

Date: Dec 17, 1999
From: Mike Shaw

I graduated from Arcadia High School in Southern California in 1965. Tried Calpoly State College, but it did not work out. I applied to the Air Force, but was not accepted. My father had been a Merchant Marine during WWII, so I decided to join the Navy rather than risk being drafted. I spent 4 years active duty 1966-70 and 2 years in the Reserve 1970-72. I left the Navy an E5 paygrade, typical for 4 years active duty in the Navy during that time period.

I made 3 six month Westpac cruises to South East Asia and Vietnam on 2 different Navy destroyers. Destroyers were used as floating artillery platforms patrolling 1500 yards off shore or out at sea escorting a carrier group. Our 3 five inch gun mounts could shoot 12 miles inland for support of ground troops and night time harassment of the enemy. Sometimes destroyers would go up rivers to shoot a mission. We would spend 20-45 days on the gun line, then go to a port for 3-7 days for repair and liberty ashore. The big USN repair ports were in Japan and the Philippines, but we also visited other ports like Hong Kong, Bangkok, Taiwan, and Hawaii (going and coming).

My first year+ (including 1 Westpac cruise), I worked and stood watch in the Forward Fireroom (boiler room). Then, I got lucky and was allowed to become an electrician, working on ship lighting, power generators, motors. Electricians stood underway watches in the Engine Rooms between the 2 electrical switchboards, much cooler and cleaner than the steam boiler rooms (smile).

We ate 3 hot meals daily and a midnight snack, slept in bunks, usually had water for showers. Our fresh water lasted about 10-12 days out of port, then we condensed sea water to make fresh.

On the gun line, we would meet with supply ships out at sea to transfer goods via high line (ropes between ships). These were called unreps. My first cruise, we took on 1500-2000 five inch rounds (35 pound powder casing, 78 pound projectile) every 2-3 days, fuel oil every 3-4 days, stores (food) every 5-6 days. All items carried below deck by the crew while underway, 3 different unrep ships (bullets, oil, stores). By my third cruise, we would go along side one bigger supply ship for everything at the same time, using high lines and helicopters.

My first cruise, we received counter battery (enemy fire from shore) on occasion. The ship would go to General Quarters (GQ), flank speed, and turn out to sea. We would only be in enemy gun range for a few minutes. I was never on deck to see the shells hit, but it sounded like someone beating on our hull with a sledgehammer. They landed close enough sometimes to throw shrapnel on deck. My 2nd and 3rd cruises, we shot less and never received any counter battery.

At sea, everyone worked a normal 8 hour workday (Mon-Fri) plus stood an underway watch. Watches were usually 4 hours on/8 hours off, but sometimes 6 and 6. After the work day and not on watch, you ate, slept, relaxed. There was usually a nightly movie at 8pm.

In port, you usually had the duty every third day and could not go ashore that day. The normal 8 hour work day and 4/8 watches applied as well. In some overseas ports, part or all of the crew had Cinderella Liberty (return to the ship by midnight). Normally, we would hit port with a month (or 2) regular and combat zone pay with only a few days in which to spend it. We usually spent our free time ashore raising as much hell as possible in the time allowed.

When we returned from overseas, a Navy band would be playing and 300-400 relatives and friends with welcome home signs would be at the pier. I never experienced any problems wearing my monkey suit (uniform) around the USA West Coast and once was complimented by 2 grandmothers I walked past in Everett, Washington, July 4th weekend.

Mike Shaw
USS Morton (DD-948) 1966-1969
USS Turner Joy (DD-951) 1970, EM2 (E5 Electrician)