remember what the fictional USS Caine looked like. The movie was actually filmed aboard the USS Bensen, the first ship of its class. There were three ships of the Bensen class in service during the Korean conflict; the USS Bensen, the USS Fitch, and the USS Hobson.

All of the Bensen class ships were built during the Second World War. They were a fast, small class of destroyer, displacing 1650 tons and having a dramatic break in the line of the main deck about one-third of the way aft. They were originally commissioned as mine sweepers, although during the Korean conflict they were outfitted as destroyers.

The nautical expression for a ship that has some intangible, just-right, look and feel, is "Yar". The ships of the Bensen class were pretty, maneuverable, and fast. They were Yar. I stood sonar watch with L.G. Todd off and on for over two years, but I don't think I ever heard his given name, since he was always called "L.G.". He was a nice guy, very quiet, and a good sailor.

When I say that L.G. was a good sailor, I mean he always relieved the watch on time, didn't get into trouble ashore very often, and rarely complained about anything. L.G. did his job well, collected his pay, and never bothered anyone. He never admitted to having any friends or relatives anywhere, and in retrospect, I would call him a classic loner. I liked him.

L.G. had gone to sea when he was ten years old, as a boy seaman on a Canadian merchant ship carrying lumber, under sail, from Canada to Japan. A few years later, when the Second World War broke out; L.G. lied about his age and joined the United States Navy, and served aboard tin cans in the Pacific throughout the war.

L.G. and I were on the evening watch together down in the sound shack on April 26th, 1952. Our ship, the USS Dennis J. Buckley, was steaming in formation, about 700 miles west of the Azores, on our way to the Med. The group of ships we were with had just spent two weeks in the north Atlantic playing war games with the NATO navies.

The formation consisted of a column of seven large ships surrounded by a ring of twelve or fourteen destroyers and destroyer escorts. The large ships were a carrier, a heavy cruiser, a troopship carrying marines, an oiler, a refrigerated cargo ship, and a couple of supply ships.

On that particular night, all of the ships in the formation were running dark. The Navy often has everyone go to "Darken Ship" conditions so they can practice wartime maneuvering in formation without lights. It's a little nerve wracking to think of all those ships running around, big, heavy, and totally invisible.

I was sitting on the deck of the sound shack, braced into a corner with my feet against the attack plotter so I wouldn't slide around as the ship rolled. As usual, I was reading. L.G. was standing his half-hour turn on the sonar gear, when we both heard something loud and foreign come through the speaker.

I looked at L.G. just as he blurted out "What the hell was that?" The strange noises went on long enough for us to get a good bearing on the source, and then faded out. We debated reporting it to the bridge, but decided against it, since we didn't know how to identify it. The Officer of the Deck on the bridge probably wouldn't understand if we reported "funny noises".

The noises turned out to be very un-funny. L.G. and I were still discussing what we had heard when the intercom from Combat Information Center snapped on and we heard; "The Wasp just rammed the Hobson, and she went down with all hands!"

L.G. and I had been listening to the death of a ship, and after being told what it was, it seemed odd to us that we hadn't figured out what had happened; for in retrospect, all the strange noises seemed to have been exactly what one would expect to hear if a ship broke up and sank after a collision.

The Hobson did not sink with all hands, but 176 men out of a crew of around 200 were lost. A Navy Court of Inquiry finally held that Commander W. J. Tierney on the Hobson was at fault, and that he had made a maneuvering error and crossed the bow of the Wasp as the carrier was turning into the wind to launch aircraft. The Wasp suffered only minor damage, and returned to the States for repairs under her own power.

To put the collision in perspective, remember that the Hobson was a 1650 ton ship. The Wasp displaced about 55,000 tons. This makes their collision somewhat like a Volkswagen Beetle being hit broadside by a heavily loaded semi. Two of the six sonar men on board the Hobson had been my classmates in school at Key West. Had our names been in some other order in the alphabet, I might have been assigned to the Hobson instead of the Buckley.

None of the Sonar gang on the Hobson survived the collision.

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"When Did Amelia Earhart Disappear?"

Darwin Crum, 1989

Some sailors get to be well known aboard their ships for odd reasons. Max Conover had a fair amount of fame on the Buckley as the guy who would eat a blue Gillette twin-edge razor-blade if you paid him two bucks. Walt Walters was known for never going past the first bar he came to when he went ashore. L.G. Todd never went ashore, and so on.

I was pretty well known to the crew for my store of what has become known nowadays as "Trivia", and for my willingness to write letters and find out things.

There is a lot of time to kill aboard a ship at sea. The men live in very close quarters, so there is a complete lack of privacy. These things add up to arguments, and arguments often turn into bets (or fights if not settled promptly). That's where I came in. I was the arbitrator for those who chose to bet rather than fight.

The problem is that there are very few resources for settling bets aboard a ship at sea. The thing called the Ship's Library was a half-dozen volumes of Compton's Encyclopedia stacked on a steel beam on the starboard side of the mess hall. There was a certain diabolical system at work with those books. The one you wanted was always missing. If you needed to look up something on the Mississippi river for instance, the MA to MO volume would not be there. At least not then.

The books were missing because they were needed too often, and because there were always some low-life types in the crew who found it easier to throw something overboard than to carry it back to its proper place. This made it tough for the rest of us, but it made me useful. I had a reputation for providing answers.

A good example was the Amelia Earhart controversy. As usual, no one knew how it got started, but by the time it got to me, there were about ten men involved. They had argued the date of Amelia's demise down to an exact dividing line. One faction said she disappeared before November First, 1936, the other group said "after". I didn't know, although I tended to go along with the "after" group. I couldn't find an authority on board that had enough weight behind it to be believed, so I wrote to my brother and asked him to look it up for me. Since he was a Professor of Law, his word was accepted as gospel, especially when he replied on University letterhead stationery.

My favorite, and most profitable quarrel was between two (at first) men from the quartermaster gang. One of them had mentioned being on top of the Empire State building during a storm, and feeling it sway. He probably said something like; "That thing sways so bad, I almost fell down." The listener jumped on that fast. "Hey, the Empire State building doesn't sway that much, it was all in your head." "It was not!" "It must have been." "It was not!" "Yes it was". "It wasn't" "It was." "YOU WANNA BET?"

The first attempt to settle the bet only drew more men into the argument. The pro-sway sailors tended to believe in a seven foot sway. The bet finally settled on whether the sway was more or less than four feet.

That's where I came in. A trip to the "library" would prove fruitless, a survey of the crew only enlarged the dissension, and eventually a group of disputants would show up at the sound shack.

Since I wasn't one of the original antagonists, and since I didn't have any money down on the question, I was considered as a fair judge. The fact that I might not give the right answer wasn't really an important factor, since I think in most cases the need was for AN answer, not necessarily the RIGHT answer. The important thing was to get things settled.

When I didn't know what was needed to make an acceptable judgment, I had a few resources to use. Officer's Country was the best of them. Enlisted men tend to avoid officers. Officers out-rank them, even if they haven't been in the navy as long, so they must have something wrong with them. But officers have college educations, and like it or not, there was a lot of knowledge spread out amongst them, even if no single one of them ever showed any of it to the crew.

I had no trouble getting cooperation. A simple request was all it took to get a lot of answers. "Hey Mr. Dorsey, will you ask around the wardroom if anyone knows exactly how much the Liberty Bell weighs?" was all it usually took. It's strange, but I don't think that Mr. Dorsey could have settled a bet, but I could, using his answer. I was a bit proud of that, and it made me careful to be as accurate as possible. I don't think I ever gave a wrong answer to a question in three years on board, at least to a question that had money riding on it.

I didn't have the answer to the swaying Empire State building debate, and it wasn't likely that any of the officers would be certain enough for a solid answer, but I did get it settled, and the answer was very good to me in later days.

I wrote to the Chamber of Commerce of the city of New York, outlined the situation, and waited for a reply. It must have been a popular question, because I had a reply in only a couple of weeks. It was a form letter, and it gave a lot of information about the building that we didn't need, but it was very detailed about the swaying. That letter caused a couple of hundred dollars to change hands very fast. No one doubted the veracity of the New York City Chamber of Commerce, so that was that. Almost.

I put the letter in my locker and almost forgot about it until the question came up again a month or so later. This time I said jokingly, "You wanna bet?", and the guy said "Yeah, I wanna bet. How about ten bucks?" I explained to him that I had been through this before, and had the proof in my locker, so it wasn't fair for me to bet with him. He wouldn't believe me about the letter, so we ended up betting ten bucks on whether I really had it or not, and nothing on how much the sway was. I showed him the letter, and he paid on the spot, saying only "I'll be damned". I kept the letter, and used it several time more before the word spread too far and my supply of suckers ran dry. The investment of a six cent stamp returned me close to a hundred bucks, and my role as an authority wasn't hurt a bit.

1. Amelia Earhart :(1898-1937), disappeared July Third, 1937.

2. "Contrary to popular belief, the Empire State building does not sway in a high wind, however it has been calculated that if the wind were to blow at 100 miles per hour against one side for a period of one hour, the tip of the spire would be displaced one and one-half inches. It has never been known to have happened". (From the New York City Chamber of Commerce, in a letter dated August, 1952)

“Just A Little Off The Top”

By Darwin Crum

One of the inconveniences of living aboard a small vessel like a destroyer is the lack of some of the important services.

Most men are reasonably healthy, so life without a doctor is not much of a problem. Ditto for Dentistry; most of us have few toothaches in our lives. But, there was one man we had to visit every two weeks or so if we wanted to draw our liberty cards and go ashore...The Barber.

Navy regulations call for hair to be neatly trimmed, at least they used to. This meant that your hair could be no longer than the length of your liberty card. It also meant that if you didn't have a fairly recent haircut, you wouldn't be issued your liberty card. Keeping your hair neatly trimmed meant a haircut at least twice a month. This was no small trick at times aboard the Buckley.

"NOW HEAR THIS, ANY MAN DESIRING TO BECOME THE SHIP'S BARBER, LAY DOWN TO SICK BAY."

When you heard this on the PA, you knew the ship's barber had either quit, or been canned, or had been transferred, or his hitch was up. The loss of the ship's barber would have been quite a misfortune if he had been able to cut hair reasonably well. Unfortunately, not many of the ship's barbers did cut hair even close to reasonably well.

It usually took about a half-hour for the next word to be passed; "NOW HEAR THIS, THE SHIPS BARBER IS NOW CUTTING HAIR IN THE AFTER GENERATOR ROOM".

The interval between those two announcements gives you an idea of how long the training procedure was for barbers on the Buckley. It also gives you some idea of what the quality of the haircuts would be for the next week or so. Remember, in the time between announcements the man had to get to sick-bay, tell them who he was, be shown the box containing the tools of his new trade, be told to keep them clean and for “Christ's-sake-don't-lose-them." In the remaining time, he was told where the after generator room was, and that he could use a GI can for his customers to sit on.

Now keep in mind that at no time in this process did anyone ever question the ability of the new barber to cut hair. At first, this may seem like an oversight, but it isn't. The import-ant thing was for the ship to have a barber, there was no requirement that he be a ‼ good‼ barber. And, with time and luck, maybe the new one would learn to cut hair.

The reasons why a man would want to be the ships barber are obvious. He may have been faced with an onerous job in his usual rate, like a bos'n who didn't want to paint the waterline, or a gunners mate that was due to spend the next quarter as a mess cook, or anyone who was on the bad side of his immediate superior. Maybe he even wanted to learn to be a barber, although that isn't too likely.

It was fun to watch a man give the very first haircut in his life. Some men think because they have had so many hair cuts themselves that they should be able to cut hair. If this were true, everyone who listened to Sousa records could be a piccolo player. I've tried cutting hair. It ain't easy.

Now, as you would expect, a barber shop that uses an inverted garbage can for a chair is not going to have a mirror. This means the victim can only guess what's going on. Of course, if he hears the barber mutter "Oh shit", he can be sure whatever is going on is not going on as well as planned. Like I said, cutting hair is tough.

The new barber always went for the clippers first. They had a certain controllable feel to them. A couple of little test runs an inch up the back seemed to go all right, and so he inevitably became bolder and went for a little more hair on the next one. This is the point where a novice starts to show his native lack of ability. He also begins to learn, what to me, is the First Rule of Barbering for Beginners. "Half a hair cut will always look worse than no hair cut".

Regrettably, the Second Rule is; “Anything you do to try to fix a poor hair cut will turn it into a bad hair cut". Think about it, the only thing you can do to fix a poor hair cut is to cut off some more hair. Since you got into trouble by cutting hair wrong the first time, logic has it that you will get into more trouble by cutting off more hair to try to fix the first error. A tyro barber with enough determination to make things right will inevitably render his client bald, given enough time. Tapering the hair on the back of a mans head so there are no stair steps is not something that a man can learn in twenty minutes.

Now since the man in the "chair" didn't have a mirror to see what was going on, you would expect that some of his buddies would tell him. Not so, they didn't know either, because the man being disfigured was facing them, and new barbers always start on the back. It was when the victim turned his head to ask "What the Hell is going on?" that the gallery caught its first glimpse of the mayhem. The laughter told all.

That leads us to Rule Three. "An expensive haircut by a foreign barber ashore is a better deal than a free one aboard ship".

In the sound gang, we always cut each others hair, usually on the mid watch, when we had plenty of time to take it slow and easy.

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"Three Fathoms Sir and No Bottom"

By Darwin Crum

When Queen Elizabeth was crowned in the early fifty's, the Royal Navy was still composed of the ships of a number of nations. Many of them were dispatched to London for the coronation, and afterwards went home through the Mediterranean Sea. A popular port to visit was Valletta, the port city of Malta. We were there for a different reason.

The Buckley had collided with something one night that bent the dome over the sound transducer hard enough to blind us as far as underwater detection was concerned. We went into dry dock in Malta for a fix.

It took about two weeks to get the new dome installed, refloat the ship, and get her tied to a pier. Two weeks was enough time for Cat Engal to make a whole gang of new friends in the seamier section of town. Cat liked to have a good time, and as long as he was paying, his Maltese pals were willing to see that he had one. Cat liked to take other guys from our crew over to see how much fun he could show them. That's when the game of "Seven-Eleven-Twenty-One" started.

Seven-Eleven-Twenty-One was an easy game to learn. All that was needed was a table in a bar, surrounded by sailors, two pair of dice, money, and a strong constitution.

The game started with two dice being thrown in turn by each player until someone threw a seven. The man who threw the seven was the winner of the right to concoct any drink his imagination and ingenuity could invent. The process was then repeated, using three dice until an eleven was thrown. The eleven thrower picked up the tab for the drink that the seven thrower had prescribed. A fourth die was added to the dice cup, and the goal became twenty-one. The man who hit twenty-one got to drink the potion.

Since the players were all sailors, and since the chances were fair that if you named the drink that you wouldn't have to actually drink it, the drinks got amazingly exotic. Raw eggs, rum, powdered sugar, gin, brandy, rye, cinnamon, olives, pickles, and almost anything else the innkeeper had behind the bar were likely ingredients. An evening of Seven-Eleven-Twenty-One could be devastating. Cat loved the game.

It was after one of these games that Cat had the incident with the gondola. Gondolas are always associated with Venice, but Venice does not have exclusive rights to the gondola. These beautiful and practical boats are popular all over the Mediterranean for quick, convenient transportation. Malta had many of them available for about twenty cents a ride.

Cat was coming back to the ship early one Saturday after-noon, probably to borrow some more money to go back and play his game. He had hired a gondolier to row him across the harbor to the ship, and was leaning back enjoying the ride as he neared the port side ladder. About twenty feet out, Cat looked up and saw the Captain standing on the wing of the bridge. And, not only was the Old man, there, but he was talking to the Exec!

Cat was nervous, but only until he realized that not only was he coming back early, he was in pretty fine shape. He was sober, his whites were clean, his shave was still new, and his shoes were even polished up nicely. This could be a chance to score a point or two if he did the right thing. Cat knew exactly what to do. He stood up, handed the gondolier a couple of shillings, threw a smart salute at the bridge, and just as the Captain returned the salute, Cat stepped off the gondola into the bay.

When he surfaced, the Skipper and the Exec were looking down with absolutely no expression on their faces, just shaking their heads slowly in disbelief.

Cat swam to the ladder and climbed aboard. He came down to the compartment muttering to himself, and stripped down to put on dry skivvies. When he came into the sound shack in the corner of the compartment he was still muttering.

After he poured his coffee I asked him what he was mumbling about. Cat put down his coffee, and with the saddest of voices said "You know, I could have salvaged that whole screw-up if I had only saluted again when I came up and told the Old Man 'Three fathoms Sir, and no bottom'".

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A "Genuine Turkish Antique"

By Darwin Crum

When you stand quarterdeck watch in a foreign port, you have an opportunity to see what treasures sailors bring back with them from their trips ashore. There are some beautiful souvenirs available in most of the ports we visited in the Mediterranean; Cameos in Naples, delicate glass in Venice, first rate meerschaum pipes in all of the Turkish ports, and so on. Not too many sailors seemed to want those things. Oh, some of the crew brought back really nice things, but they were usually the older men, older meaning over twenty-five or so.

The most popular souvenir seemed to be The Satin Pillow. Everyone has seen these pillows, not many of us have owned one. They are just about always the same, with a sparse border of red fringe around a flashy yellow cover that displays a crude drawing of some kind, and words like "Souvenir of Cannes, France".

Since Cannes is on the Riviera, the cartoon would depict a pop-eyed sailor with his tongue hanging out ogling the backside of a bikini-clad girl with very over developed buttocks.

It is hard to describe just how absolutely and crudely tasteless these pillows were, but sailors bought them. I suppose they eventually took them home and gave them to someone, I don't really know, but pillows could be found in any port on the shores of the Med. Whoever made them had an absolutely predictable formula.

If there was something unique to a port, the cartoon would depict the unique thing. If there was nothing noteworthy, a semi-nude girl was the subject. Pillows from Venice showed a gondolier, Pillows from Athens had the Parthenon; Pillows from Rhodes displayed a grotesque Colossus, and so on. The artwork was terrible, and pillows were uniformly bad.

In Turkey, where a fine hand-carved meerschaum pipe could be bought for five dollars or so, most sailors bought hookahs. A hookah is the water-pipe you see smoked in movies about opium dens. It has hose for drawing the smoke from the central burner through a glass bowl of water. The problem was, sailors didn't buy real hookahs, they bought the ones someone must have made just to sell to American sailors. These atrocities were aluminum bowls with plastic stems holding a little glass platform where the combustibles were meant to go. The hose was a piece of clear plastic tubing ending in a red plastic mouth piece. Garish would be a mild word for these things, but they were popular with sailors.

I met the “Man With The Coat Full of Knives” in Izmir, Turkey. He was a dead ringer for the character that usually shows up in cartoon strips and funny movies. He always looks furtively to both sides before he swings open his coat to display his inventory of hot merchandise. The man in Izmir was the only real “Man With The Coat” that I have ever seen. He was selling daggers, and he had twenty or twenty-five of them held into his coat lining with little bands of leather. He was terrific. He had his sales routine down to a science, with only two faults. First, he spoke very little English, and second, he didn't know the meaning of most of what he did speak. Someone had

taught him to say "Genuine Turkish Antique". He obviously didn't know what the words meant, but it was equally obvious that he believed they were a very potent selling tool. When asked if the hilts on the knives were genuine Turkish antique Plexiglas, he would sneak a glance to the left and right, nod vigorously and swear to the fact. "Genuine Turkish Antique Plexiglas!" A few of the knives showed up later in the compartment, where they rusted into junk in a few days.

I was on duty as Messenger of the Watch one Sunday afternoon while we were anchored in the Port of Athens. The Officer of the Deck was an old Chief quartermaster who had seen it all at least once. The ship's boat was making hourly trips to the landing, as much to give the crew something to do as anything else. The men on liberty had gone ashore earlier, and it was too soon to expect many of them to return.

The Quarterdeck was at the mid-ships passageway, and the ladder was rigged down the starboard side. The chief and I were just standing around talking as we watched the boat approach. As it pulled alongside, we walked over and watched a very young seaman come aboard carrying a red-fringed pillow and plastic statue of "The Thinker" about a foot high.

After the kid had saluted and started aft, the Chief shook his head and said, "You know, when I retire from this man's navy, I'm going to go into business sacking up horse-manure just to sell to sailors on paydays".

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"I Love You Joni James, I Love You"

By Darwin Crum

It's strange, Joni James was one of the most popular singers of the fifties, but today I can't think of the name of one of her songs. I'm sure that Red Gregory still can though; I believe that he was as much in love with Joni James as any man could possibly be.

Red had one of those little RCA Victor record players that were so popular back then. They were only about nine inches square, and played only those little 45 RPM records. Red managed to find room in his locker for his phonograph, along with every Joni James record ever made.

Normally, a phonograph will not play on a ship in heavy weather. The roll and pitch of the ship plays havoc with the need for the needle to stay in the groove. Red solved this problem nicely.

I'm not sure where Red got the plywood, he probably brought it from home, but he cut it into a square just a bit larger than the base of his phonograph. Then he made a small hole in each corner, just large enough for a piece of marlin-line to go through. He tied the four strands together above the center of the plywood, pasted a publicity photo of Joni on the bottom, set the phonograph on the top, and after hanging it from the frame of the bunk above him, laid back to listen to his angel sing.

The only problem with the arrangement was the scanty space between bunks. The navy seems to feel that since all a man is supposed to in his sack is sleep, he should be able to get along with a bit less than eighteen inches of vertical space. This left just enough room for Red under his swinging phonograph, with not an inch to spare. He was too close to be able to see the picture, but Red knew she was there.

Red would lie there with his eyes closed, the bottom of the plywood missing his face by an inch as the ship rolled in the sea, and he would murmur softly as the music played. "Sing to me Joni, sing it for me, Baby".

It would have been cruel to laugh.

# # # # # # # # #

Four-Hundred Day Clocks

By Darwin Crum

One of the bargains to be picked up on a Mediterranean cruise was a four-hundred day clock.

They were the clocks that had a pendulum that rotated slowly back and forth instead of swinging like the pendulum on a regular clock. They were made in Germany, but they were sold all over Europe, and they ran remarkably well if you could find a stable surface to set them on.

The works of these clocks were exposed to view under a very fragile glass dome. The dome was probably the reason they had such a complex packaging system. The packaging system was one of the reasons the clocks were so popular with the crew.

The clocks were packed first in a cardboard box, the works and the dome held tightly by very precisely fitted cardboard spacers. The cardboard box was in turn contained in a wooden box made of slats about a half-inch thick. You probably could have thrown a packed clock down a flight of stairs without harming it.

It didn't take some bright guy long to see the possibilities for using the clock as a contraband carrier. He took the top off of the wooden box, lifted out the cardboard box, put four bottles of cognac into the wooden box, stuffed in some paper to stifle the clinking, replaced the wooden top and calmly walked on board with what looked like two clocks.

The system worked for about a week, until someone talked too much, and the O.D started checking. Then it was back to the little flat bottles in the sock.

THE SKIPPER

By Darwin Crum

Navy tradition holds that the Commanding Officer of a vessel is addressed as "Captain" regardless of his rank. The Executive officer is likewise dubbed "Commander".

The Commanding Officer of the Buckley, when I reported aboard, was Commander Duncan Forbes Francis III. Captain Francis was a good skipper, and he carried a great responsibility well. I think that the having the lives and welfare of a ship and its crew on your shoulders must be a crushing load at times.

At least once a week, after the lights went out in the berthing space, the dialogue went like this;

First voice in the dark: "How do you like Duncan Francis?"
Second voice in the dark: "I don't know, I never dunked him"

The single thing I remember most about Captain Francis was how little he seemed to sleep when we were at sea.

When ships sail in formation, all of them are subject to orders from the Senior Officer Present Afloat, or SOPA. When the formation is steaming at night, SOPA usually announces his plans for any activity during the night as his "Night Intentions". Night Intentions are announced late in the evening as a courtesy to the other ship's captain and crew and to prevent unexpected course or speed changes from causing maneuvering dangers.

A typical Night Intention message is; "It is my intention to remain on present course and speed until 0600" Night intentions let the crews on the bridges of the ships in the formation breath a little easier, and help to keep things orderly and safe.

The Officer of the Deck has the responsibility for maintaining the relative position of his ship in the formation. He does this by keeping a constant bearing on the ship with SOPA aboard, using minor speed and course changes to remain on station.

Speed is changed by adding or subtracting turns from the speed of the propeller shafts. Usually it only takes a turn or two of adjustment to stay in position. Course is changed with a slight adjustment to the rudder. The changes were imperceptible to me. Captain Francis always noticed them.

On the Buckley, the Captain has two cabins. The "Captains Cabin" was just forward of the officers wardroom, on the main deck. It was not very big, and not very plush, but it was the best on board. The "Captains Sea Cabin", was on the bridge deck, just aft of the pilot house. It was tiny, much like a compartment on a train, only smaller. The sea cabin had a sink, a bunk, a pull-down toilet, and nothing else. Captain Francis lived there when we were steaming.

A typical scene would be at 0300. SOPA would announce a minor course change, perhaps only a few degrees, to adjust for wind or currents. The O.D. would tell the helmsman to "Come right to

090", or whatever the new course was to be. The helmsman would put on a little rudder for a fraction of a minute, swinging the ship slowly to the new course. A few seconds later, the skipper would appear, amble over to the log, read the latest entry on the course change, glance at the compass, and disappear back to his sea cabin. The men on the bridge would look at each other, shake their heads, and say "How the hell did he know?"

I never did find out.

# # # # # #

The Dreaded Sea-Bat

By Darwin Crum

When a ship is to be sent on a long assignment in a distant place, it is necessary to review the discharge dates of the crew members to be certain that men are not in Timbuktu when their enlistments expire. Those who are due to return to civilian life before the ship returns to the States are transferred to "Back-porch" duty.

If the ship is going to be away for six or seven months, the number of crew members transferred off will be substantial, and replacements must be brought aboard to fill the empty billets before she sails.

The Buckley was one of the ships that joins the Sixth Fleet for six months every year. The Sixth Fleet is always based in the Mediterranean Sea, with ships coming across from the United States to relieve one another every spring and fall. The Buckley left for its' Med cruise in early April, and was relieved to return home in mid-October. This seven month stretch abroad meant a lot of transfers off the ship in March and April. It also meant a sizable number of new hands would come aboard.

Before one of our Mediterranean cruises, the Buckley was blessed with about eighty brand new Seaman Apprentices, men just out of boot camp. It made an interesting Atlantic crossing.

Excepting their youth and "skin-head" haircuts, the most notable attribute of the new men was their sea-sickness. The percentage of barfers among them must have set a record. That coupled with the bad weather we had for the first week or so of the crossing made living an adventure in nausea.

It’s easy to joke about sea-sickness unless you have been sea-sick, or have seen what it can do to a man who is afflicted for days on end. I was fortunate, I didn't have the problem, but I could see how the thought of no possible relief in sight demoralized those who did.

Those of us who didn't get sea-sick were also affected however, we had to stand extra watches, commiserate, and put up with finding vomit in the most unlikely places. It seems that some men think it is better to throw up anything that will pass as a container rather than put it on the deck. One learns just how wrong this is the first time his shoe is the chosen receptacle. A steel deck isn't hard to clean up, but a shoe is never the same again.

Happily, after a couple of weeks, we had some decent weather, and the sea became relatively calm. Life returned to normal, and the odors began to fade below decks. Morale went up dramatically, and the crew could spend some time on deck.

A traditional event at sea is the catching of a Sea-Bat. The equipment needed is simple; a bucket, a short piece of string, a small square of canvas, a wrench, and a man on his first trip to sea. We had an abundance of the last item.

One end of the string is tied to a little finger on a hand holding the bucket, the string goes over the edge of the bucket to the wrench inside. When the finger is jiggled, the wrench rattles with a

satisfactory imitation of something struggling to get out of the bucket. Of course, the canvas over the whole thing, ostensibly to keep the sea-bat confined, but actually to conceal the string, finger, and wrench. It is an effective illusion.

The new man would notice five or six of the crew squatting down around a bucket, exclaiming things like: "That's the biggest one I ever saw", or "Don't lift the cover too high, he'll get out!", and, "Listen to that summabitch struggle!" The men are excited, and the victim's curiosity soon sucks him in.

"What have you guys got?"

"The biggest goddamn sea-bat you ever saw!"

"Sea-bat? What's a sea-bat?"

"You never seen a sea-bat, where you been, sailor?"

"Lemme look"

"O.K., But you gotta get right down close so he don't get out"

At this point, the victim is allowed to stoop over as far as he can to peek under the canvas that covers the bucket. This provides one of the perpetrators a chance to hit the victim across his backside with a slat from a wooden orange crate. The slat is then pointed out to him as the "Real" Sea-Bat.

Sailors at sea are easily amused.

# # # # # # # #

The Mail Buoy

In order to distribute mail to the ships and men of the fleet, the Navy maintains an immense network of buoys near all the major shipping lanes. Mail is distributed to ships as they leave the States in such a manner that it can be left at designated buoys for pick-up by other ships as they pass.

This system allows mail to be sent to ships at sea that would otherwise be months being delivered. Each ship has a coded combination to the locks on the buoys so security is assured.

The preceding paragraph is totally untrue. The Navy has never used such a device as a mail buoy, and such things do not exist.

Jimmy Phillips learned all about mail buoys on the way to Guantanamo Bay. The hard way.

A ship's bridge is an interesting place. Much of the time you can see things actually happening on the bridge, unlike in the berthing spaces, where sorting laundry may be the big event of the day. Jimmy liked to hang around the bridge.

Normally, the bridge gang is fairly hospitable, and visitors are tolerated as long as they don't get under foot too often, or interfere when things are busy. Jimmy did both, and the Chief Quartermaster finally got him for it.

The Bosn's pipe preceded the announcement; "NOW HEAR THIS, YEOMAN PHILLIPS REPORT TO THE BRIDGE".

Jimmy was petrified. Visiting the bridge was one thing, being summoned there was quite another. He made up four decks in no time flat. The Chief was waiting for him with a kindly smile. "Phillips, you're going to set the mail-buoy watch on the bow, do you know what to do?" Jimmy had to admit that he didn't. The Chief's smile faded a bit; "For Christ's sake, don't they teach you guys anything in boot camp any more? Get some binoculars, and report back here on the double."

The Captain was on the bridge, sitting in his sea chair, and listening to the conversation. "Here son, you can use mine if you like" Phillips was flattered, this must be important!

It was the Chief's turn next. He very patiently explained about the mail buoy system, how important it was to be sure we didn't miss ours, and how Jimmy would stand on the bow and keep watch for the next buoy we were due to pass. It sounded totally reasonable to Phillips. He was even a bit eager to start his Watch.

"Just a minute sailor, haven't you forgotten something?" It was the Chief, putting on the icing. "You have to have a boat hook, how else you going to snag the buoy?" Phillips said he would get one, and left the bridge.

Everyone on the bridge was watching when Phillips strode up the bow a few minutes later to start his watch. Even the skipper was smiling.

It took about two minutes for the word to spread from stem to stern. Everyone who could manage sneaked forward to get a look at "The Kid on the bow with the twelve foot boat hook". Some took pictures. It was a classic.

You have to have a little sympathy for Phillips. It didn't take him much over an hour of standing there and thinking, to realize that something was wrong. If the ship needed to find a buoy, why not use radar? Or wouldn't it make more sense to watch for it from some high place, like the regular lookout stations? And why had he never heard of a mail buoy before?

Something was definitely not right... But hadn't the Captain had loaned him his own personal binoculars, and the Captain wouldn't play a trick on someone in his own crew, would he?

But abandoning your post was a serious offense, and if this was not a trick, and Jimmy left his post on the bow, he would probably end up in Portsmouth Naval Prison cutting square corners for the next five years. "Oh my God!" he thought, "What should I do?"

What he did was to stand there for about another hour, noticing how many sailors were peeking at him and laughing. Then he decided, not quite firmly that "Captains binoculars or not, I've been set up"

Yeoman Phillips didn't dare glance up at the bridge as he went to stow the boat hook.

→ →

"Guys, Want Some Velveeta?"

By Darwin Crum

Keeping a warship supplied with all the things that she, and the men aboard her, need, is a big job.

Warships are built to fight, so it is natural and proper that the things needed to fight have first priority. The things needed to assure the welfare of the crew are secondary, and the things needed for the comfort of the crew seem to have no priority at all.

The crew was always fed, but not necessarily well fed. There was always something nourishing in the mess hall at meal times, even if it was spaghetti with so much anise in the sauce that the only taste it had was licorice.

In retrospect, the men in the galley did amazing things at times, particularly when the sea was really rough. Cooking for nearly two-hundred sailors couldn't have been easy in the little ship's galley in good weather, but when the ship was rolling 30 or 40 degrees, it should have been impossible. I can't remember a meal not being served on time.

When the ship was taking swells from the beam you had to sit astride the bench at your mess table, with one hand gripping the edge of the table so you and the bench wouldn't fall over. The table was welded down, and you quickly learned to keep your fingers under the table, but to hook your thumb over the top and in your tray.

That way your tray wouldn't slide across and land on the deck, or in someone's lap. It was interesting to watch the coffee in your cup stay horizontal as the ship rolled. If you filed it a bit too full, it would slop over into your tray and make the food even worse. The one advantage of meals during heavy weather was that there were so few men in the chow line, so there was no waiting and there was no problem finding a place to sit. Appetites fade in heavy seas.

The ship's supplies were all transferred aboard at sea while we were in the Med. Bringing stores aboard at sea involves meeting a stores vessel some where and running alongside her for an hour or so while the supplies were sent over in huge cargo nets. The supply ship had big cranes which hoisted the cargo nets out of her holds, swung them over and lowered them onto our main deck. The standard announcement was; "NOW HEAR THIS, ALL ENLISTED MEN NOT ON WATCH LAY UP TO THE MAIN DECK TO HANDLE STORES"

Cargo nets were brought aboard on both the foc'sle and the fantail. There they were broken open, and all hands were ordered to turn to, and pipe stores below. The term "pipe" never made much sense; a better word would have been "carry"

Piping stores was traditionally the time for crew members to make off with everything possible. It was considered a sporting challenge to see what could be slipped into some handy niche for a later retrieval. That's how we got the cheese.

Enlisted men's cheese came aboard in big wheels, weighing about fifty pounds. One of those wheels was not a good item to steal, because there was no way to keep it under cover long enough to eat it, and it wasn't very good cheese anyway. The officer's cheese supply however, came aboard in cases of two- pound boxes of Kraft Velveeta. THAT was worth going for, and we did.

I had taken a little detour on my way below with a case of Velveeta, and had stashed it the big laundry bag in my compartment. Later, after all the stores were aboard and stowed, I retrieved it and brought it to the sound shack.

We ate the first box that evening, during our perpetual game of Hearts, and began to worry about all of the rest of it, since if we kept the whole case, it would certainly not be gone by the time we had our next session at general quarters, and the ASW officer would surely find us with it. Swiping officer's food may have been the sporting thing to do, but it was still theft, and theft is severely frowned upon in the Navy. Some men have gone to Portsmouth for less than a case of cheese. Particularly officer's cheese.

We decided to eat one more box, and give the rest away as soon as possible. This would be a quick way to destroy the evidence, and also a way to spread the guilt a bit.

I waited until it was dark, and wrapped three or four boxes in a dungaree jacket, slung it as casually as possible over my arm, and went up to Combat Information Center, CIC for short. The radar gang was kind of like brothers to the sonar-men, since we were in somewhat the same business, except that we hunted submarines, and they were after airplanes.

I went in, looked to be sure there were no officers around, and asked the leading radarman, "You guys want some cheese? We have a whole case down in sonar" He almost fell over. "No kidding! We got a case too, and we don't know what to do with it. We sure as hell don't need any more!" I shrugged and said "No sweat Chief, I'll give it to the radio shack". The Chief shook his head, "It won't work, they got a case too."

We ended up throwing almost all of three cases of Velveeta over the side that night. The strange thing was, there were only three cases brought aboard, and since they were all diverted to the crew, they were assumed to have never come aboard. There was no fuss made at all, and we could probably have kept them in relative safety.

The next time we handled stores, that damned Harry Alden swiped a case of gallon cans of fruit cocktail, when he could have taken a huge summer sausage.

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Klootch Making

By Darwin Crum

One of the most despised tools aboard ship is the paint scraper. Using it is hard and boring work. When a paint scraper is "accidentally" dropped over the side, it makes a noise best described as "Klootch", when it hits the sea.

Sailors on the deck-gang find it a delightful sound on hot days. From experience the Navy has learned to carry a huge inventory of scrapers.

# # # # # #

Bunking In

By Darwin Crum

The choice of bunks in a berthing space aboard ship is according to rank and time in the compartment. None of the bunks is exactly what you would call plush accommodations, but some were less bad than others.

We slept three high, on very small, very thin mattresses were that laid on canvas bunk bottoms that were placed into frames made of aluminum pipe. The frames were held up on one side by hooks welded to steel posts, the other side hung from chains that were hooked over the frame of the bunk above, or from the overhead in the case of the top bunk.

The heavy cord that was laced through the eyelets around the edge of the bunk bottom and the bunk frame were properly called "lashings" aboard ship. Lashings would eventually wear through, usually in the middle of the night. The broken lashing would then gradually lower the man and his bedding onto the man below. This event always seemed to be hilarious to the men in the compartment, so much so that it became a bit of a sport for some men to cut a lashing, tie the ends with thread, and then wait for the victim to descend when the thread snapped from the weight of the sleeper. Sailors at sea are easily amused.

There were no springs under the mattress, but the flexing of the aluminum frame gave a little illusion of resiliency, and allowed enough sag in the bunk to let you sleep without rolling around in heavy weather.

Bedding was minimal. A white cotton cover slipped over the mattress was your bottom sheet. There was no top sheet, only one of the two woolen blankets the navy sold you in boot camp. The other blanket could be used as a pillow if one was wanted, regular pillows being forbidden. Men who had a hard time sleeping without a pillow had a tough decision in cold weather.

Mattress covers were changed twice a week and in good weather when the word was passed for "Air Bedding", each of us carried our mattress, mattress cover, and blankets topside, folded them over the lifeline, lashed them in place, and waited for the sun and fresh air to freshen them a bit.

Top bunks were uniformly bad. It was hard to climb into a top one, and they tended to be terribly hot in warm weather. The light level in top bunks was also so poor that it was difficult to read in a top bunk.

A bottom bunk might have been OK, except there were three lockers under each of them. Since these lockers were like bins, and were opened by lifting their lids, you had to get out of bed and lift up the side of your bunk frame any time someone needed something.

The middle bunk was definitely the best. The best middle bunks, in turn, were against the hull. There was a steel beam that formed the hull exactly at the level of the middle bunks in our compartment. It was an I-beam, with a vertical flange about four inches high. This provided a perfect place to put books, an ash tray, clothes, or most importantly, your shoes when the sea was rough.

Finding a place to put shoes at night was a problem. You couldn't leave them on deck to be stepped on or stumbled over, and in rough weather if there was a sea-sicker sleeping above or below you, you stood the chance of finding your shoes barfed on and in by morning.

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THE SLUSH FUND

By Darwin Crum

Slush funds are illegal in the Navy. Every ship has at least one slush fund. A slush fund is a loan agency that a sailor, or group of sailors, starts in order to take advantage of the propensity of some of the others in the crew to always need some money "Until pay-day". Civilians also have slush funds, usually run by organized criminals.

When we started the Sonar shack slush fund, the going rate for a loan was "Five for Six Until Pay Day", a truly handsome rate, for the lender, considering that pay day was never more than two weeks away. Five for six until payday simply means that for each five bucks you borrow, you agree to pay six bucks back on the next pay day. Of course, if you borrowed ten, the pay back was twelve, and twenty would cost you twenty-four. We rarely let anyone get into the fund for more than twenty, with the notable exception of Major Wingo. "Major" was his name, not his rank.

If Major had joined the army instead of the Navy, his given name would have probably been a problem. Even then, it took a little getting used to, calling a stewards-mate second class, "Major". Actually, everyone who knew him well called him "Maj", with a long "A", so it rhymed with "Page".

Major was a stewards mate, and he loved to shoot craps. He wasn't a good crapshooter, but he played whenever he could find, or start, a game. This made him a natural as a slush fund customer.

When we started our slush fund, we had no idea how lucrative it would turn out to be, since we were at sea most of the time and there wasn't any place to spend money except the ship's store, and no one ever bought anything there. The ship's store was a little room just aft of the mid ships passageway, on the main deck. Its inventory was over-priced cameras, flashy sets of carving knives, underwear in sizes that no one wore, and tin cans that were half-full of broken pieces of hard candy that some one with pull had managed to get the Navy to stock.

The odd thing was, our business was just as good while we were at sea as it was while we were in port. We had figured when we set up our fund that we would probably make our loans to men who wanted to go ashore, but were still broke from their last liberty. Not so, as it turned out. Gamblers were our best slush fund customers, and it didn't make any difference when pay day was, gamblers either needed money, or they could afford to pay their debts. Maj always paid his promptly.

We started the fund with twenty dollars from each of the six men in the sound gang. In about eight weeks, mostly spent at sea, we had assets of over five-hundred dollars.

Typically, Maj would show up at the door of the shack, and say, "I need twenty bucks man, and I need it right now, how 'bout it?" After the first few times, it was a quick transaction. Maj would sign the little book we used to keep track of the fund, take the twenty, and head back to the game. As soon as he got comfortably ahead, he would be back with the twenty-four he owed. He never complained about paying so much interest for the short time he used the money, and he always repaid us with a smile and a "Thanks", he was far and away our best customer.

We realized just how good a customer Maj was the day he borrowed the same twenty dollars three times, paying back twenty-four each time. We made a handsome twelve dollars profit on Maj that day.

A few weeks later, the fund had become so large that we were a bit nervous about it, so we decided to dissolve it. My share was enough to pay my train fare home on my next leave.

I believe if I ran into Maj today, and he asked, I would loan him money.

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The Greatest Flying Saucer Sighting in History

By Darwin Crum

Flying saucer stories aren't so regular in the newspapers nowadays compared to the nineteen-fifties, but I still read a few every year. I'm not a believer in flying saucers, but I know from experience why people are and I never sneer at their beliefs, because for a couple of hours during the summer of fifty-two, I, and about half the crew of the Buckley, was ready to extend a welcoming hand to the aliens we knew were up there. We had proof!

We were tied to the stone seawall in Taranto, Italy, making a good-will visit. Taranto, down at the instep of the Italian boot, is the major base of the Italian navy. It's not much of a town for good liberty, since the local people are constantly exposed to men in sailor's uniforms. Not many of the crew were ashore the night we saw the saucer.

I was up on the bridge, enjoying the balmy Mediterranean night, and wondering if I should get involved in the poker game in the pilot house. There was almost always a poker game going on in the pilot house when we were in port. It was a nice place to play, with fresh air, enough deck space, and most importantly, only one means of access. It's hard to get caught if you can't get sneaked up on.

I can't remember who saw the saucer first, but whoever it was, blurted out "What the Hell is that? It looks like a goddamn flying saucer!" We all looked up, and sure enough, there it was. A Real Flying Saucer!

The saucer appeared to be hovering directly over the ship, maybe moving a little toward the north. It was no vague, ill-defined, elusive, phantom as so many sightings are described. This was a real, tangible, solid, honest-to-God, flying saucer.

The poker game adjourned. Someone broke out binoculars. Guys hollered "Get a camera, get a camera, get a camera". There was a lot of profanity. Someone finally called the Officer of the Deck, who was on duty at the quarterdeck on the main deck, amidships. That's when things became scientific.

I can't remember who was O.D., but as soon as he was told that he could see a flying saucer if he looked straight up, he came up to the bridge. He looked at the saucer for a minute or so, and then he called the Executive Officer.

The Exec was Mr. Stevenson, an Annapolis man, a good officer, and a popular guy with the crew. He was also a little more level-headed than the rest of us. He took immediate charge. "All right men, lets do things right." Mr. Stevenson set up the plan that would end the Flying Saucer controversy forever. "O.K. men, we all seem to be sober and in control of our senses.

Everyone get a piece of paper and draw a picture of what they see. Sign your picture, and write the date and time on it." He sent a man down to Combat Information Center to light up a radar and start a plot of the saucer's track. Then he called the Captain. Mr. Stevenson was obviously doing things right, and we were all going to help him all we could. This was Big!

The skipper showed up in a few minutes, looked up, and said; "That's pretty damned interesting, have you got a plot going? has anyone taken pictures?, do we know how high it is?, is it moving?" When he heard affirmatives to all the questions, the Captain asked to be kept informed, and went below.

I kept my sketch for years. It showed a perfect circle of black, surrounded by a bright ring of light, surrounded by another narrow ring of darkness, which was surrounded by yet another ring of not-so-bright light that gradually faded out into the blackness of the sky. It was pretty, and awesome. From the ship we couldn't tell how high it was, but the center, black, part, was about a moon diameter across, and the whole thing was maybe five moon diameters across.

Mr. Stevenson called down to C.I.C., and asked what was going on. "Yes sir, we got it! It's at 2500 feet, and making 5 knots at three-five-oh."

We were all going to be famous! We knew that when a vessel of the United States Navy, a destroyer with extra radars for picket duty, with a crew trained in tracking flying things, reported that it had a radar plot of a Flying Saucer, no one could possibly dispute the facts. We were making history.

We watched the saucer drifting away for another thirty minutes before we lost sight of it. The radar gang plotted the saucer for another fifteen miles before it suddenly disappeared from the screen. That really cinched it since there was no way that anything man-made could just vanish from radar. The icing was on our cake. The saucer was real beyond a doubt. We were all going to be famous.

We gradually calmed down, the poker game resumed with me in it, and things were almost back to normal when the next saucer showed up. In fact, three more of them appeared. They were much lower than the first one, and quite a ways east of us. This meant we could see them from the side, not the bottom.

"It's a goddamn balloon!"

There was a trade fair going on in Sicily, about twenty miles to the south, across the Straits of Sicily. Part of the promotion for the fair was the launching of paper balloons, hoisted by hot air. The balloons were made of a translucent paper with a big flat pan of burning oil centered in the open bottom end of the bag. When they were viewed from the bottom, the bottom of the pan formed a dark circle, the flames lapping over the edge of the pan formed a bright ring, and the light from the fire showed through the paper sides to finish the perfect image of our flying saucer.

The wind was carrying them north. Then they drifted until the fire went out, or the paper caught fire. Either one would cause the balloon to plummet to the earth and drop out of the radar beam.

We were crushed, disappointed, angry, embarrassed, and sheepish. There was a fresh wave of profanity as men threw their precious drawings over the side. The poker game adjourned, and we went below to hit the sack.

If only one balloon had been sent up from Sicily that evening, I would probably still be preaching about some imminent space invasion myself, probably on television. After all, I was part of the greatest flying saucer sighting in history.

Nowadays, when I read in the paper about an airline pilot, or a physicist, or an ordained minister, who has seen a flying saucer with his own very eyes and is absolutely certain that we are being invaded, guarded, watched, or what ever, by an alien force, I understand how they feel. I also laugh, at them and myself.

# # # # # # #

Channel Fever

By Darwin Crum

Some men don't like to admit to being homesick, as if it was a sign of weakness, or it made them less "Salty". I'm not one of them, but I do prefer to call it "Channel Fever".

After the ship has completed her tour in the Med, or the Caribbean, and the bow is pointing toward the U.S. You can start looking for an epidemic of channel fever. The symptoms are always the same. The most obvious is a desire to stare forward at an empty sea.

It was in October of '52 and we were "Proceeding Independently to the Continental U.S.", as the navy liked to put it. "Going Home" was the way the crew put it. The Buckley had been relieved of her sixth fleet duties in Palermo, Sicily, and after about eight months away, there were a lot of emotions around, what ever you might call them.

We were crossing the Atlantic by the northern route, which meant that the first landfall we would make would be the Breton Reef lightship. The Buckley had spent an extra week during the crossing to join in some NATO exercises, so we were more than ready to get home. By the time the war games had ended, men had started drifting up to the 02 level every now and then, to stand in front of the number two gun mount and lean on the lifeline and take a long time to smoke a cigarette. You could almost smell land, even if we were still a hundred and fifty miles out.

There were probably a dozen men gathered near one of the radiomen, listening to him tell bout his big plans for his wife when he finally got home. Like many men in those circumstances, he was laying it on a mite heavy when he said something like; "When I come through the front door, I'm gonna tell the Old Lady to get a good look at the deck, 'cause all she's gonna see for the next week will be the overhead!".

No one had really noticed the Chief Bos'n standing a ways to the port side until he said gently, "Son, it don't make no difference how far behind you get, you can always catch up in twenty minutes".

He was right, of course.

# # # # # # # #

Honors, Awards and Medals

By Darwin Crum

Whenever Audie Murphy is described as "Much Decorated", I'm reminded of a wedding cake. I don't think the term "decorated" carries the respect that is due to someone who has earned all of those honors.

A story is told that an aide to Napoleon once saw the Emperor preparing medals to be awarded the next day and asked “Sire, why do you play with those toys?" Napoleon looked up, froze the man with a stare and said "Toys? ...Men die for these toys!"

It is regrettable that so many "medals" are awarded for things that do not merit an honor. My medals fall into this category.

We were tied up in Naples during the summer of 1952 when I was awarded my first medal. Actually, I was playing a hand of Casino to see who would go up to the head and fill the coffee pot, when the award was made. We always played "loser goes".

The award ceremony wasn't anything like the ones in the movies where Tyrone Power stands proudly in front of the fluttering regimental flags while Maureen O'Hara looking adoringly on.

The Casino game was about half done when the sound shack door opened up, some Yeoman from the ship's office stuck his head in and asked "How many guys work in here?" I said "Six, why?"

The Yeoman muttered "Here's your medals", tossed six little cardboard boxes into the shack and left. That's how the sound gang, and everyone else on the vessel was awarded the "European Occupation Medal"

The medal was rather nice. It was bronze, about an inch and a half in diameter, and had a nice silky ribbon connecting it to a bar with a pin for hanging it on your jumper.

I never wore it, and I always felt a bit ashamed of getting it, as if I had cheated someone who had really done something meritorious to earn his medal.

About a year later, an announcement was made at morning quarters that all personnel who were on active duty between such and such dates were eligible for The Korean Victory Medal. Since I had thus far spent all of my enlistment east of the Mississippi river, I didn't feel I had done much to deserve a medal for winning the Korean "Police Action"

The Navy has a pecking order for awards. The most important one is always the first one on the right end of the top row of the ribbons which are worn to show what awards have been made to the wearer. The least prestigious award is worn at the left end of the bottom row. The Good Conduct Medal is considered to have enough importance to always appear in the top row. The usual flip remark about the Good conduct Medal is; "It's for three years of undetected crime"

The point is that the armed forces have given so many medals for so many non-meritorious things that they have cheapened the medals which represent truly brave deeds or great personal achievement.

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Flush, Flush, Flush

By Darwin Crum

The Great Lakes Naval Training Center was making sailors out of civilians at an incredible rate during the first half of 1951. During the first week of the year over twenty-thousand men were processed in. This meant that about nine or ten weeks later the Navy would have to process that same twenty-thousand men out to their next duty stations. All of that processing takes a lot of time.

When we finally got to take off the canvas leggings that cursed us as Boots", we were transferred across the base to an ill-defined area called "Mainside". Mainside was where the real Navy could be found. The real Navy being; beer joints ("slop chutes"), soda fountains ("geedunk stands"), and stores that sold candy and treats ("pogey bait"). Mainside was also the home of O.G.U.(Out-Going Unit), to which all of us were transferred while awaiting our orders. There were thousands of us in O.G.U. with not a whole lot to do.

The Navy is a firm believer in the adage that the devil finds work for idle hands. Centuries of experience have demonstrated that sailors will gamble, argue, fight, and even steal if left idle for too long. That's why all of the recent boots were assigned to make-work jobs during their terms in O.G.U. I spent two days as a messenger while in O.G.U. That's when I found out about the Navy policy on toilet paper.

The lieutenant I was assigned to as messenger had a little office in one of the wooden frame buildings in mainside. In retrospect, he was probably the low man on the officer's totem pole, but he was certainly a long way above me and my almost-shaven head, fresh from boot camp.

The lieutenant enjoyed having a man at his beck and call, and he beckoned and called constantly...I think it made him feel a little less insignifigant. His office also had a private bathroom which added much to his self esteem. It wasn't a fancy bathroom, it had an industrial-type of toilet with a bat-handled valve that you could flush with your foot if you wanted to, but it was a private bathroom.

The lieutenant sat on an old padded swivel chair behind an older wooden desk in the center of his little office. I sat in the corner on a hard chair. I was told to be quiet, to sweep the wooden deck several times a day after sprinkling it with water to keep the dust down, and to do very little else. It was easy and boring, but I guess it kept me from getting into trouble.

Some of the men were assigned routine maintenance jobs around the base. One of the jobs was the "Toilet Paper Watch". The Toilet Paper Watch was a crew of three men who replenished all of the toilet paper dispensers on mainside. There were hundreds of toilets ("heads" to the Navy), and they all needed someone to check for empty toilet paper dispensers and refill them. It was a job that had to be done by someone, and it was a fine, constructive way to keep three potential victims out of the hands of the devil.

The toilet paper crew had a good system for carrying out their orders. Toilet paper came in very large cardboard cartons, perhaps two hundred rolls to a carton. The crew had punched holes in opposing sides of the carton near the top edge. A swab handle was pushed through so that it extended about eighteen inches or so out of either end, making a handle to be set on the carrier sailor's shoulder, much like the pictures of a dead deer being carried out of the woods. The third man did the actual replacing as a penance for not carrying the carton. The crew could replace a couple of hundred rolls in a day's tour. They replaced my lieutenant's toilet paper on the morning of my second day with him. He was furious.

The lieutenant came out of his private head, looked around, and shouted at me, "Where in hell did they go?" I had no idea who he was shouting about so I asked; "Who sir?" Now the lieutenant almost screamed, "Those bastards with the toilet paper" He was purple. I explained that I had no idea where they were, they had been in the lieutenant's head over an hour ago, so now there was no telling where they might be. The lieutenant sat down in disgust and proceeded to rip into me.

"They put that goddamn enlisted men's paper in my head, I'm supposed to have officers paper, not that goddamn scratchy crap they give you guys".

That was the first that I knew just how different we were, officers and enlisted men. Imagine, we even had to have different toilet paper! The lieutenant explained as he calmed down. "Officers get soft paper like civilians use, enlisted men get that crap the a Navy buys real cheap from some swindler. I'll be damned if I'm going to use it, it's worse than a goddamn newspaper.

Things calmed down. I sprinkled and swept and sat quietly for an hour or so. Then the lieutenant went to head.

He didn't close the door, but since my chair was in the opposite corner I couldn't see in anyway, but I could hear. I heard flushing...a lot of flushing ...constant flushing.

Curiosity got the better of me after about two minutes of uninterrupted flushing, and I decided to take a peek. The lieutenant was solving his toilet paper crisis with Navy ingenuity. He had the offending roll of toilet paper in front of him, with an index finger in each end, and was standing next to the toilet bowl with one foot holding down the flush lever.

The lieutenant had unrolled a few feet of the roll out and shoved it down into the bowl. Then he put his foot on the flush lever and held it down so the toilet would flush continuously. The rushing water was pulling the paper off the roll and down the drain at a brisk pace, with the roll bouncing merrily around on his fingers.

I sat down and waited for the lieutenant to come out. It took him about fifteen minutes and enough water to float a destroyer to get rid of the roll. He came out of the head with the empty cardboard core and handed it to me.

The only errand I ran for the lieutenant during my two-day tour was to take the empty roll to the Master-at-Arms' office and get a replacement. My orders were firm, "Don't bring back any more of that enlisted man's crap."

I think of the lieutenant almost every year when I send my check to Internal Revenue.

# # # # # # # # #

Swimming

By Darwin Crum

The Navy has a strict rule that no man will go to sea unless he is a "Qualified Swimmer". The navy also has an amazingly simple and effective system of producing "Qualified Swimmers".

One morning during the third or fourth week of boot camp we were told we would spend one of our class periods that day at the pool. It sounded good to most of us who had done some swimming, but the guys who didn't swim were a bit nervous.

The Chief marched us to the big building marked "Swimming Pool" ,herded us into the locker room and turned us over to the swimming instructor. The swimming instructor, dressed in dungarees and oxfords, told us to "Shut up and get your goddamn clothes off and get showered and get into the next goddamn room but don't get into the goddamn water." He made all sound like one long word.

We showered and went into the big room with the pool. It was cold and clammy, and the water looked like it needed filtering. The pool was a big one, maybe 25 meters long and fifteen meters wide. It was marked as twelve feet deep under the diving boards at the end and sloping up to three feet at the other end.

The swimming instructor, still in his dungarees and oxfords, climbed up onto the diving board and blew his whistle. We quieted down and listened. "Shut up and line up along the edge of the goddamn pool with your toes hanging over the edge and don't get into the goddamn water until I tell ya" One word again.

We milled about a bit and eventually got lined up with our toes hanging over the edge, I was about at the middle of the edge, where the water was about five or six feet deep.

"Listen up Skinheads" He was still on the diving board. "When I blow this goddamn whistle again, you jump into the pool and swim across and get out of the water and stand on the edge of the pool with your goddamn toes hanging over the edge and don't do no goddamn talking." By the time the swimming instructor had finished this one big long word he had climbed down from the diving board, picked up a long bamboo pole and was standing behind us.

Most of the non-swimmers started hollering; there were a lot of them, and they were scattered quite evenly along the length of the pool. Of course, the instructions meant that some of them were being asked to jump into water that was over their heads.

If you are cold and scared and can't swim and someone tells you to jump into water that is over your head and swim you are very likely to complain loudly. At any place but boot camp you would probably run. In boot camp there is no place to run so you just panic.

The swimming instructor blew his whistle. I think he meant to blow it to get us quiet, but since he had said that when he blew it again we were supposed to jump in and swim, so most of us jumped in and swam. It was chaos.

The Swimming Instructor did the best he could to salvage the situation. He walked along behind the men left standing on the edge and pushed them in. Fortunately, he started at the shallow end, so the men he pushed just semi-jumped into the shallow water and stood there. When he got to the men at the deeper end, the men just went into the water and flailed around like they were drowning. As a fact, they were drowning!

When the swimming instructor had shoved the last man in, he started fishing them out. He picked the ones who looked to be in the most difficulty, swished his bamboo pole around, hitting them in the chest until they grabbed it. Then he pulled them over to the edge, pulled the pole away from them and went for the next potential drowner.

When we were all out of the water and turning blue we were moved back to the starting side and told to "Line up along the goddamn edge again and we'll try that again." We all milled around and eventually we were all lined up again, but this time with a difference. All of the non-swimmers were now at the shallow end. The panic level was also much lower. The swimming instructor blew his whistle.

Eighty-five men hit the water. Those who could swim swam. Those who couldn't swim just crouched down a little and walked across the pool, moving their arms like swimmers do, sloshing the water. All eighty-five men crossed the pool.

"That's more goddamn like it!"

It was duly entered in every man's service record that he was a "Qualified Swimmer". The swimming instructor had done his job; we were all eligible for sea duty.

# # # # # # # # #

Report

By Darwin Crum

A ship is not really a ship when it's tied to a pier. A ship is even less of a ship when it is half-way through a major overhaul.

When I reported aboard the U.S.S. Buckley in the Charlestown shipyard in Boston, I had expected to walk smartly aboard, face aft to salute the ensign, snap around to ask the Officer of the Deck for permission to come aboard, and take my place as a proud member of the crew of a smart ship. Except for saluting the ensign, I was all wrong.

The Buckley was tied to pier four with the standard seven mooring lines, and another two dozen or so welding cables, air hoses, power lines, telephone wires, and unidentifiable drapings. Both smokestacks were missing, the gun mounts were missing, the masts were missing, most of the ship was covered with red primer instead of the usual haze gray, and the Officer of the Deck was an ordinary sailor in dungarees reading a comic book in a wooden shack on the main deck. I was disappointed beyond belief with my new home.

The sailor in the wooden dog house didn't seem too delighted to see me. I was interrupting Captain Marvel I suppose. He told me that the ship's office was in building sixteen, and that "you better get your ass over there and report aboard before they secure for the day or you won't get a bunk, and don't leave that goddamn sea bag here or some yard bird will steal the sonuvabitch sure as hell." It wasn't nearly the Welcome Aboard I had hoped for.

The ship's office was a mess too, but in an hour I was officially a crew member. I also discovered that the crew was temporarily quartered on an APL tied to pier one. An APL is a floating barracks. It is also an invention of Satan.

# # # # # # #

Marksmanship

By Darwin Crum

All sailors are expected to carry weapons on certain occasions such as sentry duty in peacetime or landing or boarding parties during war. The Navy therefore needs to teach sailors how to handle these weapons.

Like almost everything that it does, the Navy teaches marksmanship according to rank. The lower five enlisted grades are taught to shoot a rifle, the next three grades men are taught to shoot an automatic pistol, and officers shoot both a pistol and a sub-machine gun. For those of us at the bottom of the pile, the rifle shooters, the lessons were amazingly brief.

Aboard the Buckley, we were given our marksmanship lesson at sea, well away from any other vessel. The Bos'n on watch on the bridge turned on the 1-MC circuit blew his pipe and announced: "Now hear this; Seamen Jones, Smith, Johnson, Nelson and Swanson report to the fantail for gunnery instruction."... It sounded more impressive than it turned out to be.

Back on the fantail, Seaman Jones reported to the Chief Gunners Mate, gave his name, and was handed an M-1 rifle. "Keep that sumnabitch pointed up, Sailor, the bastard's loaded!" That was the safety portion of the lesson.

Jones was half led, half pushed over to the rail, and told "Shoot." The natural response was "At what?" The answer, "At the f#&@%&# ocean sailor, what else is there?"

Jones pointed the rifle vaguely out to the port side and pulled the trigger. BANG! End of marksmanship for another year.

The ships office was duly notified, and Seaman Jones' personnel records were up-dated to show that he was properly qualified to use an M-1 rifle.

Of course, the facts that Seaman Jones didn't know how to load the gun, sight it, or hit anything smaller than the Atlantic Ocean, and that the Gunners Mate on the fantail had even snapped the safety off for him, were totally omitted from the record. The important thing was that he was qualified.

The entire crew was qualified with one weapon or another in one day, and less than three hundred rounds of ammunition were needed to do the job.

That's true Navy efficiency.

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“I Was Watching Him Like A Hawk”

By Darwin Crum

The Beretta Arms factory is near Naples, Italy. Beretta makes a line of fine automatic pistols that had great appeal to American sailors. The appeal was based on two facts. First, the going price in Naples was about a quarter of the price in the States, and second, guns were strictly forbidden aboard ship. Any time the Navy says something is absolutely forbidden, it throws out a challenge to the men to prove that, forbidden or not, it can be had by some ingenious sailor.

Of course, the Navy said that sailors could not bring weapons aboard ship, and anyone having one in his possession would face severe punishment, so buying one was a bit trickier than picking up a satin pillow. Two men in my compartment learned just how tricky, both in the same week.

Rick Dillon was a radioman third at that time, and he wanted a Beretta. He followed the standard pattern for satisfying that want. Rick went ashore and hit one of the bars where the Navy hung out. There are only two types of people in those bars, Sailors, and those who prey on Sailors.

Rick was looking for one of the people who prey on Sailors who also sold Berettas. It didn't take long for him to find one. Rick asked a man who was peddling imitation Bulova watches and phony Parker pens if he had a Beretta for sale. The man recoiled in horror at the thought. Heavens!

Berettas were illegal, everyone knew that, and he would never ever do anything illegal. The phony watch salesman left and returned in less than five minutes with a man who looked both ways before every sentence. Glance, glance, followed by, "You want to buy a Beretta?" Rick allowed as how he most certainly did. The man glanced around and suggested they retire into an alley to talk business. Rick told us about it later.

The man glanced both ways, and asked what caliber pistol Rick wanted. Rick wanted a .22. The man glanced both ways and produced something wrapped in newspaper from inside his clothing, and after another glance unwrapped a gleaming blue Beretta.

Glancing around again, he handed it to Rick. Rick looked it over thoroughly, because he knew that the man he was dealing with was a crook, and he wasn't about to be cheated into buying a less than perfect gun. The gun looked flawless to him, and to get the haggling started, he said something like "I'll give you seven thousand lira for it". That was about ten dollars, and it was common knowledge that .22's were going for around fifteen.

The man glanced around, took back the gun indignantly, and they started to deal seriously. A few minutes later, Rick had gone to twenty bucks for a gun and an extra clip. The glancing man had by this time put the gun back into his shirt while he showed Rick the extra clip.

The man wanted Rick to show him some money, so it was Rick's turn to glance around. An alley in Naples isn't the best place to flash that much money, but he did, and the man said the deal was on. Rick watched him like a hawk as the man rolled the Beretta and extra clip up in a piece of newspaper, and tie a piece of string around it. He handed the package to Rick with one hand as he

took the money with the other, and glancing around one last time, disappeared down the alley. Rick slipped the package into the waistband of his whites and went back into the bar.

Rick didn't stay and drink very long that night. He wanted to be certain get back to the ship in good shape so he wouldn't risk trouble with the Officer of the Deck and maybe get searched. He went down to the liberty boat landing early and got the next boat that came in. He was excited.

There was a game of Hearts going on in the sound shack when Rick came in. He interrupted it to tell us the news, He had a Beretta! "Look at this!" Rick pulled out his package and opened it. The man had pulled a switch, and Rick had paid twenty dollars for a cap pistol!

We laughed hard, but not nearly as hard as we did a few days later when Ronnie Meyers, who had laughed at Rick, fell for the same trick and paid eighteen bucks for a stone in a cardboard box.

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RIOT SQUAD

By Darwin Crum

The Shore Patrol is the Navy counterpart to the Army's Military Police. There is a considerable difference between the two groups. The Military Policeman in the Army is a full time cop. The Navy Shore Patrolman is just another sailor who got stuck with some extra duty.

When a small ship such as a destroyer calls on a port, the navy requires that some number of the crew be designated as Shore Patrol to keep things orderly ashore. This isn't a very effective system.

When the Buckley moored in the harbor at Salonika, Turkey for a week's stay during the summer of 1953, I was picked for Shore Patrol duty for the first two days. A twenty-two year old kid from North Dakota has a lot to learn about life, and Shore Patrol in Turkey is a lot of lessons all at once.

# # # # # #

The Flying Five

By Darwin Crum

When men live in close quarters there are some things that are certain to cause trouble. Money is one.

Payday is complicated in the navy. Since sailors are paid in cash the amount of money involved is quite substantial, and the chances of error are much greater than in a system in which checks can be written and books balanced before the fact, the navy has devised a complex method of keeping things ship-shape.

On the day before payday, a list is posted which shows how much money each man has in his payroll account. Each man then fills out a pay chit, complete with his thumb print, for the amount of his pay that he wants to draw. This is a sensible procedure since when a payday comes around while the ship is at sea there is not much need for cash, and money is much safer in the ships vault than it is in a mans locker. Less than half of the crew may show up for payday at sea, while a payday in a good liberty port will attract every man on board.

The actual cash is disbursed in the mess hall. Tables are lined up to form a long counter across which the payers will face the payees.

(*I think that this file was incomplete*)

# # # # # # # # #

"A WORD FROM THE CHIEF"

By Darwin Crum

I think that Chief Petty Officers must have an "Adage Service". It seemed like one of them was always dropping gems into the conversation.

I suppose it's because a Chief is always a career man, and he has seen thousands of men go through a single four-year hitch, each of whom had said or done much the same things. The word "Uniform" is very important to all of the armed services, since uniformity of individuals in a group makes management of the total group much easier. The Chief, during his long career, had often seen and heard things which those of us who were only in for one hitch thought were unique.

A good CPO carries more respect aboard ship than most officers; even from the Skipper

"Never kick a horse turd, sailor. It might be your next commanding officer." "When you eat rice-pudding aboard this vessel sailor, always check the raisins for legs."

"The average sailor spends ninety per-cent of his pay on liquor and women, the rest he just wastes."

"If you are looking for sympathy, sailor, you'll find it after shit and suicide in the ship's dictionary."

"I know your wife is having a baby, sailor. You have to be there when the keel is laid; they don't need you for the launching".

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Ship Talk and Rhyme

Collected by Darwin Crum

"Lady Wentworth", Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

...Ships went to sea, and ships came home from sea,
And the slow years sailed by and ceased to be.

The crew, they ride a whaleboat,
The Captain rides a Gig,
It don't go any faster,
But it makes his ass feel big.

The Captain rides his fancy Gig,
The Admiral rides a barge,
It don't go any faster,
But it makes his ass feel large.

Mother Carey's Chickens

The Patron Saint of seamen is St. Elmo. The Patroness is the Virgin Mary, which, in Latin is "Mater Cara". Thus, the Storm Petrels which follow ships in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean became known to sailors as "Mother Carey's Chickens"

"Eternal Father, Strong to Save."

William Whiting, (Navy Hymn)

Sound is searching as we go,
Ping, train, listen, to and fro.
All is silent down below,
Save screws alone, at one-eight-oh.

Eternal Father! strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the mighty wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep
O, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!

More Quips

Bridge-Sonar: We have a sonar contact at oh-one-oh.
Sonar-Bridge: There's a whale on that bearing.
Bridge-Sonar: You better look for two whales Sir, we hear screw noises.

What it is…

That packet of assorted miseries which we call a ship.

"The First Sailor." Rudyard Kipling

"Did you see the crowd on the dock watching us tie up? There must have been fifteen-hundred people there!" "Fifteen-hundred Hell!... There was at least a thousand!"

It is Said

A sailor spends ninety percent of his money on liquor and women... the rest of it he just wastes.

Inspecting Officer: "Sailor, do you have any pornography in that locker?"
Sailor: "Pornography? Hell sir, I ain't even got a pornograph!"

Old Salts

Son, I've sailed past more light houses than you've drove by mileposts.

Listen Boot, I've wrang more salt water out of my socks than you've ever sailed over.

Ship Over? Not me!

When I get out of the Navy, I'm gonna burn my sea bag and dance around the flames.

When I get out of the Navy, I'm gonna get me a pair of oars, put'em on my shoulder and start walking inland. When somebody asks me "What are them things on your shoulder?" I'm gonna stop and settle down.

Me ? ... Fall for That?

The port running light does not use red oil.
Relative bearings do not require grease.
There is no place on the ship to get a bucket of steam, regardless of who sends you for one.
There isn't a golden spike in the keel that you can look at even if you go down into the fire room and bend way over.