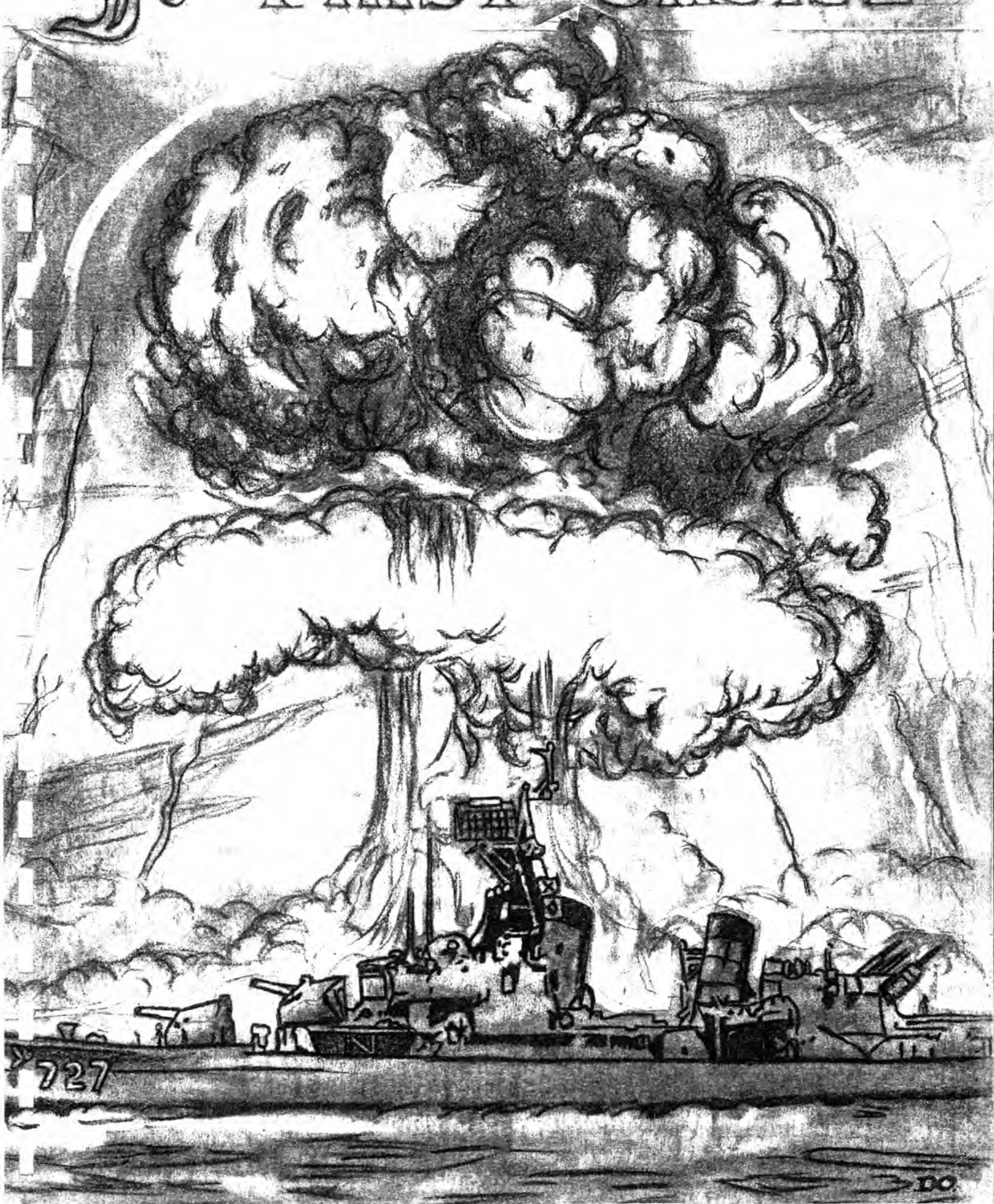


J's FIRST CRUISE



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J's First Cruise

by Jerry Mike Sears

April 1958 – Long Beach Naval Shipyards. Reveille - Reveille – heave-out while the bosun's mate's whistle is screeching over the bitch box. "Hey, what's happening?" Someone is shaking my rack and calling my name. Huh? "Hey, Sears, pack your sea bag and be on the quarterdeck by 0800. You're being transferred. Thinking, "What the hell?" I've only been on this ship (USS Columbus CA 74) for about a month or so. Got up, dressed (dress uniform), packed all my stuff into a sea bag, ate chow, told a few mates I was being transferred, went to all the necessary departments to be signed off the ship. 0800, arrived at the quarterdeck, was given my orders and service record, and departed.

I was transferred to another ship – the USS DeHaven DD727, which turned out to be about a mile from the Columbus CA74. What a shock, going from a heavy cruiser to a destroyer. I checked on board and was taken to the engineering department. I was assigned one small locker and a rack, told to report on the main deck, starboard side forward, after storing my sea bag and squaring up my rack. There seemed to be a lot going on. Well for the next hours, myself and crew-mates stored ammo for the 5" gun mounts. That's when I found out that the ship was getting ready to leave for a six-month cruise in 72 hours. Damn, I needed liberty to say goodbye to a girlfriend and all.

0800, seventy-two hours later, the ship is underway for the Hawaiian Islands (Pearl Harbor). I made as far as the Channel Islands before becoming sea-sick; for the next five days I checked into sick call. My thinking was that I'd be relieved from work and standing watch. "Oh, no, sailor," the doctor said; "eat soda crackers. You are to report for duty. That's all." Unable to eat, barfing everything up when trying to eat, including the soda crackers. So it was standing watch, work, and sleep, until the ship hit the breakwater at the entrance to Pearl Harbor. Going topside to look at Hawaii and the surrounding area, a peek at a time, as I was on work duty and it was below decks in the number one boiler room.

One of the first things I learned onboard ship, besides never to leave your locker unattended and unlocked or your shipmates will steal all your personal stuff, is that one is on his own – self-survival. Only working as a team for the survival of the ship. I also was learning how to sleep with one eye open. The ship docked outboard to three other destroyers. Liberty-call, but I had watch duty, no liberty for two more days. Two days later, the morning was used for work duty in my assigned area until 1200 hours, when I had Cinderella liberty, which means back on board the ship by 2400 hours. Three shipmates and myself headed off for Honolulu, walking through the base toward the main gate.

Thinking to myself, there sure are a lot of ships here at Pearl Harbor. I asked the shipmates and two of them who had been here before said, "It's always like that." We hailed a taxi to a place called "Hotel Street". Every business on this street is dedicated to the US military. Standing on the street with the mates discussing what we wanted to do, they, of course, wanted to hit the first bar. "Hey, I'm only seventeen years old. They will not let me in." The oldest mate said, "Don't worry; they will not ask for your ID." They didn't, and I had a Tom Collins.

I left the shipmates after the first drink, as they wanted to stay at the bar. Walking and looking at all the sights – bars galore, cafes, hotels, fun zones, movie theaters, tattoo shops, book and magazine shops, etc. – anything you wanted if you had the dollars. Ran into a couple more shipmates. They were counting money and I asked what they were doing. "We're short on the money needed to rent a car and drive around the island. Do you want to come?" I asked how much and they said twenty dollars, and I can't drive. The car is a 1957 Chevy convertible. I had the back seat to myself with the top down. What a trip! The road around the island was close to the ocean. We stopped at the beaches, went sightseeing, and stopped for food and drinks. The island is beautiful – in sights, sounds, and smells. It only took us five hours. As circuitous and narrow as the roadway was, the driver couldn't keep the pedal from going to the metal on the '57 Chevy full power. The shipmate driver dumped the other shipmate and me at the Waikiki Park in Honolulu. The shipmate said he wanted to go his own way. "See you back on ship." I walked around Honolulu and on Waikiki Beach, saw all the sights, had some Hawaiian BBQ, and returned to the ship.

Two days later, after taking on supplies, fuel, and ammo, the ship left Pearl Harbor on our way to Midway Island to refuel. Our final destination was Yokosuka, Japan, more than nine days from Midway Island. The ship hit rough seas soon after we passed the breakwater barrier. My stomach became a bit nauseous but I never became sick.

For the next three days or so, rough seas, normal routine work, standing watch, sleeping and eating. On the third day or so, the ship is weaving about the atolls towards Midway Island. The channel the ship had to follow to get into the pier was very precarious. We sure answered a lot of bells on the boilers to maneuver the ship into the docking pier. When I was relieved from watch, I made it up topside to look where the ship was docked. As I walked about the ship, I saw the reason for so many bells. The base was small – about twelve buildings and some large oil tanks. That's why the ship is here – to refuel in order to make it to Japan. There were ships, half- and completely sunk, and other military equipment scattered about the area, reminiscent of the Second World War. The water was clear, could see different types of fish and other sea life.

Since I'm not part of the refueling team, I go ashore with a few of my shipmates to the PX. I need four white hats for my uniform to be complete. While on shore looking into the area where the ship passed, I notice high in the sky these large birds, just gliding in the

wind. Then one of the birds just folded its wings and started dropping straight down towards the beach, hit the sand head first like a crash landing. Rolls over a couple of times, gets up, shakes its body and head a few times, and waddles down the beach with its wings flared out to catch the wind and sun? Others followed. Have to get back to the ship, getting underway soon. I ask one of the shipmates in the boiler room what was the name of the bird. He said, "It's a 'Gooney Bird'". I laugh.

Underway again at the burners watch on No. 2 boiler. Whoops – someone didn't make it back. We wait for about fifteen minutes. Later, we're told over the bitch box, "All hands prepare to get underway." We left in a hurry. It was the captain and the XO who were late getting back to the ship. The ship started to hit heavy seas early evening. I have the 8-12 watch. The top watch of the boiler room would laugh and taunt me and my fellow shipmates all the time: "Hey, you need to get batter ship-legs, you-all are nothing but a bunch of boots," and laugh. He is a petty officer, 6'2", 230 lbs., and a lifer. He instructed us boots on how to operate and maintain high-pressure, high-temperature boilers. A tyrant. Also, I'm on his watch. That's another story.

Two days or so, the weather is getting rougher, as the ship is rolling and hitting large waves, up and down, creaking and shutting at slow speed (knots) indicated on the bells device. A sudden squawk from the bridge phone to the fire-rooms to light off the superheaters on the boilers don't bring it on line (stand-by). We are changing course. I had to put the burners in the superheater as per orders from the top watch; everything went well. We changed course for what reason, us sailors on watch, thirty feet below the main deck, had no idea. About 2100 hours, the phone goes off, the top watch answers and listens. All I hear is, "Yes, sir," and hangs up. He orders me to shut down the superheater. He also said to stand by for a lot of bells, as we are going to rendezvous with another ship.

By the time I get relieved from watch and go topside and see what's happening, it's after midnite. I see some other shipmates hanging out, ask what's going on. One says, "The ship is sending our doctor on board to a MSTS ship as they have a medical emergency. You see those lights blinking off and on? That's the ship; they are sending over a LCM (motor launch) to pick up the doctor." While standing and holding on, as huge swells were breaking over the main deck. My sea legs were getting better as time at sea went on, no matter what. It took a while for the LCM to come alongside. After a struggle between the ship and the LCM, the ship is able to transfer the doctor. I went below to the living quarters and hit the rack, as I had watch again in about six hours. One also has to shower, shave, and eat – and sometimes work during those so-called sleep times.

The bitch box yelling, "Man overboard, man overboard, all hands on man-overboard team report to your stations; this is not a drill." I turned over and went back to sleep. I'll find out what happened in the morning.

0600 the bosun's whistle screeching, oh-oh, a new day. Out of my rack, dress, etc., and go to chow. At chow, I spoke to a couple of shipmates who were on the man-overboard team. What happened was, as the MSTS was bringing the LCM on board, something on the wench broke away and the LCM went into the ocean with all hands and the doctor. It took us about three hours to find them. Our ship rescued three of the sailors and they're back on board the MSTS. One of the shipmates said, "We were tied down on the main deck; we were pretty much under water at times, really had to grab-n-hang onto the life lines. I'm sure glad we were able to rescue all of the sailors and the doc." The ship began to change course away from the MSTS. Once again on our way to Japan.

A couple of days or so later. The bosun's whistle, "Attention on deck all hands; the captain will speak." "All hands, our orders have been changed. We are to proceed to the island of Enewetak in the Marshall Islands chain. New orders for the crew will be in the 'plan of the day' tomorrow morning. That's all." The captain signed off and we the crew returned to our regular duties.

Next day after reading the plan of the day, we the crew were upset – not everyone, but most of us in engineering. The last order on the plan of the day is that all personal lockers are to be opened for inspection. All cameras and radios will be confiscated but will be returned at the end of our mission. We will arrive in Enewetak in three to five days. I ask the master-at-arms why they had to take our stuff. He said, "Orders are orders; here's a receipt for your camera and film. You will need to present this receipt in order to retrieve your camera and film." For the days there seems to be a lot of scuttle-butt throughout the ship on what was going on, because all communication is on a 'need-to-know' basis.

The ship arrives at Enewetak Island and anchors out from the island, as it seems to be shallow. One is able to see fish and other sea life - also the bottom. The water isn't as clear as it was at Midway Island.

The bosun's whistle screeches over the bitch box, "All hands attention on deck. Our new orders (ship) are posted. All hands must read." It's an order. Being on watch at the time, I had to wait until relieved from watch. Going topside after being relieved from watch, first I'm looking for the new orders (plan of the day). On my way to chow, I met a fellow boiler-man and he let me have his plan of the day after he was through with reading it. Having not looked at the plan, I asked him what he thought about the 'new orders'. "Not much," as we move up in the chow line. It said that the ship was going on picket duty as necessary for the duration of the atomic bomb test series. The military commander is stationed on Enewetak Island. We will be issued film badges for our own safety. Tomorrow the ship will be standing off a small atoll where the bomb will be detonated. We will be at GQ (General Quarters), all hands at their battle stations.

For the afternoon we are given first aid instructions – how to protect yourself during an atomic detonation and how to use a Geiger counter – but never having the opportunity to

operate one for real. It seems the ship is short of Geiger counters. They haven't arrived from Enewetak yet, along with other gear to monitor the bomb, also film badges. Not matter what, the bomb will be detonated at the scheduled time. The ship is getting ready to get underway to the picket line (the picket line means to keep out all ships and any sea-going vessels from the test area; this includes submarines). (Russian?)

The next morning arrives, one goes about the standard routine of the ship. The ship is scheduled to be at the test area at 1300 hours. The ship arrives at the test area. A few of us sailors are standing around on the main deck, looking off the port side at an atoll with a huge erector-set-type tower. One of the sailors says, "That's where the bomb is placed." We talk about the bomb but no one really knew much about the bomb; it was mostly scuttle-butt.

As the bosun's whistle sounds, "General Quarters, General Quarters, all hands man your battle stations. This is not a drill. All hands man your battle stations." My battle station is the forward fire room. We are all accounted for as the port and starboard hatches closed. That's it; no way out. We're shut off from the outside world by two 24" hatch covers. All us sailors man our battle stations. Everyone found a way to hold on and operate the boilers at the same time. We all started getting a bit edgy. After a bit of time, over the bitch box we hear "10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, and so on. At first there is no sound – nothing, just the operation of the boiler and all the auxiliary machinery. The ship is hit by the shock wave, holding on as the ship is being picked up by a huge wave and we take a 43-degree roll to the port side. The boilers and aux machinery are making strange noises, some steam pipes are leaking steam, and electrical wiring is shorting out. Tools, etc, not tied down very good are flying around, ending up on the lower deck or bilges. My body felt like it was crushed from the outside to the inside, but I couldn't think about it because all us sailors did for hours was damage control. The steam pipes are the hardest, and hottest at least 105+. Four of us sailors are boots, the lowest in rank and money received. We got all the worst jobs and had to finish it. After getting myself burned a couple of times, which were by accident, we finally finish our job and have it signed off by the second class boilerman, who in turn related everything to the first class boilerman, who in turn told us (under-class sailors) that we were relieved from duty and to go topside. When I arrived topside and was looking for the bomb, I asked a fellow sailor where the bomb is located. He said, as he was pointing off the port side, "out there someplace." Thinking I've been in the fire room for so long that I missed seeing the mushroom cloud and all on my first 'A bomb' experience. I have not had the time to dwell on the bomb, but notice certain parts of the main deck on my way to the engineering compartment that certain parts of the main deck are condoned off with 'Do Not Enter' or off-limits signs. Entering the engineering compartment, I asked one of the petty officers, "What's with all the 'Do Not Enter' signs?" He said, "The area is hot with radiation. The deck apes are to scrub and hose down those areas to decontaminate from radiation, that's all." The 'need to know' world by one's rank. Rank! I had no rank, at the bottom when it comes to rank and the 'need to know'. We hadn't

received any film badges before we left port. Maybe everything was just a drill? The ship is returning to Emewetak. Things seem like they are back to normal but underneath most sailors were just a wee bit more uptight. So the interaction of us – sailors – is starting to be a bit tense, one becomes more cautious.

Arriving back at Enewetak, anchoring out from the island. The boilers stay on line, in case we have to leave in a hurry. But they just announced over the bitch box, "Liberty Call – military area only"; the civilian area is out of bounds, closed area to all personnel. There is a PX, officers' lounge, and a white hat club. Section one liberty call at 1600 hours. Dress – white tropical. I'm in section 3 on liberty call. While I have a little free time, sitting on a line stanchion watching the sun dropping over the horizon, it's absolutely beautiful. I have this exotic feeling coursing throughout my whole body.

Awakened by the returning liberty callers, every one of us who had the mid-watch yelled at them to shut the fuck up, it's lights out. They became quiet almost immediately. Of course a few of the sailors kept making noise and had to be threatened with captain's mast if they didn't shut the fuck up.

The next morning at quarters we (crew) found out that the sailors off the ship were on report for fighting and damage to the white hat club. A drunken fight started and ended between sailors off the ship and other sailors and marines off ships and Enewetak. The commander of Enewetak was so pissed off, he restricted our personnel from the island. No liberty. A day or so later, after loading supplies and equipment, we proceeded to leave port to carry out our orders.

We received film badges, maybe some more Geiger counters? The ship only saw Enewetak a few times, for a short while, for needed supplies. No one left the ship. The ship is at sea for a long time, as I remember, going back and forth between islands while the ship is experiencing many A & H bombs from General Quarters to being stationed off some miles from the bomb test, where the ship is stationed for each test (A & H bombs) is at different areas and distances from the bomb. The ship is receiving bomb effects from each one, no matter how far away the ship is from the 'bomb'. Us sailors are beginning to be on edge. More men were showing up for sick call. We only have two corpsmen, a chief corpsman and a no-rank corpsman like myself, a no-rank fireman.

I was on the 4-8 watch, manning the burners on the boiler. Something strange is starting to go through my body and mind. I was basically pissed off about where I was – in a hole which was over 100 degrees all the time, dealing with the effects of the A or H bomb test. If you're not standing directly in front of the ventilation, you roast, sweat through your uniform; it was hot-hotter. I look up at the gages of the boiler, which indicated it is dropping below 600 lbs. pressure, so I regulate the amount of oil going into the firebox of the boiler. The boiler returns to normal 600 lbs. pressure. So I'm looking around the boiler room and notice the top watch was asleep on a rag-covered 5 gallon metal can. I have no

idea what came over me, but – grabbing the oil throttle and pushing it wide open, the pressure starts to rise up to 620 lbs. pressure. That's when the safeties on the boiler lifted, which they did with a huge explosion of steam, and by some kind of luck, it reset itself perfectly when the pressure returned to 600 lbs. pressure. Meanwhile, the top watch was jerked awake and fell off the can and hit the deck on his big fat butt, all splayed out. I just couldn't hold it in; it was the funniest thing I've seen in real life. I just busted out laughing. Laughed so hard that I bent over, it hurt so good. That's when the top watch kicked me in the butt, yelling at me that I was on report and, "get the fuck back on your watch. You better not ever lift the safeties again or it will be your ass." In the meantime, there's all this commotion leading down to the fire room. "Yes, sir; yes, sir; watch your step, captain." The captain is really pissed off. I'm in deep shit. He's yelling to step in front of him. Of course the top watch has gotten hold of me. Captain says that he will see me at 'captain's mast' and I will muster with the master-of-arms morning, mid-day, and evening. We salute each other; he turns and leaves. The top watch and myself return to our watch stations. The top watch is really pissed at me – all this before 0800. Everytime I think about it the expressions on the top watch's face and body makes me laugh. A few of my fellow sailors said, "Way to go, sailor; that jackass sure deserved it, but lifting the safeties on the boiler and having the captain coming down to the fire room, you sure are in deep doo doo. The captain's cabin is below the forward stack; you woke him up. Super-hot steam hitting the air equals one explosion. Thanks."

The shipmates were right. First I was transferred from the fire room to mess cook. I ended up in the scullery washing metal plates – everything from cups to silverware – for the next three or four months, but didn't have to stand watch or go near the fire room except for GQ. I still have captain's mast to deal with. Captain's mast came. There's just two of us sailors at mast. I wasn't asked one question, just given two weeks extra duty in the anchor chain locker. The anchor chain locker is located in the most forward part of the ship. The locker only has room for the anchor chain and the machinery to move the anchors as needed. On my first day of extra duty, I was given an area in the chain locker to clean, chip, and paint. It was rough going because it's the first area of the ship that meets the ocean. With creaking, banging up and down, rolling from side to side, and holding on, one hardly has time to do any work. This went on for over three weeks because there were thermal nuclear bombs to be testing. During my stay in the anchor locker, no one ever checked up on me, not one time. The only thing I had to do was muster in and out with the master of arms.

The bomb test business is in full swing. The entire crew are becoming more uptight with each other. There are threats and scuffling among us sailors and different section of the ship. I finished extra duty by completing an area of a bulkhead 15" x 15", chipped, undercoated, and painted. I don't have any idea if anyone ever checked to see if I did some work or not. I was never asked.

Every time the ship took on board test animals, we knew we were going in pretty close to ground zero. The animals are all in cages, strapped in; they are unable to move. One time while on mess duty, I was able to see a rabbit. It was all white, with pink eyes. The ship is on its way to the ordered test area coordinates. It's going to be a night shot. The ship is on station and we don't have to go to GQ. Over the bitch box all hands are ordered to take cover until the all clear is given. As yet, another A or H bomb the ship and crew experience its effects. I wonder how far we are from ground zero; it's never enough.

After the all clear is given, I head topside to catch the bomb in all its intensity, the most incredible color patterns, absolutely surreal vision-wise, beautiful beyond words – but at the same time, the most lethal and violent weapon man has developed in order to kill as many humans as possible, and all the other species of life, and the earth within the kill area of the A or H bomb. I'm a few yards from the rabbit as I approach the cage and turn on my flashlight to check out the rabbit, its eyes are as black as coal. Another shipmate saw the same thing. Then this other sailor, a petty officer, came up and told us we were off limits around the cages and if he catches us around the cages again he would put us on report for captain's mast. I asked him, "What did we do?" He said, "Need to know"; we were off limits. "Now get the fuck back to your duty stations." We return to our quarters. We're talking to each other, "What was that all about?" Also about the rabbit and the other animals that are brought on board the ship. After the last bomb test, we pulled out of the test area, which was about 100 miles or so, to replenish fresh water and feed water tanks. The ship did this quite often during our stay in the Marshall Islands.

After being in the scullery for a while, it turns out to be not so bad work duty. If one works it right, one might get a little extra free time. But, of course, this didn't last long. The chief cook decided to transfer me to the spud locker. Either the chief caught me free-timing or someone snitched on me – never found out. Ah – the spud locker. I peel, slice, dice, chip, French, and mash about 200 lbs. of potatoes for three meals a day. Also prep and clean other veggies, make salads and jello as per the menu of the day and the cook's needs. The cooks always have a written list each day of what I was to do veggie-wise and anything else during work duty. I was pretty much heads down. The one thing I really like is having access to areas of the ship which I would never be able to gain entrance to because of 'need to know' and also I'm a no-rank snipe.

The ship has encountered two A or H bombs tests in the last twenty-four hours. The shipmates are becoming testier and testier as time goes on. I'm at midships, talking with a couple of shipmates about what's happening and all. All of a sudden a petty officer yells, "Hey, you swabs! Return to your duty stations or I'll write you all up for shirking duty." I'm back at the spud locker when I realize I had a Geiger counter, forgot to return it to the decontamination storage locker. I'm thinking I'll return it after the evening meal; sure don't want to run into that master-at-arms again this soon. At the spud locker, I'm working away at preparing potatoes and veggies for the upcoming meals. I'm out of potatoes. I

need to go up to the second deck and get a couple hundred pounds of spuds. I took along the Geiger counter just to check out the spuds and onions. The spuds and onions are stored near the first stack, outside. I turn on the Geiger counter to take a reading. The reading is high and the counter is making its rapid ticking sound. Yes, the spuds seem to be hot! I think, better get the chief P.O. and let him make the decision on these spuds and onions. I go below to the chief's quarters. When I arrive, another chief says, "Sailor, you are off limits, back to your duty station." I say, "Chief, I'm looking for the chief of commissary. He said his rack is up forward, starboard, bottom rack." I find the chief, wake him. He's really pissed off. He gets up, tells me to return to the spud locker, he'll be up in a few minutes. The chief arrives and we go up to the second deck storage area. The chief grabs the Geiger counter out of my hands. He turns the counter on and starts to check the tarp which is covering the potatoes and onions. He says to me, "Wash down the tarp and around the general area." After washing the tarp down, he checks it (counter) again and tells me to remove the tarp. Whoo – it really smells bad! I back off and he puts the counter on the potatoes and onions. Ah – below casualty dosage. I say to the chief, "I guess I'll be throwing all these spuds and onions overboard. We can't eat rotten food and they also seem a bit hot, chief." He yells, "What sailor?! I want to see potatoes and onions for three meals a day – peel 'em; that's an order."

Back at the spud locker, peeling potatoes and onions, making salads for dinner and supper. One of my shipmates comes by and tells me, "We're heading into a radar station on one of the islands." He thinks there'll be liberty call for a few hours; we'll see. We arrive and moor at the one dock on the island. Sure enough, liberty call for all hands except the sailors who have extra duty. Liberty call was for a couple of hours for each section. Liberty only lasted for a few hours, as a fight started in the white hat club with the sailors and marines who were stationed on the island; it became a brawl. During this time, one of the shipmates spotted a teenage girl in the civilian section which was off-limits. That didn't stop him. He managed to sneak into the civilian section and follow the girl to her quarters and try to rape her. He was getting after her when her father showed up and put a stop to the attempted rape of his daughter. He first beat the crap out of the sailor and then called the shore patrol. Well, that ended all liberty again. The commander of the base arrived dockside, yelling at the captain of the ship to get the hell out of port, and the ship was restricted from the island. The sailor never returned to the ship; never did hear what happened to him. There was a captain's mast for the sailors who were caught fighting. At least I was able to get off the ship for a few minutes to empty the garbage cans from the spud locker. It felt really good touching terra firma for a few minutes. As the ship backs away from the pier, the commander of the island, shaking his fist at us as we depart for more atomic tests.

The A and H bomb tests are taking their toll on the ship and sailors. After a few more tests, the ship's barber flips out and starts to go after shipmates with a straight razor. A couple of sailors received slight razor cuts in the act of subduing him. The ship's command

decided to make a brig out of a compartment in the fantail of the ship. Maybe the captain is starting to worry about what been going on with the crew and all? At times, daily life – or the routine of it – is just a blur. What us sailors have been through with the A and H bomb tests. I notice the sick call line is getting longer on each day. None of my fellow shipmates ever say too much about what ails them; also there's very little scuttle-butt, except about VD, which is posted in the 'plan of the day', because one is restricted to the ship for so long for medical attention?

After the last A or H bomb test, the ship is headed out of the test area to refuel and take on stores. Being a mess cook, one is always handling stores as they come aboard and are stored in the bowels of the ship; it's all food. Taking a few free moments to review myself, I notice how fatigued my body feels all the time. I have some kind of a rash on my body in three different places; it itches like hell off and on. I went to sick call; the corpsman said, "It looks like a heat rash. It's hot here in the tropics, sailor." He gave me some talc powder and said to take a shower every day and put the talc on rash areas. I said it doesn't look like any heat rash I've had in the past. He said, "Sailor, that's all. Return to your duty station." I have headaches quite often – also Montezuma's revenge, hot and cold sweats. I've noticed other shipmates with similar problems and others with different problems.

Stand-down; the ship has two days off. The ship anchors off heavily damaged atolls by A and H bomb test sites. Liberty call. My work in the spud locker is finished by the mid-day meal, so the head cook gave me liberty until the evening meal. I catch the next motor launch to the atoll. Liberty was a small area with roped-off limits, with two cool-boxes full of beer, hard stuff, and mixes. No food or shade; this doesn't look good. When one looks out over this atoll, I only see complete destruction of all life in around this atoll. We are told to stay within the perimeter of the roped-off area as it's 'hot' with radiation. Hey, what about the area within the rope? I was yucking it up and having a beer with some of my shipmates. Some of the sailors were already getting worked up over grievances with their fellow shipmates. Before long a fight will break out. Time for me to return to the ship. Some liberty? Sure enough, a fight did break out and soon ended when a drunken shipmate crossing the gang plank between the ship and the motor launch slipped and fell between them and is crushed to death while other sailors were trying to rescue him.

Little things started to happen among different sailors, like when one is passing another going in the opposite direction in the passageway of the ship, after he is just past, some shipmates would turn and hit one in the upper arm or shoulder area for no reason at all – saying, "Gotcha," and keeping moving away. Well, that little thing didn't go over very well with the sailors who were being hit, and we hit back. I think the officers got wind of what was going on and put a stop to it. The shipmates seemed to be just a little more uptight. It seems like every day or night we were dealing with A and H bomb testing. It just goes on, on, and on.

No one ever comes by to check the veggies for radiation contamination with the Geiger counter. I'm almost out of fresh veggies. It's cans mostly, some frozen. That's all the ship ever gets in the way of food. It arrives in cardboard boxes, either frozen or unfrozen. Then it's transferred from an oiler ship or some other supply ship. One good thing is the ship is almost out of the 'hot' potatoes and onions. I took every precaution I had at my disposal in preparing the food. The spud locker had a fresh-water spigot. I washed the veggies and peeled every veggie if it was possible. After the noon meal, I have a little free time, so I'm down in the living quarters hanging out with some shipmates, listening to the scuttle-butt. Scuttle-butt goes from being a very funny tale, to a one-liner joke, to the bottom of the scuttle-butt: too demeaning of all humans for their color of skin and all the other body parts (eyes, ears, noses, mouths, and so on. Then also they're everything between being funny and being demeaning. As us sailors are carrying on having a few laughs, we hear all this racket of sailors getting pissed off over a fellow sailor who happens to be black. The ship has only two black sailors - one each for the boiler rooms on the ship. There are three kinds of whites: Northern, Southern, and other independent states like myself and others. Some Northern and Southern sailors are still fighting the Civil War. Any ways, on with now. Two sailors (one white, one black). Both men were big, each 6'2", 210-250 lbs. The white sailor is ranting on the black sailor. The black sailor up and slaps the white sailor so fast and so hard in the side of the face with the biggest hand. The blow covered his whole head; he went down like a sack of spuds, out. That wasn't all; it just made the black sailor mad. He started to yell that he is going to kick all us white honky's asses. He came at us, six white sailors trying to get up off the deck and disappear. Too late. He got me and slapped me up the side of the head. As he let me go, I dropped back to the deck in a heap. He went through a bunch of us sailors before he was put down, handcuffed, and in leg chains. The master-of- arms and team took him forward and locked him in some kind of brig. Didn't see much of him after that little brush-up. No one in the upper command ever asked us what happened. I don't know if they talked to the sailor that caused all the trouble. He never said anything about what happened on the hot afternoon in the tropics on an ever 'hotter' US destroyer. Some of the A or H bombs are just huge and violent. It seems like all I'm doing is the spud locker and experiencing the bombs, either at GQ or taking cover for the next A or H bomb test. After a while we finally got orders; after this next test we are to proceed to Johnston Island. Which will take several days and then standby. The ship arrives in the area of Johnston Island. The A or H bomb test is set for 2400 hours. 2300 hours arrived with the bitch box saying, "All hands take cover inside the ship until the all-clear is given. That's all." Not too many sailors are up, as most are standing watch, some just coming off watch, and so on. With the ship some thirty miles plus from ground zero, it received only a minor physical reaction, except we did go dead in the water when the ship was hit by the electro-magnetic pulses created from the H bomb. The 'All clear' is given. As the hatch door is open, the light coming through is intensely brighter than sunlight. Stepping out, I covered my eyes with my arm. I could see my bones in my arms - like an X-ray.

The ship is completely covered, like an umbrella. No matter which way one looked, the bomb was boiling clouds of the most beautiful colors and patterns of horrifying violence. Some of the sailors and kneeling down, looking into the bomb, saying they see Jesus – another yelling he sees God. A fellow mess cook next to me asks if I can see Jesus. I said, “No, I don’t see Jesus.” I stayed topside for a while watching the bomb. To top everything off, it’s my 18th birthday. The ship reconnoitered in the area of Johnston Island for three days or so to monitor the aftermath of the bomb. While the ship is on station, it said in the ‘plan of the day’ that it was the last bomb test for the ship. The ship’s port of call is Pearl Harbor.

Also, the ship is going to have visitors to thank us for our participation in Operation Hardtack I Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Test. There was also a steak dinner with all the trimmings, all hands required to attend. After finishing up with prepping all the potatoes and veggies for the steak dinner, I was off duty. The visitors brought the steaks. First we sailors had to stand in line and to be sworn to secrecy by an officer. We had to give them our name, serial number, and rank. I asked the officer how long we were sworn to secrecy; He said, “for the rest of your life – or else.” He then made a gesture of a knife cutting cross his neck, making a cutting sound. Then we were given a Certificate of Participation in Operation Hardtack I. Finally, the steak dinner.

The ship is getting back to normal as we head for Pearl Harbor. Things are still very much uptight but with a little lightness, as it has been months since the last liberty. It will feel good just walking on land again. Next day, the ‘plan of the day’ said we will be in port for five days for light maintenance and resupply and refuel, also R and R. It is between paydays and my pay was only \$129 a month at this time. I don’t have enough money for liberty, so I stay on board. The next day in the ‘plan of the day’, on base they offered testing for high school diploma (GED), also testing for two years of college, in which I enrolled. I had to juggle a few things and time around in order to take the test. The ship and spud locker came first. So I managed two days on shore and I also ate at the PX. About two months later I was notified I passed the test and it will be noted in my service record.

I notice my body is feeling a little less uptight, just a bit less tense. I’m thinking also visually in my brain, with a shudder of my body, of the last H bomb test. I’ll never forget this experience as long as I live. Mentally and physically it feels like the A and H bombs have burned through my entire being.

The ship is on its way to Japan to meet up with other ships for maneuvers. The trip to Japan is about two weeks; we stop at Midway Island as before. After Midway Island the ship is about five days out and there is a general sigh of relief among the crew, myself included. The ship lost a number of the crew in Pearl Harbor. How many, I don’t know, but there are some new faces in the engineering living quarters and on the ship in general. The spud locker has been busy. The ship loaded in an awful lot of stores – frozen, dry stores,

and fresh – in Pearl Harbor. Wherever we're going will have food and much work for the spud locker sailor. It took about twelve days to steam to Japan from Pearl Harbor. The only thing we encounter is heavy seas as we approach Japan.

The ship arrives in Yokosuka, Japan. The ship will be in port for two weeks plus for repairs and maintenance. The shipyard was full of navy ships. Liberty call. We had to change cash for scrip if we were going off the base. No dollars for the black market? At morning quarters, we were lectured on the do's and don'ts off base. It is only thirteen years after the Second World War. Japan looked and felt like it's still at war. We (US military) were only allowed in a small part of Yokosuka; everywhere else was off limits. The area consisted of bars, places to eat and buy Japanese souvenirs. All the bars had signs at the entrances welcoming all the navy ships by name and ship numbers. I was curious as to how the Japanese bars, etc., know the DeHaven was in port before we were in port? We sailors were living under "need to know" and secrecy. From a small amount of research, it seem on average a few days before the ship arrives in port, the Japanese businesses are painting new welcome signs. I was only able to get ashore twice but on the base many times. The navy had a huge PX with movie theatre, bowling alley, pool halls, etc., for R and R. I didn't have much money, also didn't get liberty until after the evening meal – too late to go ashore. Had to be back on board the ship before midnight.

The Japanese shipyard workers carry out most of the work on the ship. Not once did I see anything like a Geiger counter or other monitoring equipment to check for radiation contamination.

It's a little over two weeks now, and the ship is getting ready to leave port. Along with fellow mess cooks, I have been moving supplies and stores for the last two days, along with doing our regular duties. The ship is underway; we're rendezvousing with a carrier task force. The seas are rough in this part of the world most of the time. Some days later we meet up with the carrier. We're going to operate with the carrier and other ships for exercises such as plane-guarding the carrier while it launches and retrieves planes. This goes on for a couple of weeks. The 'plan of the day' this morning says that we're finished with the carrier and our next port of call is Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands for a week. It's really hot in Subic Bay. The ship is on tropical working hours, which means we work until 1200 hours, then liberty call. Of course no liberty for me, the spud locker sailor, until after the evening meal.

Went on liberty and met up with some shipmates at the USA Bar. Things were in high gear when I arrived at the bar. The place was jammed with sailors, marines, and Philippine women and also a few men. At the bar I ordered a San Miguel beer and noticed a bunch of crewmates went over to the tables. They were sitting, jumping up and down, talking, yelling; they seemed pretty much into liberty call. I also notice money was changing hands. I asked, "What is happening?" The shipmate next to me said, "See that tiny woman over there with the two men standing beside her? They are taking bets that she can piss further

than any man in the bar." The place was going mad! Now this barker says, "All we need now is a man who can out-piss this small woman." Two big dudes stepped up; both said they could out-piss any woman with their swinging dicks. The bar is really rockin' out. Then everyone started yelling, "Show us! Prove it! etc. They did! Both were – well – huge, so they flipped a coin to see who is going to have a pissing match against this woman. The dude went first, at his insistence. The woman's handlers nodded it was OK with the woman. The dude is downing one last beer as he is stepping to a line that was painted on the wood floor. He grabbed his dick to build up pressure; grunting, growling, he leans back and lets loose a stream of piss that shot out and was marked with some chalk or something. The place is really jumpin' now. Then the woman stepped up to the line. In an instant, you could hear a needle drop. Started to smile, at the same time dropping her skirt. The place went completely bonkers! Betting and drinking, one couldn't get service fast enough. The woman is much gentler with her pisser; she's building up pressure and leaning back. All of a sudden, she lets go with a stream of piss that went way beyond the dude's piss stop. The place settled down a bit after the show; money is changing hands and the energy of the bar is starting to change. I had one more beer with my shipmates and departed to get some food. I went to a Philippine BBQ café that catered to the military. Back to the ship, I stayed on base for the next liberties at Subic Bay. The navy exchange, bowling, pool, etc., and also fellow shipmates. None of us have very much money I guess. Yes, there was a brawl at the USA Bar; some of the shipmates show signs of a brawl.

The ship is underway again, heading for Formosa. The sea is rough but not too bad. We arrive in Formosa and anchor out in the harbor. There seem to be a lot of ships and junks coming in and out of port. The Formosans had captured a Chinese merchant ship and are celebrating. They hung the captain from the yardarm, upside down and very much dead. The captured ship was to starboard side, at the very least a hundred yards – and one could still hear the celebrating going on. Liberty call at 1600 hours. Just before the LCM was to come alongside to pick up the shipmates who were standing by to go on liberty, the bitch box blared, "Attention all hands. Liberty is cancelled. The ship will be underway in fifteen minutes. All hands to your underway stations." At the breakwater, the ship hit heavy seas. The bitch box comes alive again to tell us we must prepare for heavy seas; there's a typhoon in the area. So the ship rode out a typhoon for the next three or four days. The ship is being tossed around, similar to the A and H bombs, without all the bombs' effects on us sailors and the ship. The ship returned to the same port on Formosa, but only long enough to take on fuel and some supplies. What I could see from the ship, the typhoon had levelled the port. Ships and junks were pushed onshore, many damaged in and out of the water. There is stuff of all sorts floating in the harbor.

We departed to meet up with the Formosa Navy to escort them to Quemoy and Matsu islands that Formosa and China were fighting over. The Formosa Navy are bringing in supplies for the islands. The ship escorted the Formosa ships within the twelve-mile limit.

The Formosa Navy is on its own from there. We circled around outside of the twelve-mile limit. At dark, China and Formosa start firing artillery back and forth all night long. The only reason I know this is because all sailors on board are required to watch the latest VD (venereal disease) movie before the re-run of the same movies as we haven't been in port for a while. A couple of shipmates and I went up on the 2nd deck where the movie was set up, signed in and took our seats. The movie started, a gross VD movie. It didn't get its full attention, as over to the starboard side, we started to watch the artillery shelling between the two countries. The tracers and shells we could see in the clear night sky, going both ways. There's nothing like watching a VD movie and artillery shelling at the same time.

Next morning, while in the spud locker working, the ship was moving towards another ship off the port side. As we get closer, I notice it's an old LST dead in the water, also a sea-going tug. As we approach closer very slowly, one could not but notice the huge hole in the port side, with smoke escaping and the ship listing. The ship escorted the two vessels back to Formosa. We didn't go into port; we departed for the coast of China for the next weeks – up and down the coast in heavy weather, rough seas, high swells, at slow speed – with all 5" gun mounts manned as well as the electronics to aim for the gun mounts. One step from GQ, they clamped down on "need to know". Because of the way it's designed, the spud locker is very seldom hit by waves crashing over the ship.

Early evening I'm working in the spud locker when I hear this scream from the starboard side. Running across the ship to see where the scream came from and who it is, I'm as far forward as I could go. Searching quickly – no one. The hatch forward is always secured during foul weather. I decided to open the hatch and look forward. First thing I see is this shipmate about to be washed over the side. I run out and grab the mate, just as a wave hits the ship and all that water hits us. I'm hanging on him and a stanchion and screaming, "Man overboard!" The officers' mess is pretty close to us. I'm holding the mate with all I have. They finally get to us and pull us to safety. The mate is out cold but starting to come around. He's bleeding all over. The corpsman arrives. This officer comes up to me and says, "Sailor, you are dismissed; back to your duty station. We'll take over now." They took all the credit for saving the man's life. I didn't see the mate after the incident, but thanks to the scuttle-butt I heard the corpsman put anywhere from 120 to over 200 stitches on the shipmate. This is how the shipmate ended up on the main deck about to go over the side. As the ship is on semi-GQ, we had a stand-down. The shipmate had stepped out of the number 2 gun mount for a smoke break. The ship was hit by a huge rogue wave which washed the shipmate down from the 2nd deck to the main deck. After being dismissed, I'm on my way to change my uniform because I'm soaking wet and lost my white hat during the rescue.

Some days later in the 'plan of the day', it says our next port of call will be Hong Kong for 72 hours. I'm thinking "liberty call". The ship is running slow on supplies and fuel oil because of the weather. We tried to resupply at sea but couldn't because the ocean was

rough and the two ships were unable to come alongside each other and safely transfer supplies and fuel oil.

It took some time getting into Hong Kong. The water is full of jellyfish. It is beautiful with all their colors and sizes and shapes reflecting in the water. This went on for miles, even in the Hong Kong harbor where we tied up to a buoy. As soon as we tied up, supplies started to arrive. Most of the supplies is food. We are running pretty low, so liberty call came and went; maybe tomorrow? By 1200 hours the next day, I have everything for the evening meal prepped; so the head cook let me off duty. I asked the head cook if he knew of any good restaurants where we could get a good steak dinner. A fellow mess cook and myself went over to Hong Kong for liberty. We never saw or felt so many people jammed into such a small space. Cookie gave us the names of a few places which turn out to be in the British area. We walk and gawk at all the stuff that is happening. It's exotic and very tense, with a little laughter. The Chinese border is just across the bay in a city called Kowloon.

Three or so days later we're back going up and down the South China Sea. Things on board ship were running normal, but us sailors are a bit uptight. What it comes down to is the cruise we are on was only to be six months long. The ship is extended time-wise by the higher command.

For the evening meal I had to make jello for dessert with some kind of cool whip for topping. Just before the evening meal, I go below to the freezer compartment to get the jello to set it up for the meal. I notice the hatch is open. Looking in, I see this sailor standing in front of the jello containers, pissing into both of the jellos. I yelled at the sailor, "What the fuck are you doing pissing in the jellos?!" He said, "Fuck off, sailor." I turned and left the area and went to the mess decks to tell the master-at-arms and the head cook what is happening. They tell me to stay on the mess deck; they are taking charge. Never saw that sailor again. I had to clean up all the jello pots and disinfect the freezer area where the sailor was pissing and have it inspected by the master-at-arms.

The ship received orders to stand down and return to Yokosuka, Japan. The ship returned to Yokosuka. Liberty call. I lucked out, got liberty, went into the military area of Yokosuka. The ships' welcoming signed are already out. We've only been in port maybe three or so hours. Maybe that's enough time to add another ship's name and number to the welcoming signs outside most of the bars and other shops and cafes.

Monday morning we got underway for home port, Long Beach Naval Shipyard. We'll be there in about three weeks. In the meantime, I've got plenty of spuds to peel and salads, etc., to keep me busy. My 'heat rash' has cleared up somewhat but it still itches. At quarters, there doesn't seem to be as many sailors. The only sailor who isn't on board is a sailor named Red. He and his new wife or girlfriend are waving at the ship as we backed out away from the pier, leaving Japan.

The count in the chow line seemed down. The master-at-arms made a head count at every meal. I asked the number. He said, "No, sailor; it's the 'need to know'," and then threatened me saying, "Don't ever ask me again, or else." More or less. I got the picture and got lost. All us shipmates seem pretty happy about going home.

Having to dodge another storm, the ship is days late arriving at Midway Island to refuel. The ship is low on fuel oil. No one left the ship; we're taking on fuel and leaving. The refueling is completed, we are cleared to leave, and leave we did. The ship is leaving at much higher knots than I've experienced in the past times coming in and out of Midway Island. When the ship hit the breakwater, the ship speeded up in knots. It went this way for some time. The ship started to hit rougher water and we started to slow down. Later, I asked a shipmate who stands watch on the bridge how fast we were going. He said between twenty-five to twenty-seven knots. Scuttle-butt is the captain is pissed off about something, HA HA.

Some days later the ship is entering Pearl Harbor. We tie up and have liberty call. I didn't go on liberty, just R & R on the base. The ship is departing for the States after three days in Pearl Harbor. After steaming for 5 days, we arrive at Long Beach, but we can't enter until the fog lifts. Two days later we finally enter port and tie up. Home at last! A tremendous amount of relief among the crew – or maybe just a sigh. None of my shipmates ever said anything about the cruise. 'Need to know'; also sworn to secrecy. Six crewmates left the ship in strait jackets on stretchers. I don't have liberty for another two days, so when it came, my folks met me at the main gate. I have 48 hours liberty. It's OK seeing the folks. On the drive back to their house, they started asking questions about the cruise. I replied how beautiful the tropics and the ports of that part of the world. At the same time how different other humans live in other parts of the earth. Then my old man started asking me what the ship was doing in the islands. I told the family, the old man especially, "Don't ask me, because I've been sworn to secrecy. I will not say anything about anything. Let's change the subject." Then Mom and Dad started telling me how much I've changed since they last saw me. This is not going good. We arrived at the family home. The family on my old man's side are there to wish me home. Called maybe girlfriend; that didn't go well at all. Had a big meal with the family; everything went OK. The next morning I'm up and gone by 5:00 a.m. to hitch rides back to the ship. I left a message for the folks that I was going back to the ship.

There is a lot going on on the ship. Part of the commotion is because all of the reserves we picked up in Pearl Harbor after the A and H tests are being discharged from the navy, as well as some regular navy. Anyone with two years plus also will be discharged early. Last but not least, one officer and four shore patrol came aboard and took the captain off the ship. Never saw him again. I was on that ship for the duration of active duty, which is another two-and-a-half years.

Dec. 1958

Afterword:

The ship and all us shipmates were in 30 A and H bomb tests. Operation Hardtack I and Operation Project 58. Bombs ranged anywhere from 5.9 kilotons of TNT to 9.3 megatons of TNT. The ship is near the bombs when we go to GQ; the furthest we were from ground zero was thirty-eight miles. To this day, I experience the aftermath of the bombs – physically and mentally. In my waking state or sleeping state, I still experience the bombs.

2019



Jerry M. Sears, author of "J's First Cruise".
Age 18 in photo