

# Close to Home

By Paul Boos

It was June of 1953. I left Orange Coast College two weeks early, took my finals and joined the Navy. The Korean war was still going on.

I took the train from Santa Ana to Los Angeles and met up with thirteen other recruits. We all got on the train and headed to San Diego NTC boot camp. San Diego was only 87 miles from my home.

I spent fourteen weeks there then six months at Balboa Hospital going thru hospital Corp school. I thought I would probably be getting orders to go to the FMF school at Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, California but instead the Navy sent me to Corona Naval Hospital at Norco which was 38 miles from home. I worked six months in pediatrics and obstetrics then got orders back to NTC in San Diego and worked in the laboratory and emergency room.

I had been in the Navy for just about three years and never got orders to a ship and was never further than 87 miles from home. By this time I was a second class petty officer and had never gone to sea.

I had been going out with a 2nd class wave in the personal office and while working in the laboratory I got a phone call from her. She told me some orders came in for me to report to a ship called the USS Ponchatoula. The ship would be tied up to the fuel dock at Coronado Island across the bay.

I got my order and packed my sea bag and was over there within two hours. I was sitting on my sea bag when she was being tied up and the gang plank was being lowered. I knew I had to salute the flag and someone else and ask permission to come aboard. I did not see the flag but saluted where I thought one should be and went aboard. I saluted the only person I saw who was 2<sup>nd</sup> class BM Chester Hunter. He said "Doc, you don't have to salute anyone unless he has gold on his hat" Chester Hunter had 3<sup>rd</sup> class Bill Pannell show me to my quarters. As we were talking I asked Bill where the ships home port would be. He told me up the coast to a place called Long Beach, California. Long Beach was only 38 miles from home.

Two months later we were loaded with jet fuel, oil and ammo and would be on our way to the far east. That did not happen because on the way out of Long Beach Harbor, we collided with a Richfield Tanker on her way to Oregon. The Ponchatoula ended up in dry dock at Tod shipyard for a month for repairs. After that we headed to the Far East.

While at sea I had been in the Navy three years and nine months and I made 1<sup>st</sup> class but Captain Dennie would not give the rank to me unless I signed up for six more years so I left the Navy and went back to school.