

Naval Days

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“Pipe-fitter.” I had got myself into a tight corner with my new “profession” after high school graduation. Jobs were very scarce for new, young people. The union was taking only two new apprentices a year and I was one of them in 1953 thanks to a friend of the family.

It was interesting but after only half a year, the work with the “big pipe” at Union Bag was at an end and the construction company workers were moving on to another city where they would get new apprentices if they needed them and I was put in with a local plumbing company. It would be five years before I was a Master making enough money to follow the big jobs.

So, in less than a year I was really hating it all and looking for a way out. No jobs, but the draft was active for Korea and when a friend who registered when I did was called up, I knew I would probably be next; for a year in the army. I didn’t think that would be enough time to break away, a year, and I would probably be back in the same rut, and I was sure I would not like the army. Draftees were sent directly to the front lines and definitely looked down on in those days. None of the other services were drafting but you could enlist-for no less than four years. I decided for the Navy.

Leaving home for the first time was, of course difficult. My father shook hands with me for the first time and trying to hold back their tears were my two sisters, my mother and me! Columbia S.C. on a bus for test and physicals and then a five day train trip by way of Chicago picking up more recruits along the way. By the time we got to San Diego, we had four or five carloads. I had been given the records of the Columbia group because of the highest score and had a compartment! For the first time I began to look forward to it all.

Fitting out and sending civvies home really marked the beginning for everyone. Nothing issued would fit but after the first day we all thought it did. Most of the time we wore blue jeans and shirt with leggings and on cool days a navy turtle neck sweater under the shirt. The brogan shoes were worn out by the end of boot camp.

Haircuts were an ordeal for most; they ended up as skinheads. I had got a “flat top” before I left home and the barbers left it pretty much alone.

Our company “commander” was a chief Petty Officer and he started looking for company officers immediately. I had had two years of ROTC and had planned to try for a place. The second afternoon we were having a smoking break with the Chief. The expression or order for this was, “The smoking lamp is lit” or “out.” I had smoked some during Junior and Senior High but not much. Mother didn’t like it and had talked against it and I had quit so was one of about six out of the whole company who were not smoking. When the smoke was over the Chief said the area had to be “policed” up. He asked the non-smokers to raise their hands then had us to pick up the butts and burnt matches! Needless to say that this turned me off with him and I didn’t try out for anything under him. I suppose he was trying to gain favor with the majority.

The camp routine was well thought out and kept us busy with no time to get home sick. We marched everywhere and learned how in no time. We went to classes on everything and had practical experience with ship handling, firefighting, tear gas, rope tying, firing guns and K.P. (kitchen service and clean up). We were issued a rifle but used it primarily for exercise. Lots of that and we did it to music! A series of complicated moves which we learned in one lump with the rifle off the ground for about two hours. Some “fell out” but I managed to hold on.

We had to sign up for a team sport and I went out for “whale boat racing” since I knew I wasn’t good in any of the conventional sports. A river ran through the camp which had a ring of hills loaded with civilian houses. They certainly had a good show but not for us in the boat. About all we did was row out into mid-stream and smoke. I had already joined the crowd. When the race came, I was in sick-bay with a badly callused ball of my right foot. A large hunk

of my feet came out but healed over quickly and caused me no trouble. That and two trips to the dentist were my only medical problems. In the back court yard of the barracks were a lot of concrete platforms, tall wooden poles with rigging like for sails, and a lot of tin buckets and scrub brushes, all of which was for washing. We tied the washing up all neat and organized and were inspected every day. The thing most often looked at was our white hats. I guess they figured if it was clean everything else was. Early on the chief brought in a large barrel and filled it with bleach into it we put our hats for overnight.

We were washing and having inspections with all our items laid out in precise order. At one of these inspections, a boy close by had some items out of order and we lost some merit points. The Chief was very mad but knew the kid was not very smart. In locking around, I was the closest and he blamed me for not keeping an eye on him, which I should have along with the others. He sent me out on the public porch with m rifle over my head for a while.

I also got in trouble over shaving which we did at night so the “heads” could be easily cleaned before morning for inspection. I was accused of not shaving and when backed up by others was told to shave in the morning from now on.

After we passed two weeks we were marched over to the “Gee-dunk,” a sort of drugstore, soda fountain and candy bar center with everything very large size. We ate as if we had not had sweets for a year and I almost got sick.

The sunny, bright and cold days that I will always associate with Southern California were slowly passing but it seemed so long! After a time, we received short liberty time but I never went into San Diego. The recruit’s single stripe was just too “low” and I would wait until better days. There were recreation activities but usually crowded. I was content to rest around the barracks and most others were too. It was during this time that I became acquainted with two fellows who along with me stayed over after graduation and we became good friends. One was an old farm boy from middle Alabama. I later learned that his family owned a large part of that middle. The other was a red Scots from North Carolina.

Training never intensified as far as I was aware. We had no “obstacle course” to overcome nor harsh treatment like the Marines. My greatest trouble came with the swimming requirements. When I try to swim I sink like a rock but can float reasonably well. When they discovered that, after “a lot of water down the hatch,” they let me float (back stroke) through the swimming requirements.

The most frightening thing came with the requirement to jump off a very high tower. Actually I think it was only about 20 feet. I had made up my mind to do it when they put a heavy and water logged life vest on me. That thing took away all my courage. We were up the tower and the boy in front of me hesitated and got knocked on the head. The instructors had long bamboo fishing poles with a lead sinker fixed on the end. To get your attention they could reach out anywhere in the pool and rap you on the head. That reminder made me realize that I didn't want to get rapped so when the word was given, I jumped and somehow came back up to the surface. Standing the “watch,” in Boot Camp (one hour) was also very hard for me. I need my sleep. Later when I was standing four hour watches, I felt like I was practically dead the next day. Here the watch was in the barracks where everyone was asleep and we simply walked about.

During training, we had test all the time and preparing for them was one thing I could do. My ability to study impressed some of the others and they asked me for help. Eventually before each test I had a pretty large study group going. I think this is probably why the company voted to give me the flag a graduation.

Toward the end, we were given an opportunity to choose they type of duty or school we were interested in. I don't remember the school I picked but nothing was beginning at the time of graduation (recruiters don't mention this) and I was assigned deck duty on a destroyer. This was about the worst of all possible worlds. Word came down from the Training Center Administration that they needed typist and I immediately signed up and so did my two friends. The deal was that we had to stay over to type up Christmas leave orders for the recruits. They

were sent home in two shifts over the holidays. We would be allowed leave afterward and would probably be kept at the center with a Personnel-man rate and that is exactly what happened.

We typed and typed and finally got leave. My two friends and I took the Super Chief to Chicago and there divided up only to meet again in Chicago on the way back. I enjoyed that train ride. It was very cold and you could sit in the dome car and occasionally see snow falling along the way. It was especially cold in Chicago and icicles were hanging horizontally from the train at least a foot long. The wind was blowing off the lakes and I don't think I have ever been so cold. I had to change from one station to another and on the way back I stepped in a little corner cafe early in the morning and tasted my first hash browns.

Leaves were great and I always went home at least once a year. We received 30 days a year. In fact, something is wrong here because I remember a bus ride across country in those early days! (?) I think we probably also were allowed a seven day leave after graduation along with everyone else and then the leave over the New Year. At any rate, when I got back in middle January, I was stationed in Administration at the Naval Training Center for the next eighteen months.

The Administration Office was a large space full of open sections and desk. At first I was in a pool that worked with personnel files. A few months later, I was moved into a section referred to as Discipline. There were three desks and two people were leaving. I was the only one brought in and even then the work was not hard. These office shifts and change in workloads went on all the time.

Discipline kept the "Absent-with-out-leave" list for recruits, administration and school and I typed up in correct for the charges that were brought against someone for Captain's Mast or Court Marshall. There had been some other duties but they had been cut when I came.

We received each morning by telephone the names to add or delete to the AWOL List. Most of them were recruits. Invariably names got on the list that were in error. I don't know how they did but this obviously embarrassed the Administrative Officer and we were always on

the “hot seat” although it was not our fault. The Chief whose section we were in was always trying to think of some way to double check and like to have drove us crazy. The people who turned them in needed to be got onto. Not us. This was my only source of aggravation with the job.

Once I got use to the legalistic forms, there was no problem with this part except sometimes the people over at Legal were not very clear and when I eventually took over the section I use to call and “straighten them out.” It is a wonder I didn’t get in trouble when you called, you didn’t give your rank so I don’t know who they thought I was. I never knew where they were located.

To move up in rank in the Navy you have to do a required time, be recommended, take a test and then depending on the number of slots vacant they would take the highest scores to fill them. I think that was exactly the way to do it even though I never got pass Third Class. When you graduated Boot Camp, you got two stripes and were Seaman Apprentice for six months. Then you went up for Seaman, and three stripes which I did and got. Then a year later, you could go up for Third Class and I made that first time. After that I became eligible and took the test twice for Second Class but did not make high enough for a slot.

San Diego was an interesting town but it was full of sailors. Never the less, I started going on liberty as such as I could afford. Like most towns in the fifties there was good bus service which everyone used unlike today. A lot of sailors kept cars and later on my Alabama friend got one. One sailor even had a Cadillac but was fussy about dirty shoes and smoking!

I bought some everyday civvies and put on lay-a-way a Botany 500 suit, shirts, ties and dress shoes. I really didn’t need it but in those days you still thought of yourself as a civilian. We kept our clothes in rented lockers at the gate and were allowed to change just before we left the base and had to change again there before we came in. There were a few parties I got invited to but usually there were very few occasions to dress up. The best liberty in these halcyon days was a good meal on real china plates. Then a drink and a smoke and a good movie. There was a

fantastic tobacco shop downtown and I went “overboard.” Cigarettes (Pall Mall) I got cheap at the base. Here I bought pipes and tobacco and occasionally some weird cigars. The favorite was from Portugal. It was a long, black twist soaked in rum and I am sure must have smelled awful. Also my pipe tobacco was very aromatic and always burned my tongue. It took me years to find the best tobacco which was from Holland. Before that I would stink up everything and lost pipes right and left.

There was a wonderful chain of Mexican restaurants in San Diego with the best food. I want every chance I got and could afford. Most dishes were topped with real sour cream and slices of perfect avocados and on the table were big bowls of the hottest condiments you have ever tasted. Later I dated the daughter of the Mexican owners.

Another dish I tasted for the first time was “pizza pie.” I met downtown a boot-camp buddy who was attending Medical School and he invited me to have pizza. The restaurant was in a sub-basement and when you entered the door you went down a long ramp and then turned and went down another long ramp which brought you into the bar restaurant. Neither of us was quite of age to drink but they served us a beer at the table with the pizza. You ate the pizza in those days with a knife and fork. Even while I was in the Navy, pizza became much less formal and pizza joints were soon all over the place with the cook at a plate glass window throwing the dough up into the air with a twist or spin to make it flatten out into the correct shape.

Six months before I was discharged I was sent back to San Diego to the Naval Air Station and it's Enlisted Man's Club was centered around pizza ovens, beer and bingo. That was great fun.

After a few months of riding the bus we thought we would get classy and the three of us bought a share in an old used “airflow” Hudson, for \$300. It was a few weeks before I got behind the wheel. I was not too anxious because the California roads even back in the fifties were a very complex compared with Savannah. I came up to an intersection to turn left and stopped at what I thought was a red light. The turning light, which I had not seen, was green.

The car behind me honked and everyone said go and I turned left when the yellow was turning red having never seen it. The car behind me was a policeman of course. He pulled me over and I explained. He gave me a ticket but told me if I got a California drivers license I would not have to go to court. This was probably the most frightening thing of my whole four years. No one would go with me. When I got my Georgia license, the officer asked my Daddy if I could drive. He said yes and that was that.

I passed the written test O.K. and got ready with the officer for the driving test, I had been too scared after I got the ticket to drive. Of course, that was a mistake because I was not use to the car. Almost immediately I found out that the officer was originally from Georgia! I think he was the only person I met out there from home. I babbled on the whole time and I think scared him once or twice but he passed me anyway. I was the only one who ever got a California license and I immediately sold my share of the car. Several months later the other two sold theirs.

My Alabama friend found out about a body building course at the Y.M.C.A. which was free and we signed up. N.C. was reluctant and dropped out after a few weeks. I think we went two and three times a week for about six months. They had an indoor circular track and we spent a lot of time running. No one ran out in public back then. It was fun but I don't think we did our bodies much good. We seldom followed the instructor's directions. I didn't weigh very much and I think I lost some during the time period.

We had to work everything around our watch period which was every eight days and rotated; eight to twelve, twelve to four (the horrible "mid-watch") and four to eight. You were the only one in the whole complex and were just there in case of emergency. I don't know what I would have done if there had been one. I did everything I could think of to pass the time. I even bought a microscope and when I relieved the old watch I would run (very bad idea) down to the river about a block away, scoop up some water and run back and watch river bugs the rest of the time. There were some horrible monsters in that water.

I eventually got to know chess players in the other offices and played a lot. You couldn't afford to go into town all the time. I finally met on player who was about evenly matched with me. The only one I ever met and we played every opportunity we had. The competition was so close thought that we felt too much tension and eventually admitted it and quit.

They had ceramics shop where you could paint figures, glaze them and then they would fire them in a potters oven for you. I did several which survived. One in particular is a beer mug and is packed away somewhere. It doesn't have a lid to it. I think it was my best.

I also got myself "painted." There must have been dozens of tattoo shops in San Diego. A few sailors got a lot of them but most got only one or left it alone. I was interested but never seriously thought about it. One night after being out on liberty, Alabama came in with a tattoo! I was so envious that the next night I went out and got me one. Most of the examples in the shop were large, loud and horrible looking and I like to have backed out. I should have. I finally found the little bird (smallest one in the shop) and told him to put it up high. I never thought about how they did it until he whipped his little paint machine out and I could see the needles working in and out at the bottom. It was very painful and the blood flowed freely. When I got back my friend's was beginning to scab over and looked terrible. If I had waited and seen that I would have never done it. But we both healed up and I never thought about getting another one and have never seriously regretted this one.

In those early days, I went to the San Diego Zoo on Sunday. It was quite a place but I'm afraid animals do not interest me very much except for one Sunday trip later to see some bulls. This was the bullfight in Tijuana. I was fortunate enough to get in with a group who helped pay for expenses and would have probably not have gone on my own. It was my first "foreign" visit and I thought it very exotic and was very charmed. The town was a very small place and the main industry seemed to be leather goods. It was piled up all over the place. We looked around and had lunch at a little Mexican cafe at the end of a street. It was under a lean-to with vines and a dirt floor. The food was good but we had Mexican beer and it was not. A little band

strolled by and we had them play for us. Some guitars and brass instruments. I thought this was really living!

We bought the cheapest tickets without knowing about the “shady” and “sunny” side and naturally were in the sun and hot! But, it was a fantastic show. A little shocking but we were in a foreign country where they do things different. I had bought a movie camera and took a roll of film. A few weeks later, I went to the Icecapades in San Diego and put the same roll of film in the camera and got a very interesting double exposure. Of course, I wish I had not been so careless.

We started talking about leave in late August when we had been there almost nine months. Alabama and I decided to go for a couple of weeks the first of September but N.C. had been moved to another department and was drifting away from us wanted to wait until Christmas. We probably should have.

We took the Southern route this time. I remember the layover in New Orleans in late evening. We got out of the station and walked through principally the Black district. We ate supper and had our shoes shined and no trouble.

After a week home, my friend called. He had got a new car, a Ford, and wanted me to help him drive back. I agreed, turned in my tickets and met him in Mobile staying a night with Aunt Myrtle.

It was not a pleasant drive for me. It was hot and exhausting with long hours on the road and with his new independence with the car, I could see us drifting away. This was helped when he too got transferred to another department and had also to change barracks.

I liked one or two close friends and was never any good with the group. I was at loose ends and ended up getting a night job at one of the downtown theaters. A number of sailors did this and it was easy. You could, I was surprised to find out, hire someone to take your watch. The Section Chief didn't like it but he didn't say no. The theater where I worked showed grade B movies. They dressed me up in a fancy uniform that looked like an admiral and I was the ticket

taker. You stood outside just in front of the doors and during the winter it was rather cool. It was interesting at first but became boring. I worked from 6:00 P.M. to about 1:00 A.M. depending on the length of the movie and then caught a bus back to the base. Why I did it I don't know because I was always sleepy. It made a day seem like two and the pay was not that good. I guess I have always needed to keep busy.

I did meet people and one of the ushers who worked with me had a Mexican friend that I began to date. She was the daughter of the family who owned the restaurant chain and she had her own car.

Now that I had met people (civilians) I didn't have any time to be with them. It was a "catch 22." We went out on Saturday or Sunday before I went to work to various places including Tijuana. One time there was a Mexican Circus in town and we went to see it. It was rather seedy but interesting. A lot of freakish side shows one of which I remember had trained fleas. Yes, fleas! They appeared to have little skirts on when you looked through a large magnifying glass. Some would spin around individually and sometimes two together. There was a very small chariot with several fleas attached and another would hop on and be pulled around.

Her mother liked music and invited me several times to go with them to the Starlight Opera which was given outside in front of a large half domed stage. It was there that I saw my first Gilbert and Sullivan-the Mikado. It was a spectacular show. I would guess that they had over fifty extras and every one all dressed in beautiful Japanese costumes. All the shows were very enjoyable.

After a time, there began to be hints about engagements and marriage and I began to ease off my dating. I certainly did not want to get married in the Navy. Couples had a very hard time back then. Nothing was provided for a married sailor during his first enlistment.

I changed theaters and met more interesting people but night life and night people are very--I don't know what. I do know that I always felt a little leery. Decent people were not out

all hours of the night back in those days. These people didn't seem to be going anywhere but down and I didn't really want to join them even though being on the fringe was interesting. It was hard though to keep just to the "edge."

I did get introduced to a new and wonderful eating place in the same neighborhood. It was called the Sing How Low-Chinese food and my first experience. It was a wonderful place. It was expensive and I didn't have the time nor even the money, to go often. It was there that I met a fellow from our boot camp company again. He was serving on an aircraft carrier and invited me out to see it which I enjoyed. Those things are so big. We took several outings together and he invited me for a weekend in Los Angeles to stay with his grandparents. I talked with them by phone just to be sure and we went up on the train. His Grandmother was English and it was there that I had my first cup of hot English tea and enjoyed it. I saw the old section of Alameda Street and rode the short hill cog train known as Angel's Flight. It had been featured in a movie I had just seen and I was fascinated to be there. He also took me downtown and I was shocked. Back then L.A. looked like most big cities today full of bums and beggars and filthy dirty.

About two months later, I went up to L.A. on my own and coming back was involved in a train wreck in which several people were killed. I was very lucky about the side of the car I was on and received only a few scratches.

A few months before I was transferred, I quit the outside work and spent more time on the base and involved myself with the recreation there. I knew my time was getting short (close to 18 months) and I was apprehensive about new orders. I had made Third Class but I didn't know a thing about ship life. I was trying to make all the luck I could for overseas shore duty but when the orders came I was to report to the General A.E. Anderson a troop transport ship which was docked at a pier number in San Francisco. I went home first for a short time when I reported back, the Anderson had already steamed. The departure date had been changed

without notifying me so I was not at fault. But by the time I got to her in Yokohama Japan, I was very depressed.

To be in transience is to be in limbo. I spent two weeks on Treasure Island in the bay and it felt like two months. I had to wait on the ship to get to Japan and at the time, I never thought of that. They finally flew me over on a military flight. We landed at Hawaii and were allowed out of the plane for about two hours. I sat down under my first palm tree with coconuts on it.

My first view of Japan was from the back of an open truck as we hurdled along from the airport just as dawn was coming up. The Anderson was big, old and dingy. Especially below decks, it looked like it had not been painted in years. I was kept at the quarterdeck for about a half an hour. I figured everyone was at breakfast. I never got mine and meals on board that long flight were not much. I didn't get much of a welcome in the Personnel Office either. I have no doubt that most of my troubles on the Anderson were my fault, I just didn't like it. The office already had a full staff; three Third Class and one Second Class Personnel-man. I wondered if they had been able to get someone just before they left and had not expected me to be allowed to continue with my assignment. Anyway, I think I met them half way but got little response and soon gave up. We were shortly getting under way to pick up Army Troops and carry them back to the U.S. I never got much information about the operation and didn't ask. I don't know where we went in Japan nor how many thousands we transported.

I was immediately made the Captain's telephone talker for departing and docking. I couldn't believe it. No one liked the duty but usually it was the senior Personnel-man's job and I didn't know a thing about ship operations. I made mistakes and every time I got a good going over from the Exec. in front of everybody.

In the office, I was "extra" and all kinds of silly jobs came my way. Once, I had to take the box in which returning liberty cards were dropped and sand it down and repaint it. I was told it was a two day job! Another time I was told to wipe down and mop the sleeping

compartment. A Third Class never had that duty. I never had it. I failed to wipe the dust behind the lockers (obviously never done) and got a dressing down from the Ensign.

I had my first liberty in Japan while the troops were embarking. I walked way out along the main street of the town. It was dusty and dirty with an open sewer along one side. Shops and houses were strung along the way. I came to a public aquarium and went in. On my way back I found a restaurant and ordered sukiyaki, the only dish I had ever heard of. It was strips of tough beef and strange vegetables cooked together and served with beer. On a small plate was an egg which I broke open thinking it was hard boiled but it was raw. If I understood correctly, it was suppose to be mixed in with the dish. I didn't eat much.

On the voyage back, I didn't eat much either. With all the troops, we must have been having a more difficult time than I except they knew they would shortly leave it, it was very hot and smelly. I couldn't eat or sleep. I tried sleeping on the top deck but woke up too stiff. Steel is very hard.

A few days before we got in, the Second Class sent me to sick call in the morning. I told them I couldn't sleep well nor eat much and got told off for trying to get a medical discharge by the Doctor. He said I just wanted to get out which was perfectly true. I wanted to get out of that ship.

When we docked and the troops left, I want on liberty in San Francisco but couldn't seem to enjoy it. My whole state was very low and I seemed unable to get out of it. I am sure that if I had gone on as I was, I would eventually have got into serious trouble.

However, after about two months the Anderson received orders to transfer a Third Class (no name) to the U.S.S. Ponchatoula, a tanker, stationed at that time in Long Beach. I was told off to go and went gladly. Miracles do happen.

I took a few days liberty and went first to San Diego and saw some old friends. We went to the beach and reported to the Ponchatoula with a very bad sun burn. I don't know what they thought of me but I was delighted. It was almost a brand new ship with air condition! It was

still warm down inside, but not uncomfortable. There was a neat Executive Office on the upper deck with port holes. Everything seemed bright and airy and everyone more-or-less friendly. The office had a First Class who tried to be a dictator but I ignored him as best I could. There was one other Third Class and a Seaman in training to be a Personnel-man. In spite of my time on the Anderson, I still didn't know any office routine and worked to try and understand. Unfortunately the First Class liked to keep things under his control so he could make specific assignments and it was well over a year before I ever got a complete understanding!

We were to leave almost immediately for Japan for a six month's tour. When we were getting under way and everyone was at duty station, I had not yet been assigned one so not to be conspicuous doing nothing, I went down into our sleeping compartment and was at a little small table against the outside bulkhead writing a letter home. All of a sudden, I heard the Boson's whistle and very clear and calm voice saying, "Stand by for a collision on the starboard side," which was where I was sitting, I couldn't believe it. The message was immediately repeated and not knowing what to do I reached over and grabbed hold of a bunk support. A few seconds later there was a long, slow "bump" that went down the side of the ship and the bulkhead that I was next to vibrated and actually buckled some, all though I could not tell it. Heavy pipes and other pieces of firefighting equipment were flung off the walls but none struck me. I ran up topside and next to the water-tight door was a bin of life preservers and I put one on. I could see others doing the same thing and my number one thought was that we were going down and I had not been assigned to a lifeboat! I looked to the starboard and to our stern, just off from us, was the other ship. I later learned that as we approached the breakwater opening a civilian cargo ship was also about to exit. Civilian ships have the right-of-way in peace time but the Captain was reported as saying that we could both made it and did not give way. The civilian Captain obviously thought that we would slow down and took the center of the opening and the two ships collided against their respective sides. No bulkheads were pierced but they were buckled. I also heard that our Captain went directly into full reverse of the engines and that the

boiler came very close to exploding. We were carrying, as tankers did, ship oil and aviation gas and some ammunition and we were full in preparation for our trip overseas.

We were put into a repair dock and work went on day and night so that we could release our counterpart in Japan and more importantly get our supplies over. Starboard plates were removed, including the whole side of our sleeping quarters. Other bunk assignments were made but we were at full compliment and apparently limited. A Seaman and I had to remain. It was impossible to sleep with the work going on right next to you and I occasionally took my mattress after hours and sneaked up to the office. This would have been a serious offense if I had been caught. You were not supposed to sleep away from the assigned areas in case of emergency. No one came for me and we were shortly prepared and again under way. I was assigned telephone talker to the engine room and handled that fairly well.

Two weeks at sea! It was quite a feeling and for the first time I began to think of myself as a real part of the Navy. I had never thought about sea-sickness and now observed some come down but fortunately I was never bothered.

We were shortly out of fresh milk and eggs but the food was and remained very good. No one said breakfast, dinner and supper. It was "What's for chow?" and "How much longer to chow?" and depending on the time we knew what meal was being talked about. I gained weight and learned the ship. The Captain during the collision was replaced by a new one and he tested us out with a lot of drills and complained about slowness to duty stations. He liked to call us to Battle Stations between nine and ten at night when a lot of people were taking showers. They started coming up just like they were! He stopped that and things slowed down. The Executive Office put out a "newspaper," taking the news from radio reports in the early morning hours. The First Class liked that job and since he got up an hour or so earlier to get the news he left several hours earlier in the afternoon!

Someone liked Oklahoma and was allowed to play it over the intercom in the afternoon over and over. I discovered the ship's "library" and began reading. The office was in charge of it

but no one ever checked out a book. I read the three volumes of the Tontine there for the first time. Movies were shown in the “mess” later on in the evening after everything was cleaned up.

Sasebo is in the Southern part of Japan and was our Asian home-port. We came in late in the evening, passing a score of small Japanese boats we could just barely see. I felt sure we were tearing our way through their nets but I guess not. When I went on deck early next morning, I could smell Japan. It is hard to explain and better not. We were in a large bay with odd looking mountains all around which two or three of them the, “old salts” had some very risqué names for. I could see the town sprawling up the side of one mountain from the low river front. Small fishing boats were still passing by and the water was choppy and gun metal gray. It looked very cold.

The town was small and what there was for sailors was rather seedy. I didn't think much of the people and I am sure they returned the feeling but the culture and especially the natural surrounding were very interesting and beautiful and I liked them a lot. I always liked to look out on the bay and the surrounding mountains.

I had made friends with the two hospital medics. They were just across the passageway from the office and a cut above average. The head medic would make Second Class before he was discharged the next summer and that meant that he had to make a very high test score. Before I was discharged, I stayed overnight at his apartment on the beach where he was attending Berkley as a medical student. I am sure he became a doctor but never heard. Also, he was just about to get married and I met his wife who appeared to be much in the same class as himself.

I had also made friends with the group that centered around the War Room; the Radar-man and Signalman. All of us occasionally went ashore together and I have a picture of some of us taken in Hong Kong.

The Enlisted Man's Club was outstanding as apparently were most of them overseas. I became acquainted with one other in Yokohama. In Sasebo the meal was fillet mignon steak

with baked potato and salad. The meat was said to be Kobe beef from cattle fed with sake rice mash and massaged daily. I don't know about that but it certainly was delicious.

I once took a Japanese girl there which was a mistake. Most Japanese eat little or no meat by preference and economics. She was not horrified but I could tell she was disturbed and she ate very little.

There was a row of shops where I bought, every pay day, some sort of souvenir and family present. We had to trade our money in for yen and got 360 yen to the dollar which was quite a bargain for us. It also gives you a big roll of money, like Italian lira today, and mad you feel much richer than you really were. Before we left for a return to the States I had bought a lot of gifts there and in Yokohama. My best buys were probably cultured pearls for mother and my oldest sister. I had bought a large tin suitcase and we could store our purchases in a special locked compartment. A very interesting but awkward purchase was a complete hibachi. I carried it across country by hand, with a full suitcase and some items strapped on the outside. Somewhere along the way an old lady tried to buy my hibachi pot!

I tried Saki (rice wine) but did not like it but bought two large bottles on board (strictly against regulations) and the medics let me hide it in the X-Ray room. The inspection tours never looked in there. Daddy didn't like it either.

I almost bought a bonsai, the first real ones I had ever seen. Our next door neighbor had a fake one in her dining room and I ordered a "bonsai kit" when I was in Junior High. It had seeds, small pots and an instruction booklet. I got a couple of seedlings up but that was as far as I got.

In early spring, there was an outdoor market of them that I came upon. Hundreds of really great trees for about \$25 each. I thought and thought but I couldn't figure out where I could keep it nor how I would get it home.

Also by accident I saw a temple procession. Great carts were being pulled along on oversize wheels and temple images were being carried along by a gang of chanting men. All of it

was very decorative and colorful looking just like the pictures I have in books. Unfortunately I didn't have a camera at the time and in fact I was a very poor picture taker!

All in all the bay view remained the best thing but we were in and out a lot and saw many other things. A lot of our cruises were by ourselves to practice drills. All kinds! One time we had to react to a volcanic disruption on the sea floor.

One man-over-board drill was very exciting for me. A dummy was thrown overboard (not me) and the alarm given. The ship began turning and stopping and at the same time a boat was lowered with a medic as part of the rescue team. On one of these drills, I had made arrangements to take the place of the medic. We had not exactly asked but we had let the Chief know indirectly in case of serious opposition. Actually it wasn't unusual to have a rating sitting in on a quite different job as a part of training to change rates. In the office, we had at one time a "boozy" old Boson who wanted to become a Personnel-man.

At any rate, I was sitting in the boat when it was being lowered. It was a tricky maneuver for the best crew when the ship was still moving. Somehow, the forward lines were let go before the aft and the movement of the ship forced our bow under and twisted us upside down. We were all thrown out and the ship had a real overboard rescue. We were all required to wear life jackets and there was no danger but it was still scary being out in the middle of the ocean waiting to be rescued. No one was hurt and nothing was said about me for which I was most grateful I was very scared of being involved in some sort of report or investigation.

One test of our drill results were held on us by another crew and we held one on another ship. A test crew would come on board over the period of time sequence we would be required to react to various emergencies affecting different parts of the ship and different people. For our test I had no particularly hard part but when we went to give a test I was assigned the duty of control over the timing. This was done on the intercom. I was sent to an isolated area which had a hookup and I had a large booklet from which I would broadcast over the entire ship the timing and the series of emergencies. When I first heard my voice booming out and echoing

over the entire ship I almost made a mess of it but managed to pull together and continue. Stage fright!

On one of our cruises that fall, a typhoon was in the South China Seas and the seas were very heavy. Usually the Ponchatoula was very steady but now we were heaving up and down and had a slight roll as giant waves ripped down our sides. We closed the office because the typing carriages would roll back on the slant of the ship and spent our time trying to secure things. Over the ship, a lot of small items got broken. We were not allowed to cross the grating deck unless going to duty or emergency and safety lines had been rigged.

In the middle of all that, we received a SOS from a small Japanese freighter which had damaged its steering and could not control their ship's direction. They were much closer to us than any other ship and in serious danger. They had managed to set out a sea anchor to keep their head to the wind or they would have already gone down. We were a dangerous ship but being the closest, we steamed to try a rescue. In a few hours, we had her in sight. The deck crew had prepared a towing cable with much discussion about tensile strength. They even made an announcement over the intercom asking if anyone knew about "such and such" a technical matter.

We came along side ready or not, and a gun fired a small line across their bow which they got the first time. We pulled ahead and the cable was slowly let out. They had a hard time securing it but about an hour later, we started moving forward with them in tow. We towed them for two days when a sea going tug took over in much calmer waters.

The storm itself had been stupendous. The most exciting and exhilarating thing I think I have ever been involved in. I don't think we were ever in any serious danger but what did I know. In another storm, I was afraid and we were in serious danger and this was while returning to the ship in a liberty boat in Hong Kong harbor. A rain and wind storm had come up in late evening and we returned in it. It did not get really rough until we were about half way to the ship. As usual we were anchored several miles out in the harbor along with the ammunition

ships. On board ship those waves had very little effect but in our boat we were certainly tossed about. The canvas top had been put up but still we were soaked from waves breaking over in no time. The coxswain, a Third Class no older than any of us, handled himself extremely well. He stood, somehow, in his "well" with little support and with two hands on the wheel kept us going in the driving rain. He made four passes for the small gangway platform hanging over the side of the ship fixed just above the water level and finally his helper got a hold. We were up and down five or six feet and it was difficult for them to keep in close yet stay off the platform to keep from damaging the boat. We had to jump several feet, timing it when we were level and often the platform would immediately be underwater. All made it and surprisingly none were hurt.

We had a four day stay in Hong Kong and saw all the sights usually for a tour group and in fact were carried around as a tour group. I saw the Aberdeen Village, the floating restaurants and all the hundreds of boats that served as homes. People all over the place, land and water. I walked down the most exotic streets with everything imaginable hanging out for sale. I saw the weird sights of Tiger Balm Gardens of which I have some little bitty pictures I got them developed in a shop there and that is the way they were returned. We had lunch in the hotel and walked on the beach that was a feature in the movie "Love is a Many Splendid Thing." I had lobster in a Chinese "French" restaurant. I wish now I had had "Peking Duck." We went all over the place and it was just unbelievable.

On one long period of steaming, we did our duty and fueled ships just off Korea. Aircraft carriers on the Port side and Destroyers on the Starboard. Hoses were run out and oil and aviation gas was pumped by the hour to one after another. It was a long duty spell. Everyone was getting sun blistered and the medics brought out a thick white cream and we covered our faces and the tops of our hands. Sandwiches were brought out for breakfast, dinner and supper.

One line was rigged to carry cargo and since we would be going back to port first, we took in mail and delivered it if we had it. We also exchanged movies for everybody and sometimes, if

we had it, sent them fresh food over. Once we brought across from a carrier an Ensign who was so sea sick that he had to be sent ashore.

Once a civilian ship crossed in front of us and our Captain, in command of all ships hooked to us tried to have everyone execute a turn. We popped some lines and almost collided with a carrier. Another time a destroyer drifted too far away and the strain on the hose didn't break it but caused a split. An arch of heavy oil sprayed up over and directly into the starboard open bridge. We saw it coming and everyone got inside except two telephone talkers, one of which was me. We were hampered by our lines. We were also covered with oil. The steel deck was so slippery we couldn't keep our feet and went down. The other talker slipped down the ladder (steps) part way and I think I almost went over the side but probably not. At any rate I held on for dear life. We were eventually got hold of and got down to the grating deck where we were cleaned up with a water hose somewhat and taken to the infirmary and scrubbed down in the showers. The oil inflamed our eyes and we both had got some of it down and were deathly sick. After two days we were back to normal and released except that the other fellow had bruises that showed for another week.

When I went up topside, we were steaming in convoy formation. Ships all around and a very impressive sight. Skills were being developed on station keeping and course changes. I stayed up late that night. There was a full moon and you could see all the ships clearly. Also signal lights were blinking all the time. Signalmen loved to signal and it was probably practice but a lot of information still passed between ships through signalmen. I had a very good friend who was one and it was interesting to watch. In back of the open top or flying bridge were the signal flags which were occasionally run up for fleet course changes. Also the signal lights were on each side and it was there that the signalman stood when he used hand flags which was the most interesting thing of all. I tried to learn them but never succeeded. I have been with them on leave when they were separated but could see each other and they would signal messages with their arms.

Next morning, all the ships were gone and we were heading further South to the Philippines where we spent a warm and very different December.

We anchored first in Manila harbor and were there for several days. I was not very impressed by it. A great sprawling place, rather seedy and certainly satisfied to “make do.” I never saw anything of interest although there were very probably things I missed. We left shortly for the naval base at Subic Bay and the little community of Olongapo which I knew of through Don Blanding’s poem. It was mainly a long road out from the base with bars on each side. The bars tended to be big open barn type buildings full of very sleazy people who enjoyed very much what they were doing. Everything was rather rough and fights were common.

I had served on Shore Patrol in Sasebo once before on Thanksgiving Day and spent all the time at the station. When we got back, the mess people had saved us enough food to sink a battle ship! Here, I served on Patrol duty twice and got into all kinds of situations. At one bar we were called to everyone was fighting and all kinds of things were flying through the air. I mainly hid behind a table until it quieted down.

Another time we filled the “paddy wagon” full. Two of us were standing on the back holding on and before we got back to headquarters, we had a flat. There were a lot of mad people inside before we finally got them to the brig.

Just before my last duty was up three of us went out on a call. Two people were involved in a vicious fight and the real S.P. stepped in to try and handle them. I had two real drunks who could barely stand up falling over me trying to get at each other. We all fell down and the foot of one of them hit me in the eye and naturally I had a good one the next day. The only one to get hurt!

The best part of the daily routine was swim call at 1:00 in the afternoon during the hottest part of the day. We got in the liberty boat and it took us around the curve of the bay away from everything where there was just a thick jungle, a strip of white sandy beach and beautiful clear water. There was a palm roofed hut where the Navy issued out a couple of beers

and that was it. It was restful, refreshing and very tropical. A float was anchored out quite a way and I made it out (on my back) a few times. I would turn over occasionally and there would be swimming around, schools of small tropical fish that looked just like the ones in my aquarium. The floor shelf fell off rapidly but you could look down through the clear water and see sand sharks on the bottom. I was told that they were harmless but I never felt that when they were around.

I attended midnight services at the small base chapel Christmas Eve. Four Chaplains in full dress whites read the service and a small choir in red robes sung Christmas Carols. The arched windows were fully opened and flowering vines trailed into the Church. An occasional butterfly (or moth) would come fluttering through. It was a memorable Christmas service.

We steamed back to Sasebo where we stayed for a short period and then up to Yokohama where we were at anchor until we started back in the States. Yokohama was not much for tourists but we were about a thirty minute taxi ride from Tokyo.

I couldn't afford to go often but I walked the Ginza shopping street, saw a spectacular "review" show which I have since read about and met a teacher when I tried to call home one day. This was at a phone "exchange" and she spoke English and attempted to help me. I saw her several times and the last time she gave me the doll in the glass case.

We were always taking on fresh food in port but here we had a major restocking. All hands were called (Third Class and down) to move goods to the appropriate areas. It took about two hours. When finished, the Deck Officer told everyone to stay where we were. He took about six men and began a systematic search of the ship uncovering all kinds of supplies that had somehow been hidden away. I had not even been aware of it but he seemed to know where to look and I don't doubt found it all. No charges were made against anyone even though stuff was hidden under bunk pillows and blankets. The trip back was a two week repeat. Time changes always confuse me and we got our day back crossing the International Date Line. We had to be careful dating documents and I usually had errors.

I heard rumors of some of the “old salts” holding an initiation. They may have done it when we first crossed and I am pretty sure they did when we crossed the equator but I never really saw anything. This was primarily the deck crew.

When we first went out, some of the men wanted to grow a beard but the Exec. wouldn't let them unless they signed an agreement to keep it for six months. Only two did and they were not allowed to cut them off. I think they were sorry because they really seemed to suffer when we were in the Philippines. One fellow let a friend of his shave his with a straight razor out on the open deck!

We had movies in the mess again and I went to a few. Once before the movie began we saw a comet low on the horizon and traveling horizontally. It was there after the movie too. I thought to have heard some more about it but forgot to ask when we got to the States.

One movie in particular I wanted to see but just before it began, the “high sheriff,” a first class Boson in charge of the brig pushed for another movie. No one was asked and he sort of leaned on the projectionist to get his way. He was a big beefy man who never seemed to do anything. Certainly the brig was never used. He seemed to have friends in every department and I think his chief offering was scuttlebutt (gossip) about the Officers. I never liked him and I didn't like this. No Officers or Chiefs were there and I suppose he ranked first but I never liked that unofficial rule that “rank has it's privileges.” I left being mad, went back to the office, wrote up an “investigation Executive Mast” and put it on the Exec's desk. In the morning, I was shaking in my boots when we were called up to his cabin. I knew I would get the “short end” if I pressed it and so apologized for wasting his time and asked him to tear it up. I never had a word from the Boson but I know it went the round of the ship and made me look bad.

When we got into Long Beach, the main two men in the office lived close by and so I applied for the first leave wave. The First Class told me I would have to take the second which I did. He had kept us from effectively learning office routine and his work habits were aggravating. He would get small things going in the morning and lounge around the cook area

drinking coffee and eating. We were often behind as a result and he would want us to remain after hours or work on Saturday and Sunday. He did the same thing in Olongpo with the 1:00 swim call and I often didn't go because he wanted me there to work. In Long Beach I began to take all my liberty on the weekends just to not be there for him. Only the Exec. could actually cancel our liberty. So, when the work piled up and I knew he was going to work us after hours I always pulled my liberty card. Again I should have buckled under because this didn't help matters at all. He was finally transferred about a month before we left on our second tour of Asian Duty.

When I became eligible for the Second Class test, the Exec. would not recommend me to take it and I could understand why but I was angry and discouraged. A month before I was discharged I was eligible again, took the test but failed to make high enough for a slot.

The Bureau of Personnel (BUPERS) put out a complete set of instructions for running an office. On a shelf, it made up a series of large loose leaf binders that was about five feet wide. It was just impossible to study it and learn everything. Besides, a good part of our time was spent in putting in new instructions and taking out the old. The best you could do was to learn where to look which I had pretty well succeeded in by the time he left. We got no replacement immediately and I was in charge for about two months before we got a decent Second Class in to take over. I had one helper during that time, a long time Third Class Boson who wanted to become a Personnel-man. He was a good fellow and could type but was absolutely no good. When the First Class left, he took with him the combination which the Exec. didn't believe. The Boson fiddled with the tumbler for about fifteen minutes and got it open! It was his one success.

When I finally got my leave, it was a pleasant one. I didn't tell them I was coming and had all my "presents." I took the Northern route. The train South left Chicago in the evening and the next morning I got to the washroom real early and bathed off as best I could and put on my whites. I had been in my dress blues three nights and two days. I remember yet what a delightful change. In Atlanta, I found a bus leaving almost immediately and would get me in to

Savannah about the time the Nancy Hanks was leaving Atlanta. While I was getting my tickets changed around, I left all my stuff piled in the floor behind me. The Clerk called me away and when I came back a police officer was standing over it. When he saw me he shook his finger and nodded his head back and forth and walked away.

Back in Long Beach, we remained docked most of the time with few steamings so we had plenty of time for Liberty. It was an interesting place but it had a lot of strange people. I went to the movies and ate out most often. Occasionally there would be a concert in the park in the late afternoon. I found a cheap rooming house right on the beach and would sometimes rent a room and bath for Saturday and Sunday. The medics and most of the radar and signalman had been replaced and I didn't try out for new friendships. I sunned myself on the very large sandy beach or stayed on board out in the sun on what we called "signal beach," the upper bridge. I got very brown and managed to avoid a sunburn but I am sure it was still not good for me.

There was an amusement park with rides that I went to once. They had a large roller coaster that was exciting to ride at night. On one downward sweep it lifted my tie right off and over my head and I never found it. I had sat on my cap but didn't think about it blowing off.

Many sailors had their clothes tailored. Some had jumpers cut so tight they had zippers in the side to get in and out of it. I had been slowly having my pants "belled" by having the knee section taken in a little bit. The old style thirteen button and belled pants had been phased out years before and everyone wanted them now. Most readymade dress blues were made from a material like gabardine and didn't look nor feel like the regulation blues. Most bases and no hips would not let you wear them if caught. I found some dress blues with the flap and thirteen buttons in wool but a little darker and softer than regulation. I bought them anyway on lay-away. I was sometimes stopped but they would feel the material and let me go on.

It was during my "pay-off" that I found a carved and turned ivory chess set for \$175 which was not cheap back in those days. I probably would have bought it except my money was going to pay off my new dress blues. I certainly got my values turned around!

One morning early when going in the office, I saw through the porthole the tail end of an airplane sticking up in the water a few yards away from the ship. It turns out that it had crashed during the night and the pilot had been picked up by a patrol boat. Some of the liberty boat crew went out and attached a line to it in an attempt to tow it back to the ship and make it fast until salvaged. In the process it took on more water and sank!

This was the time I went to see my medical friend at Berkley and during the time we talked about college. I learned for the first time about the G.I. Bill and what it would pay for college. I thought a little about attending college there but decided it would be best to go back South. For the first time, I began to feel easy about when I got out. Every now and then I had been thinking about the end of my tour and I went into my last year and was afraid I would be tempted to re-enlist but now I knew I had a real alternative.

Our return to Japan was a happier time for me, even though there was a lot of work in the office. I was getting the “paper” out now and doing just about everything else. The Exec. was not very happy about not getting an office “head” replacement but he never complained about the work. We had another new Captain. I had never had much contact with the others but now I had to carry a lot of papers back and forth and often saw him in his cabin. It was quite a setup for a ship. He was the only officer’s quarters forward. It was very private with his own stewards, cook and mess. I still had not learned my lesson about rank and privilege! His Steward, a Jamaican and very big man came back after the first day at sea and wanted to help on the paper. He said he had asked the Captain for permission and he had given it.

Well, everyone wanted to put something in the paper especially the junior officers who had written up silly things about each other. I had taken the first one up to the Exec. and he had said no. Instead of making an announcement in the Ward room he told me to bring each one up to him. He just wanted to see the stuff and always said no and I had to explain to the Officers and that had been no fun. Now this guy! He wanted to be my editorial assistant with a big silly grin on his face. The whole thing was on a tight schedule for me to get it out on time for

breakfast. Also, it was a one-man job. I had no idea what he wanted to do but I knew it would be trouble. I explained as carefully as I could and pointed out the Exec.'s ruling about other efforts and in effect said no. He left not very happy. Another First Class who wanted to be Chief! Second Class were O.K. and Third Class were the best.

I didn't hear anything more but several days later; we were having a ship inspection which meant the Captain would inspect the ship and the men. Normally the Exec. did an inspection when we mustered on deck for morning call. It was usually the Yeoman's job to follow the Captain and take notes. His office was forward and he worked directly with the Captain. The office got word that I was to follow the Captain this time. I went forward with the Exec. and Dept. Head Officers when the Captain came on deck. He said something about inspecting the men and that he would start with me! He gave me a good look over and said that my tie was tied with a slip knot and not a square knot. Now, even after boot camp for a while I had a time learning the square knot and often tied a slip knot which was easier. However, this was a square knot and he knew it when he pulled it apart. He had to use both hands which he wouldn't have with a slip. When it was hanging down all loose, he told me to leave it there and I had to during the whole inspection. It was very embarrassing. I could tell that several of the officers knew what had happened and spread the word around. They didn't know the cause but they knew better than I how the Captain when crossed would take his revenge and that was how he got me because of his Steward.

From then on, I knew the Navy was definitely not for me! When I received my transfer orders, I had only a few months left and I was to report to the Naval Air Station in San Diego bay (island) where oddly enough the Navy kept and did all the paper work on transferring sailors around. They did it one at a time unlike the other services.

I was ready to leave the Ponchatoula. They put me on a seaplane up to an airbase in central Japan. The sea plane went right out into the bay of Sasebo and when it took off, the water spray was flying up past the window and I thought we were going under.

The mess at this base had Japanese workers to run the whole thing and all you did was to go in and sit at a table with real china and not a tin tray. You served yourself from big bowls of food on the table and they filled your glass with tea. This time I didn't wait around in transit and had only two meals there before we were flying out. Those flights were so long but this one was not uneventful. Between Wake Island and Hawaii an engine went out. The pilot turned to go back to the closer Wake and flew down very low over the water. My "heart was in my mouth," but we made it and I suppose no real danger. We were on this little island for a number of hours while they "fixed" the plane. I was only slightly aware of it's historical importance from WW II but there was absolutely nothing to see. In the corner of one large hanger, a "native" was giving a haircut and I asked and got a haircut while we waited. A haircut on Wake Island! In Hawaii, they still had to work on the plane and we were to stay overnight and they put us up in the Royal Hawaiian Hotel which was right down on the beach. It was all fantastic and there was a lot to see. We just were not there long enough. We ate out on the patio with everyone else and also out there they had a lowering of the American flag ceremony in the evening. The flag was slowly lowered by a troupe of Hawaiians in native dress with some carrying torches. Several of them sang the National Anthem. Our balcony faced the patio and we stayed up late watching the activity below. Two to a room and they were beautiful rooms.

I didn't even know where we landed except it was North of San Diego so when I got outside the gate in the early morning, I took the first bus heading South. It took me the whole day to get to San Diego when I could have probably done it in two hours by train but I was terribly sleepy and could not think. I dozed off all the time the whole trip. I went directly to the Air Station, signed in, got my bunk assignment and slept the night through.

The office was on the second floor over our sleeping quarters and so right up the stairs and to work. When I walked in, I felt immediately at home even though the space of this section was only about half the size of that at the Training Center. At first, I was put into a typing pool of about twenty and we occupied about one-third of the space. We typed up orders for transfers.

I gradually learned over the next few days that there was this “special” transfer section and that a punch card computer did all the work of the routine transfers. The rest of the office did work involved with the computer. Probably at one time the whole office had been a typing pool and I think the computer had not been installed too long. There were a lot of work changes while I was there.

One of the first things I noticed was that our coffee mess, a large affair, had a steward rating there all day who did nothing but make coffee and keep things cleaned up. I never had that kind of service before but I suppose that here, you could transfer a person anywhere you wanted them.

At the Training Center Admin. office, we had a coffee mess in a small room set up and Third Class and below took turns coming in early and getting it going so that coffee would be ready when everyone came in. I had my week’s duty and one day I will never forget. I was leaning over the sink drawing water when I felt like I was going to fall in. At first I thought I was about to faint for some reason. Then I realized the building was shaking. I went running into the office. No one was there yet. The hanging “school house” globes were swinging wildly back and forth. Then I realized that it was an earthquake! I ran to the outside door and could see people walking unaware of it. Apparently you could not feel the quake when directly on the ground. No damage was done and by the time I had got to the door the worst of it was over, except that during the day, I could feel a slight shaking occasionally through my desk.

On board the Ponchatoula there were coffee messes all over the ship except the Exec. would not let us have one. At first I thought it was the doings of the First Class and that he wanted to go out to get coffee. But, after he was transferred I put in a request and it was refused. We could get coffee from anywhere but it was embarrassing to have to ask.

I’ll bet the Navy drinks more coffee than the other services combined. Everyone went around with a coffee cup in their hand all the time.

A few days later, I was taken out of the pool and assigned to a desk to learn the job because that person was being transferred. We were introduced and I pulled up a chair by the desk which was piled with incoming and outgoing boxes. I thought that this was probably a “hot” spot. The guy looked at me and then up and down and finally said, “I don’t know how to tell you this but I don’t have a thing to do!”

He had been there about eighteen months while changes had been going on rather rapidly and had managed to unload just about everything that the desk had originally been involved with and of course some of it had been phased out. He had only one thing left and with a little practice, I could do it in about ten minutes. The computer punch card orders for the day were brought in and he checked them against a list of the “special” typed orders to make sure there was no conflict. To verify that there had been a check, he would press a pencil eraser on a red ink pad and then onto the top card as his code. That was it. He had hardly walked out the door a few days later before the Section Chief began adding work for which I was glad. I didn’t want to sit there staring into space which you did sometimes for five or ten minutes in the typing pool.

The watch here was every twelve days, the best yet. At the Training Center, it had been eight days and on ship at sea every third night on the bridge hooked up to the engine room. In port every fifth day as a part of the quarterdeck duty. We stayed in the office and read. Here there were two of us and we two read most of the time. The object of this watch was security and we walked the halls every half hour. There was a gun but it was locked in the desk and I don’t know who had the key.

With such a good duty, I tried the movie racket again but only for a short while. This theater played the new blockbusters and while I worked there “Pal Joey” was on. I never saw it but I heard every line again and again!

I rotated as ticket taker (inside) and usher. The theater had three balconies. The third one was practically straight up and down and made me dizzy. From up there the screen looked like a postage stamp.

We had typical usher uniforms with white shirt and black tie except our shirt was a paper front (dickey) only and with paper cuffs which showed below the coat sleeve. We got a new issue each week.

I definitely didn't like the night job any more even through everything was much easier than before and I quit and started going to the movies to see them. Over the years, I had seen a lot but two seem to stick in my mind the most. My friend in Los Angeles (grandparents) took me to the foreign film theater to see the French movie "Diabolique." He said it was the scariest film yet and it was even with sub-titles. The most haunting one that stayed with me was "Night of the Lonely Hunter" with Robert Mitchum, not one of my favorite actors. He was good but the film "atmosphere" was the best part. There were some wonderful moon lit scenes.

I also bought a small television! We had the most locker space here of anywhere. Another sailor had one and gave me the idea. I could plug min in from my bed, the top bunk with no one in the bottom or the two on the side, and watch without disturbing anyone. I was in the lap of luxury. Ship and shore bases had T.V. but I hardly ever watched it. The most I watched was in Japan when they were telecasting the Sumo wrestling competition.

I paid for the T.V. on installments in cash because I had no checking account. One time I failed to get a receipt and they claimed the next time that I had not paid. Forty dollars ripped off! There were a lot of places like that where sailors were. I knew it and should have been more careful.

A lot of people at the Air Station were "short-timers" like me and there were a lot of celebrations (far too many) when someone was about to be discharged. It was very disconcerting to see some of them back to re-enlist. I got more information on the G.I. Bill for college and wrote off for catalogues from Armstrong, a junior College in Savannah and Georgia

Teacher's College, as it was called at the time, a four year located in Statesboro. When they came I poured over them without any clear idea of the degree I wanted. I felt increasingly insecure about my chance of success in college.

I had made several good friends and one of them was a "country and western" songwriter or at least he wanted to be. He could write music but had a hard time with lyrics and when I wrote them for one of his tunes, he immediately wanted me to team up with him and when discharged, we would take off for Nashville. During my enlistment, I had concocted a number of dream jobs with a lot of people. On the Ponchatoula a group of us were going to get out about the same time planned to meet, buy an old "barge sailing boat" and travel the inland waters of Great Britain and Europe writing the trip up to sell for publication. That part was to have been my job. On occasion, I still saw my friend at Berkeley and he still encouraged me to come there but my fear was that I didn't have the necessary preparation. Occasionally I would think about a Naval career in spite of it all and then put it out of my mind again. If I had been on board ship, I would have never have thought about re-enlisting.

Meanwhile, the months were passing and I had one last adventure, I went for a weekend to Las Vegas. In fact, I went twice with some friends who often went to gamble. We left by car Friday afternoon and drove well into the night and when we arrived, we toured the casinos, all of which were opened twenty-four hours a day. On Saturday morning, we would drive out a way and get an inexpensive Motel room and sleep for a few hours and then stay up well into Saturday night. We would sleep Sunday morning away and drive back to San Diego in the afternoon.

It was a hard scheduled but great fun. I had certainly never seen anything like it; the lights, free shows and when you were gambling, free drinks. "One-armed bandits" were all over the place but I had a "system" for the roulette wheel which I quickly dropped. It depended on a fifty-fifty chance and of course they didn't give you that. I would occasionally play red or black, and most often the "bandits." I would start out with the dollar ones, and they used silver dollars back in those days, and then end up with the dime and even nickel ones late Saturday night or

on Sunday before we left. And so would go fifty dollars! Part of it for my share of gas and room butt most for gambling. None-the-less it was great fun but after the second time I said no to others. I didn't want to throw any more money away.

I was trying to save some and one of my friends, the younger brother of the fellow I replaced, encouraged me in that direction. We stayed around the base and played chess, cards and occasionally went to the Enlisted men's Club for a pizza and one game of Bingo. That was cheap. This was his first tour of duty and I don't know how that happened. Just luck I guess to receive such a great duty at the beginning of your enlistment. When he was transferred a few weeks before I was discharged, I gave him my tailored dress blues. We were the same size and they fit him like a glove.

Toward the end, I met a fellow who was a Rosicrucian and always preaching about it. I had first heard the name from the manager of the theater where I worked and so I was intrigued at what he had to say. I had an interest in the mystical beliefs which was his intent t but only the "practical" teaching of telepathy and levitation. Membership was very inexpensive and I joined to receive a booklet of teaching each month through the mail. Most of it came after I was out and by that time I had lost interest. At first, I tried and tried but one course never achieved anything they said was possible. But it was an interesting addition to passing the time.

I listened to the enlistment officer who told us the benefits in about five minutes and indicated I would carry through with my discharge. All my papers were ready and I signed and got all my copies. I had decided I would fly back. That was not cheap but I wanted to. I had made my reservation and late in the evening, my friends drove me out to the airport. I had packed my duffel bag for one last time. My civvies were long gone and I wore my uniform all the time as I did for the flight. I bought them all a drink and they told me to never come back and I promised. In fact, as the plane took off, I was very sure I would not come back. When I got home, I knew it, and felt that I could successfully take on college.

I spent a very quiet and restful summer at home and hardly went anywhere. I did buy me an old Studebaker and in the fall I drove up to Statesboro and got everything set up for my acceptance. In those days, you had to have people recommend you, including a judge. I took my diploma and honorable discharged and he signed the form without even looking at me.

The college opened and I joined all the others in trying to sign up for the necessary classes and begin my training to become a history teacher with never a thought about the Navy other than the fact that it had made it possible. I had never dreamed this four years earlier.