

Anthony F. Rossi Navy Service

Anthony F. Rossi Navy Service, Correction of errors on original discharge papers.

Enlisted 3-5-45 to 7-10-46. Enlistment term was for "duration of war plus 6 months."

Clerks at Lido Beach, NY were in such a hurry to process as many navy personnel as possible, that they made errors which, I've tried to get corrected. It's almost impossible, especially after the navy storage warehouse fire in St. Louis, Mo. in 1950. W

Found my little Sampson NTS issue note book that I had marked off the dates as changes happened.

I wrote to the Navy, explained problem and all I got was a duplicate of my original paper.

Enlisted US NAVY 3-5-45

4-6-45; sworn in at Albany Recruiting Station in P.O. building, Broadway, Albany, NY.

Spent overnight at YMCA, No. Pearl St. with a gang of others. Breakfast at small diner on lower State St., next to the Albany Hardware & Iron store; then to Union Station, boarded westbound train to Syracuse, then Auburn, where we saw the forbidding, high gray walls of the state prison, and hoped that wasn't the navy base. Had us on edge until train pass by the walls and headed for the east side of the lake.

4-7-45 to 6-16-45, spent training at Sampson NTS, on Seneca Lake, NY. i.e. physical drills to get into shape, learning navy skills and lingo, being tested for qualifications for placement, doing everything from tying knots, fire fighting school, gunnery practice from rifle to 20 mm machine gun. (great), tear gas attack, with and without masks, (the pits), to mucking out septic sanitation pits. (really the pits)

6-16-45 to 6-22-45 Boot Leave; Home for fun and whatever! Met a couple of high school chums, had a few beers, had one date, with whom? Can't remember, then back to Sampson.

6-22-45 to 7-5-45 Sampson OGU (outgoing unit) was assigned at once to a large draft to Amphibious Training Base, Shoemaker, Cal. but was advised that name was scratched from list. Ament! Spent next 2 weeks in OGU: 1st week; doing construction work at war plant in Dresden-Penn Yan across the lake. (got extra pay for this) Navy furnished transportation, to and fro, by powered whale boats. Had met Ray Devlin (classmate) in OGU. He advised that the chief will ask for volunteers, so, step right out and volunteer. You'll do well. Trusting Ray, Bob Vail and I did that. The chief assigned us to driving a small weapons type truck carrying water/ice to fill the drinking crocks all day around the construction site. That's was our duty for the week. The rest of the crew was assigned to digging, tamping with power tampers, etc. all the hard manual labor. Met Ray in Gitano (Guantanamo Bay) following Jan. on an weekend stop over. He was on the light cruiser, USS Fargo, thanked him and had beers together.

2nd OGU week; drafted into a working party, loaded on to trucks and transported to the south end of the base. There we met our work equipment; wheelbarrows, ten-tine forks, rubber hip boots, and planks. The petty officer pointed to the series of large concrete tanks sunk into the ground; orders, get in and start digging. These were the sanitation evaporation septic pits for the whole base. I booted up, grabbed a fork, walked down the plank and stood on the hard, very dark brown crust. Suddenly, I heard a cracking sound, looked down and could see a thick, stinking, brown glop oozing over my feet and up my boots as I sank into the crud. Panic almost got me as I thought of drowning in that muck, but I recovered when the sinking stopped half way to my knees. The p.o. laughed! Spent 5 days in those rotting, smelly tanks, shoveling, wheeling barrows up the ramps, loading trucks, sweating in the hot June sun and fighting off the biting, big green bottle flies. We were the pariahs of the OGU unit. At the mess halls, we were the last ones in, got our food and were seated far away from anyone else. No one came anywhere near us. When we got back to the barracks, I headed for the showers, leaving shoes behind, and in I go, clothes and all, to try to get clean and de-odorized. Getting the stench out of my nose took a couple of weeks. Our egos took a bit longer to recover. Whenever my ego starts to get to big, I remember that time and it's back to earth. It was a great humility lesson.

7-5-45: Assigned: Ft. Lauderdale Fla., for radar training. Spent two days train traveling. Left Sampson on the Lehigh Valley RR, a/k/a Leaky Valley, south into Pa; changed to an east bound B & O RR (no comment) to Washington DC. Laid over for a few hours, walked about to see the sights; was whistled at by (first time in my life) some ladies who gave us the tour. We had to catch the 9 p.m. train called the Havana Special. Too bad! Onward into Virginia, the Carolinas. At one stop, maybe Florence SC, peddlars came on selling selling food, etc. I bought a bag of "boiled in the shells" peanuts. Never had them, had to try them. Got to like them, still do. One guy bought a pint of "moonshine" ergo "white lightning." We tried a sip - gov't. should use that stuff to power our fighter planes. Train had to stop early next a.m. on the top of a tall earthen causeway in the Okeefenokee Swamps. There was a cow on the tracks and wouldn't leave the safety(?) of the RR tracks. Couldn't blame the cow especially when we heard the

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roar of a "gator" in the swamp. Conductor got the cow off the tracks. The train passed and the cow came right back up on to the high tracks. She wasn't any dummy.

7-7-45 to 8-10-45 Radar training school, 5 stressed out weeks. Navy had two hotels: Fort Lauderdale Beach and Trade Winds. Surrounded them with high chain link/ barb wire fencing, had armed guard patrols due to Search and Fire Control Radar information and operating gear in the buildings. We and search radar were quartered in the Trade Winds. Classes ran 6 days a week; 1st, 3rd, 5th weeks, 8a.m. to 10 p.m. with 1/2 hour for bkrfst, lunch, supper plus 1 hour recreation in the afternoon. 2nd & 4th weeks, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., same food, & schedule. We were "advised" miss one class or flunk one daily test; shipped immediately to Shoemaker Cal. Amphibious training base. (that place again: It gave incentive to succeed) Our group started with 110-120 men; by end of 3rd week, 41 were left who upon graduation were assigned: 21 to Marine Corp for mobile radar use and protection training (learn to shoot guns) 20 of us to the fleet.

8-10 to 8-11-45 transfer/travel to Newport RI navy base, this time on the Sun Queen.

8-15-45 Japan surrendered, big party in Newport and the USA. Liberty for all except for petty officers. They had the shore patrol duty.

8-12 to 9-6-45 in receiving barracks doing working parties, i.e. pressing uniforms in tailor shop, cleaning officers club after their parties, (ladies rooms always the messiest) standing watch guarding the garbage can storage locker (seriously). Had to be on look out for desperado garbage can thieves.

9-6-45 assigned to USS Princeton, CV-37, V-3 Radar division.

9-10-45 ninety of us transferred to Fargo Bldg. Boston, Ma. for CIC trng. (supposed to be there 7-8 weeks, with liberty every night and every weekend, great food) then 10 days later, Lt. Morgan advised that eleven of us will go to Ocracoke Island, NC.

10-01-45 to 10-23-45, for advanced radar countermeasure electronic & mechanical jamming trng. and sea patrols. Ocracoke: 30 miles off the coast, below Cape Hatteras, no liberty, no recreation, food- survival type. Long train ride again to Washington D.C. No pretty girls this time. Went to Wilson, N.C. and loaded on to a small school bus built for little kids, with eleven guys from the Pocono, GC-13, a communication ship. From there it was a 125 mile ride around Pamlico Sound, past Cherry Point Marine base to Atlantic, N.C. We and a howling nor'easter arrived at the same time, 9 p.m. A half dozen of us loaded onto an open crash boat and went over 30 miles across Pamlico Sound. Balance of our crew and the Pocono crew went aboard an LCVP (a landing craft). Their drunken coxswain fell overboard out in the Sound. It was a pitch black, stormy night. Both boats circled around and finally located him because his life vest had a Carleigh light which lit when seawater soaked it. Lucky him! Finally got to the 200 man base after midnight. Base commander had grumpy cooks fix us sandwiches, then off to bed in our cold, no-heat billet huts. our seabags were lost with our blankets so we slept in our uniforms and peacoats with extra mattress pulled over us to keep warm. This lasted about a week - we were getting a bit ripe by the time our gear arrived. Big change, ugh! Welcome aboard.

Village was about 1/2 mile south of us. Ocracekans, who didn't welcome us, are supposed to be descendants of Blackbeard pirate's crew.

Stayed 3 weeks. Learned radar jamming, did sea patrols on P.T boats and subchasers, answered a few distress calls from ships that ran afoul of Diamond Shoals, a/k/a the graveyard of the Atlantic and it was always at night. Tough finding anyone in those stormy waters in pitch black night. Learned then that the navy considered us; a) non-captureable, b) no surrender. In that event, our option was either a cyanide pill or, if we refused to take the pill, our senior P.O/officer had the authority to use his .45 on us. Hell of a note! That was our second "incentive" to be successful. Glad to get back to the carrier; no one's captured one of ours- -yet.

10-23-to 11-5-45 back to Boston, finalize CIC trng.

11-6-45 to Philadelphia, Pa. USS Princeton at Philadelphia navy yard. Arrived that dark evening and walked down to dry dock 4 and got our first close up, head on view of an Essex class carrier. We couldn't believe our eyes - the size of her overwhelmed us. Went aboard to our compartment, which was one deck above the hanger deck, called the gallery deck. Not bad, but we couldn't use the "facilities" since we were in drydock and the workmen were still doing some finishing touches to the hull. We were shown the building on the dock which was a combo chow hall and "head" with showers(not to well heated). Commissioned her 11-18-45, then set sail for Norfolk and Yorktown Va. for ammo and supplies just after Thanksgiving. Week later, leaving Norfolk in early a.m. fog, pilot ran us aground off Old Point Comfort, Va. He wouldn't listen to the radar people telling him that the ship was heading for

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the beach. Back to Philly next day for 4 new props (screws) and a weekend off. Valley Forge (sister ship) was in next drydock being built. Suspect Princeton got her screws. Monday a.m. back to sea ---(The Battleship Missouri ran aground, same place, a year or so later)

11-30-45 to 5-23-46; sea duty in the Atlantic and Caribbean, with stops in Guantanamo naval base and Havana, Cuba on 2-15-46 for ten days liberty (FANTASTIC). Came into NY City for Armed Forces Day, 5-23-46 with the 7th fleet. Sailed into NY harbor, Lady Liberty sure looked great. After a week in NY, it was south to the Caribbean with a stop at Guantanamo Bay, then to Port of Spain, Trinidad, finally to Cristobal Colon, Panama. Good liberty in all three ports! Laid over 24 hours to prep the ship to go through the Gatun locks at Cristobal Colon, then on through the Panama Canal (an 8 hour tow) into the Miraflores locks into the Pacific. Liberty in Panama City, the capital, and reassemble the gun tubs and deckedge elevator. Left Panama 24 hours later at 8 a.m. About a mile off shore, Captain announced on the speakers that there would be an entire ship inspection due to the amount of animals brought aboard with a punishment detail for anyone caught with a pet. Watched from the flight deck and saw clouds of birds, lizards, monkeys, dogs, etc go over the side and head for shore. It was close enough that they made it. Then westward on out into the wide Pacific, Hawaii bound. Recalled back stateside for a special assignment. The Princeton had the "Honor of transporting Manuel Cazon's body, Pres. of the Philippines, who died in the USA during the war, Back to Manila.

Eventually, got to Long Beach Ca. for a day, where the Arkansas (battleship) was tied up across the wharf from us. The Salt Lake City (ack-ack cruiser) was directly in front of us, plus a destroyer, Norman Scott in front of the S.L.C. We could see Howard Hughes "Spruce Goose" giant seaplane floating at a dock across the cove, so we walked over to look at it. High fence stopped us at 100 yards distance. It was so big we were amazed that it flew. All that plywood with 8 piston engines! Next day, on to San Diego, Ca. where we docked at North Island where many of us got off the ship on 6-30-46. We were bused to Camp Elliot for transfer processing back to NY state. 7-1-46 boarded train with 599 others for shipping back to Lido Beach, NY for discharge. (the trip is another story; see Anthony's Rambling)

Arrived Lido Beach, NY. Spent 7-7-46 to 7-10-46 a.m. for discharge processing. That's where the youman screwed up my service record. He was in such a hurry to process as many as possible that he put me down for 3 months at Newport, RI, which means that I would have been there into Dec. 45. Can't be, since I had been to 2 other locations and was on board as part of the original commissioning crew of the USS Princeton, CV-37, on 11-18-45. I know that I'm not the only one that has loused up records. Tried to get the records corrected but all I got was a copy of my discharge sheet. That's why I'm writing this.

I got my Ruptured Duck, papers, and flew home on an American Airlines DC-3 from La Guardia Airport. Pilot took off in a southwest wind, circled around over Manhattan Island and headed north up the Hudson River Valley. Clear July 10, 1945 day.

Beautiful, scenic flight! Glad to be Home!

Now, Some Sea Stories!!

A Memorable Day at Sea

It was on the 4 - 8 a.m. radar watch in CIC (Combat Information Center) when I noticed our watch officer going from man to man talking in a low voice. Couldn't hear him with earphones on. Felt a tap on my shoulder. He motioned me to lift the earphones, then he asked: "Ever climb up high?" Not thinking, I nod yes. Next question: "Were you scared?" Again I nod yes. Next: "But you went anyhow." Again, dummy me, a little leery now, slowly nod in the affirmative. "Good" says he, "our radar tech needs a helper to carry some parts to get a problem fixed on the SP radar antenna." I knew too late, I had been 'volunteered.' Resigned to my fate, I figure that helping repair a radar antenna can't be too bad as long as your careful messing with the high voltage.

We loaded up with necessary tools (on me) and parts (him) and went down through an island passageway to a starboard hatch. He opened it and I saw that it led on to a small railed platform on the starboard side of the ship's island. Once on the platform, I looked down and saw that we were about 70 feet above the water which was going by at a spritely 20 plus knots. (23 mph to the landlubbers.) Looked up; the "island" wall loomed above. Beyond that was one of the support legs of the platform called the "crow'snest." The tech said "Lets go" and he started to climb the U shaped ladder rungs welded to the island's wall. With an "Oh well-what the hell" I climbed after him with the

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tools banging against me and the 20 knot wind trying to pull us loose. The island wall sort of sheltered us from the full effect of the wind until we got to the exposed support leg. Then, it was wide open to the base of the "nest." The "nest" had a wall about 2 feet high that we had to climb outward to get over. It's a bit hairy since half of you is hanging free after your feet leave the last rung. (safety gear-what's that) and the wind tugging to pry you off the nest. We rolled onto the floor of the nest. I looked around and saw that said "nest" was large. It must be all of 20 feet long, 10 or so feet wide and oval shaped. In the center of the "nest" was another 10 foot pole supporting the YE homing antenna. Laying there, I saw a brass plate low on the pole, which had etched on it "Distance to the Water Line: 171 feet." Imagine being up 17 stories on a 10 x 20 ft. rolling platform, completely exposed to a 20 knot wind. Scary-Yeah! On to repair the SP antenna. It was mounted on the front wall (excuse me, bulkhead) of the platform. Tech got busy opening the SP's control box. I set out the tools, then walked about. At the back of the nest, I looked down into the huge openings of the smoke stacks. An unnerving sight! If you fall in, you'll never be found unless the boilers, over 100 feet down, get cleaned. You'd be well toasted if anything was ever found of you. I backed away real fast.

Tech worked, I assisted, when we noticed that the "nest" was tilting. Looking up and about, we saw that the ship was making a sharp turn to starboard and our perch was tilting towards port over the flight deck more and more. Dropping every thing, we made a grab for the center YE post and braced our feet against the outer bulkhead. The ship leaned over so far that the nest hung out past the edge of the 100 foot wide flight deck. Quickly, the ship straighten out. We're upright again, but only for a moment, then another turn; this time to port. Tilting toward starboard this time, we're hung out 100 feet or so from the ship over water. These high speed turns were repeated several times at speeds in excess of 20 knots causing the ship to do 20 to 25 degree rolls. Maximum roll for the carrier was 33 degrees according to the inclinometer in the CIC. Finally, the ship came back to an even keel. We called CIC to make sure that no more maneuvers were in the offing, finished the antenna, then carefully inched our way down from our tilting perch back to CIC. That's when we found out that the announcement of going into high speed turns had been broadcast to "batten down all loose gear." Nobody gave it a thought that the speakers can't be heard up where we were and neglected to warn us on the sound power phone system. I was "drafted" and made that climb one more time, reluctantly, but I made sure that we stayed in constant touch with CIC. No more surprises!

Flight Deck Duty

Having learned not to volunteer, I tried to keep a low profile in CIC. But it didn't seem to work. After the crow's nest incidents, My section officer, Ensign Paling, designated myself and another seaman to do the job of "Landing Recorder" for a few weeks on the flight deck. Job was to record the landing info; seconds in approach, touch down, wire hooked, distance traveled on wire, release and time to clear deck. All this activity measured in seconds as planes were being recovered. We were equipped with field glasses, stop watch, talkers battle helmet, kapok life jackets and stationed on the catwalk behind the #4 five inch gun turret, which turned out not to be the safest place to be. (Our captain John Hoskins was on the first Princeton CVL 23, as replacement skipper went it was attacked by a Jap dive bomber who put a 1000 lb. er through the flight deck, resulting uncontrolled fire, explosions and loss of life and the ship.

It was my week to be L.R. Flight quarters sounded at 5:30 a.m. and I took my station, plugged my phone in waited for the launch procedures to start. All went well. 90 planes left with a full load of bombs, ammo & rockets. About two hours later, they started to return: most fighters first, since they were first off the deck and used the most fuel. Torpedo and dive bombers next in order with the CAP (combat air patrol) last. One of the Corsair's made a hard landing, blew a right tire and veered right, straight towards me. For a brief instance I froze, then made a dive for a hatch, only to find two gawking swabbies had gotten jammed in the hatch opening. I grabbed the deck edge, jumped feet first into the hatch, jamming the two right through the opening with me on top of them. I saw and heard the plane go by with its right wheel, wing and prop chewing up the catwalk with a loud screech of tortured, twisted metal ending with a loud crunching bang as the Corsair hit the 5 inch gun turret. Score: pilot and 3 seaman ok; Corsair crumpled nose, bent prop, bent up wing, missing wheel and tire, chewed up catwalk and railing. Gun turret, a few paint scratches on its armor plate. p.s. Two seamen chewed out for being in unauthorized space. I moved my post 400 feet back toward the stern, directly across the flight deck from the Landing Signal Officer. It seemed safer there but it had drawbacks which I'll explain later.

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(See below continue flight deck tales here; /reason for location change; hazards of flight deck duty; error firing of "Tiny Tim" rocket up the flight deck, and anything else that happened.)

A Cold, Merry, Christmas At Sea.

We had commissioned the U.S.S. Princeton, CV-37 on 11-18-45; left Philadelphia, right after Thanksgiving, for Norfolk Va. for ammo/supplies. Stayed about 4-5 days then sailed on a foggy morn and the pilot ran us aground off Old Point Comfort, Va. Imagine the peoples surprise at the hotel when they looked out after the fog lifted to see a 30,000 ton, 860 foot long carrier sitting a few hundred yards from the front door. Back to Philly by Friday for four new screws, which I suspect they 'requisitioned' from the new Valley Forge which was being built in the next dry dock. Monday A.M. we were on our way to sea, again. Christmas 1945 found us at sea in the cold, gray, stormy Atlantic Ocean.

Dec. 24th, it was operations as usual; launching, retrieving aircraft, fire drills, damage control practice, radar search and jamming operations. 24 hours, drill, drill and more drills, day into night. Our last aircraft recovery was two torpedo bombers. As it happened, I was heading to the mess hall for evening chow and stuck my head out of a hatch to watch the crews unload cargo from the bomb bays. There were mail sacks, a happy cheer went up, then several large boxes. Much 'scuttlebutt' (gossip) ran threw the watchers, but no answers. The boxes were loaded on to a cart, taken to the deck edge elevator, down and out of sight.

Next day, Christmas, and the entire crew not on watch, was assembled on the hanger deck. Captain John Hoskins made a little holiday speech then ordered the boxes to be opened. Each division was called, lined up, and each man walked passed a box, he was handed a knitted, wool sleeveless sweater, a watch cap and a Merry Christmas. When we open our presents, there was hand written note enclosed in each one from the woman who had made the sweater and cap. It seems that the Salvation Army had coordinated the efforts of all these women to make these items. There were enough for every man on our ship plus our two destroyers. I kept that note for a long time, but it was lost during one of my many moves. I've never forgotten the kindness and efforts of those ladies and the "Sally" for that Christmas. 10-01-2008

Flight Deck Duty

Captain John Hoskins, the skipper, wants detail info as to our speed of launch/recovery of aircraft. The recovery part fell to V-3 Radar. Two seamen were "volunteered" for the job. Me and one other. We had to get equipped: battle helmets, life jackets, field glasses, stop watch, clip board, pencils and paper and go pick a spot on the starboard catwalk to be able to see and record the desired info: aircraft's time in the approach leg to the ship's stern, wire # hooked on touch down, distance to stop, wire release, then speed through crash barriers to clear the deck. Dull- hardly. My shipmate took the first week and set up post in the "cat" directly behind #4 five inch gun turret. Good viewing spot - except if a plane that made a lousy landing, it usually headed for the #4 gun turret. Why? who knows? Maybe had something to do with the twisting torque from those big engines. After having to take a rapid dive through a hatch to not occupy the same space as a 7 ton hotfooting fighter, I decided to move to safer spot, the very last phone hookup on the "cats" directly across the flight deck from the Landing Signal Officer, who guides the planes in for a landing.

Panama Canal, Cristobal Colon and the Alligator

Early June 1946: about a two weeks after we had left the big Memorial Day 7th fleet celebration in New York City, we arrived at the Panama Canal. Naval orders had transferred the Princeton from the Atlantic fleet, Norfolk Va. base, to the Pacific 7th fleet San Diego, Ca. home base. Our trip from New York included three quick stops: Norfolk Va. for fuel and supplies, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, more fuel, supplies and a load of very good Cuban cigars. 3rd stop; Port of Spain, Trinidad where we laid over for a couple of days, had liberty and met some of our British allies. Fine liberty port. Toured the city; went on a beach party across the strait a/k/a Dragons Mouth" where we saw (in a Distance) the fastest moving gators called caymans. Some picnic! Then on to the Panama Canal whose port on the Caribbean Sea is Cristobal Colon. There we laid over for 24 hours while the ship is prepped to go

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through the locks. The deck-edge elevator sticks out too far and had to be folded so it wouldn't knock down the street lights alongside the locks. Our 40 millimeter gun tub shields on the hanger deck level made the ship wider than the 110 foot locks; so they had to be removed. Result: Liberty! Ashore we went "to see the elephant" as the old timers would say. We saw the sights of Colon, went to a dance, took a tour, saw where the French had tried to dig a canal. There the guide spotted what looked like a large log floating in the swampy water. He told us to watch as he threw a couple of pieces of wood at the "log." Abruptly, the "log" moved, lifted at one end to reveal one big gator. It had to be over 20 feet long. Time to leave! Told that sea gators grow that big or bigger; hard to disbelief. That huge sea gator was enough to convince. Back to Colon to a night spot to "recover" but never "saw the elephant." Did see a quasi-burlesque dance-strip show. Tried to get conned by the "B" girls to by them watered down drinks. One buddy was all set to buy until I told them "No. Niente" they left for easier saps a.s.a.p.

On our way back to the ship, we heard a lot of yelling coming up behind us. Turned and saw four swabbies running two abreast, rapidly toward us. They were holding between them, each had one leg, was a large stuffed alligator with a light bulb screwed onto the end of its nose. Running a little distance after them, yelling a mixture of stop thieves and profanities, in English/Spanish, as loud as he could, was a Panamanian gent, who, obviously, was the owner of said 'gator. Trailing behind, at a more liesurely pace, were a pair of the local police, who didn't appear to be concerned, since they've seen this sort of hi-jinks before. The four sailors with 'gator, & swearing owner raced past us, followed by the two strolling cops, around the corner, down the street and out of sight. We got into a slightly tipsy discussion as to where we had seen that particular gator before. A bit later, nearer the locks, we passed a shop and there was the profane gent, on a ladder, hanging the gator up over the sidewalk. It was part of his store sign that we had seen earlier going into town. Don't know what happened to the four prankster sailors. They couldn't bring the gator aboard ship; no one was missing at muster next a.m.; the shop owner had his gator back and the police didn't have to arrest anyone. All ended well. 12-29-2008

Panama Canal and Pacific Exit

Next a.m. it was time to get underway. The small electric railroad engines on the shores had stout towing lines tied to the bow and stern of "Swee Pea" as the Princeton was later nicknamed, after Popeye's kid. The Gatun lock gates were open and the tug engines began to tow us into the huge locks. Once inside, the high (60 foot) gates closed and the water began to fill the lock. Surprisingly, it took less time than expected to fill the lock which has to be 110 feet wide, est. 1000 ft long and 100 feet deep. When the lock was full, the gate on the west end opened and the little tug engines, who were still roped to us, towed us into the second lock. Gates closed, filling proceeded. When the lock was full, gates opened and we were towed out of the lock. It was quite a sight. We're standing on the flight deck, which is 70 feet to the waterline, looking down at Cristobal, the Caribbean and the entrance to the Canal, which is another 120+ feet below our waterline. I'm standing on a 30,000 ton ship's deck, est. 200 feet higher than the sea we came in on and it's still Amazing! Princeton was tied to a tug and we were towed through the earthen part of the Canal toward Panama. We didn't use our own power since our ship's draft was 32 feet. Canal wasn't too much deeper and the Capt. didn't want to chance having another set of screws chewed up. The trip took about 8 hours or so to get to the Miraflores locks. A nice hot, leisurely passage between low mountains covered with jungles, which are not that far away from the ship, since parts of the canal maybe 100 yards wide. Gatun Lake, which we had to go through, is big. Arrived and descended through the Miraflores Locks. We had to lay over for 24 hours to put the ship back together again. Liberty was for the port watch, but some of us on the starboard watch managed to negotiate another liberty. Panama was just as interesting as Cristobal and bigger. No "gator" but one peddler tried to sell me a genuine shrunken, native, human head for \$25. A different souvenir, but I wasn't interested. I could have had a whie man's head for \$50, but I figured that it may be mine. No thanks. Head hunters were still operating in Panama's jungles then. Day after liberty we set out to sea and many of us were on the flight deck to bid Panama farewell (just like in a Hollywood Travelogue, only no music) About a mile off shore, the Captain's voice came over the Bullhorn (loud speakers) advising that there would be an inspection of the complete ship and if any animals (pets) were found it meant a punishment detail. The ship would circle around close to shore to give the crew a chance to unload. As we watched, the air became filled with birds of all types and sizes flying towards shore. There was an assortment of other animals, monkeys, strange cats, one foot long caymans, and whatever else swimming towards land. Sailors; you never know what they'll bring aboard. After the ship's inspection, it was westward into the sunset! Hawaii—hopefully?

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A Cross Country Ramble

6/30/1946 - - the U.S.S. Princeton, CV-37, tied up to the North Island, San Diego, Cal. - - home from the Pacific. All the crew, classified as reserves, were assembled on the dock with their gear. We waved goodbye to those still aboard, loaded onto a Navy version of a bus (a truck-tractor hauling a low semi-trailer with seats installed. (Later heard that rig was declared illegal - - too dangerous) We sat, it moved, who cared. Off to Camp Elliot. 7/1/08: a.m. taken to a rail yard, loaded onto a train and away we went to Los Angeles. 3 hours later; entering outskirts of L.A., saw a sub-division consisting of trolley cars, up on blocks, that were occupied by families. Heard that's where returning GPs lived with families since there was a shortage of housing. Seems like many want to live in Cal.'s sunny clime.

Unloaded at the main L. A. station, met with another large group who joined up with us as we marched through the station to another train. Going through a long passage, met a group of sailors going in the opposite direction, who, from the look of their dress blues, were fresh out of boot camp. Stopped and chatted with them. They were heading for San Diego for ship assignment and all had enlisted for six years. Aaaah!

The gossip mill was going full tilt. Our train would be a crack express like the El Capitan or the City of Los Angeles, which could be in New York in 72 hours. Out of the tunnel into the light of a freight and there was our "crack express:" a string of WWII troop sleepers hooked to an old steam locomotive that must have seen service since WWI or earlier.

For the uninitiated, a troop sleeper is a box car that has 6-foot long bunks installed crosswise, 3 tier high. Daytime, the middle bunk hangs vertical to form a backrest to lean against while sitting on the bottom bunk. There was a toilet (head in Navy jargon) with a 10-gallon drinking water tank next to it. No water is used in the "head"- pull the lever and the trap open and dumps the contents on to the roadbed. Sign said: "Use only when train is moving."

Our cargo was 600 swabbies One officer and 1 Chief were in charge. They took over the only compartment in the only Pullman car (Circa 1920's) in the train, with a case (or two+) of beer and a bottle or two of booze, not to be seen again until New York City. And away we went!

Talk about sight seeing! Went through the Royal Gorge in daytime- absolutely magnificent. Our train was on the lone track at the bottom of the gorge, along about 50 to 100 feet above the river that had carved its way through the earth millenniums ago. Result was the sheer, rocky walls of the gorge rose straight up for hundreds of feet, showing their multi-color stratas of rock and dirt that had been laid down since the formation of the gorge. At on point, we passed under an auto bridge that spanned the gorge. The bridge seemed like it was at least 500 feet above us. It must be awe-inspiring and a bit scary to drive a car across it, especially if there's a strong wind blowing broadside to you. Continued on through the Rockies into Nevada. The loco died at Reno: had to wait for another, which gave us walking around time, change of diet and drink something else beside tepid water. Saw Reno's famous sign hung over the main street "The Biggest Little City in the World." Must be still there. Who else could or would make that boast?

Continued on through the night. Got woke up early next morning, had our usual breakfast from the troop kitchen car. All meals included fruit cocktail which sloshed over tray ridges to mix with whatever was in the next recess. Ever have fruit cocktail mixed with beef stew? Don't knock it until you've had it. The train groaned to a stop. Looked out, saw that we were on a siding and figured that we were in the way of some fast train or freighter hauling livestock. No joke, livestock had priority. We get food/drink/ they don't. Anyhow, there was a street about 100 feet away. Facing us were a dozen buildings, lined up side by side: a general store/post office combo, barbershop, and the rest were barrooms. The barrooms had the fronts and 2nd stories decorated with signs and lights and they were all lit up; each trying to out do the other. At that distance, we could hear music playing. Talk about the siren song. Never saw the train empty so fast. Everybody bee-lined for the emporium of his choice. Once comfortably ensconced on a stool with appropriate refreshment in hand, I asked the bartender how come they were open so early. We were stopped in the middle of a barren area where you could look in all directions to the horizon and see nothing but rocks, dirt and a few little scrub brush trying to survive in the dry heat, and there is no one in sight. He answered that all he knew was that with the lights on, the music playing, the dice rattling with other gambling sounds, the people show up. In a while, the locomotive whistle blew, we hot footed back to the train, boarded, and watched that stop fade into the distance, Don't know what its name was. It must have had one; they had a post office.

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7-02-46 (or there about) The troop train rattles on across wide open, flat country. Agg'in 'ole faithless' loco died in Salt Lake City. Another an hour or so to stretch and get walking around time and see nice sights from a distance. Found that beer was strictly rationed and a card was required to buy. Oh well- people were nice, food was good-then-back to the rattler. Onward, across part of Salt Lake and into the wilderness beyond. All you see land and sky stretching until they seem to meet each other in the far distance. You get the feeling that the train is standing still and the world outside is rattling past. At one point, we saw a tall mountain in the distance piercing the sky. Some one thought from their map, it must be Pike's Peak, which meant that we were some where in Colorado. Gradually, the landscape starts to change from desert to mountains. Came the early morn and our old, oily, steam engine ground to a halt on a siding on a low bridge spanning a dry, wide, stream bed next to a small town deep in the heart of a narrow valley with mountains rearing up all around us, Off we go to see where fate and a cranky ole steamer dropped us this time. Walked up the street of about a half dozen buildings to the only cross road, and saw another dozen or so buildings spread out in both directions. The sign on the main road proclaimed that we were in Grand Junction, Colorado. I couldn't believe that this was the place that had been in the news more than once in the past year for being the scene of a few major train and road disasters. Learned later that this small town was a major north-south, east-west crossroad, train route since it was a major pass through the high mountains. 600 sailors descended like the proverbial locust horde and bought up everything that was edible in the general store and local diner. When I asked one citizen about the dry stream bed, he explained that's dry only because it's summer. Comes the rains there or up in the mountains and that becomes a "rip-roarin' gullywasher." After a few hours, repairs achieved on "Ole Belcher" and off we go. Anybody get left behind as happened in a few places like in Reno and Salt lake City? Could be! Eventually, it was out of the mountains into the rolling hills, then to miles after many miles of endless plains. The sky changes from bright blue to light gray then darker gray into black. In the distance, lights are drawing nearer. The illusion of being isolated and alone quickly leaves as we pull into a railroad station, then past it onto a siding -- again. Sign on the station identified the town as Moberly, Missouri. We're parked on an overpass that crosses the main street. It's about 8 p.m. and many people are walking enjoying the cool evening on the main drag. A large number of us got off the train, went to the railing of the overpass and were calling and talking to the people on the street below, especially to the young ladies. It wasn't too long before we heard the train whistle toot the signal: "I'm Leaving, all aboard" Many of us turned and ran to the train which was beginning to move. We yelled to those still hanging over the railing and then legged it so we wouldn't be left behind. Made it aboard and looked back to see about 20-30 still there, hanging over the cement rail, calling to the ladies. They were nicely outlined in the dark by their white tee shirts and skivvies; no pants or shirts. Oh well, such are sailors on liberty! Onward to Chicago! We arrived in the morning of July 4th. So how did we celebrate our national birthday? Most people go to parades, picnics, beach or just lay back and watch the world go by over the top of a few glasses of something refreshingly cool. That was not to be our lot. The train had stopped in the middle of the massive Chicago stock yards. I don't know how big these yards are but they surrounded our train and seemed to extend forever. No matter which direction we looked, all we saw, heard and, especially, smelled were: cattle, hogs, sheep and who knows what else. There we stayed all through the hot, sticky, very ripe, smelly afternoon with no escape because railroad tracks and trains were all around us. Finally, the train moved into the station where we met our errant sailors who had dropped off at various stops, i.e. Reno, Unknown Desert Watering Hole, Salt Lake City, Grand Junction Colorado, and Moberly. They all told the same sad story to the station masters; going to be discharged after being in the Pacific, missed train with all their gear aboard, etc. Those kindly stationmasters, to help the returning "heros" would flag the next train usually, an express like the El Capitan or City of Los Angeles, furnish them some clothes and feed them, put them on the train and sent them to Chicago in a luxury style and getting there ahead of us. Old saying applied to the rest of us; "Too soon old, too late smart."

After that, the rest of the ride east into Pennsylvania was without incident. The most memorable thing was coming around the huge horseshoe curve near Altoona, Pa. It was there that I looked out the window and was startled to see our locomotive heading in the opposite direction, since the tracks make a 180 degree curve along the upper edge of a canyon wall; showing a low cliff above the train and a steep cliff below the train. The tracks had been cut into the side of a mountain to achieve a gentle grade that the 'locos' could climb. Unnerving, if heights bother you. It's quite a sight.

Arrived in New York City, underground at Penn Station. Never saw the city. Went on to Lido Beach, Long Island on the Long Island RR, were we unloaded into the processing center on July 7th early. It's pretty much a blur until

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the morning of July 10th when we received our discharge papers, money and best wishes and out the door as civilians. Who would have guessed that 4 years later, many would be called up for a "Police Action." in Korea! A "Police Action" hah! If some one is shooting at you and you have to shoot back, call it any name you want, it's still a war. P.S. Having come from a family exposed to railroading for 10+yrs. I've tried to remember the names of the 'roads.' From San Diego, Ca to Lido Beach, Long Island, NY: Remembered are: Southern Pacific, Union Pacific, Denver & Rio Grande Western (a/k/a Dangerous and Rapidly Getting Worse) Atchinson Topeka & Santa Fe, Wabash Rd, Burlington Route(?), Missouri Central, Illinois Central, Baltimore and Ohio, Pennsylvania RR, New York Central, Long Island RR