

CHAPTER XIV - USS TICONDEROGA

Officially I was still an Aviation Structural Mechanic when I received orders from the Naval Intelligence School back to regular duty. The Bureau of Naval Personnel had authorized changing my rate to Photographic Intelligenceman, but no one bothered to do the paperwork. The Intelligence School was through with my education, and gave me a diploma to prove it. The school released me to the Bureau of Naval Personnel who reassigned me to the Pacific Fleet Enlisted Personnel Distribution Office in San Diego. The distribution office, not realizing that my occupational specialty had been changed, sent me to a Utility Squadron at Brown Field, California as an Aviation Structural Mechanic. I reported to Brown field and told them that I was now a Photographic Intelligenceman. They asked me what in the world a Photographic Intelligenceman was. I told them that if they didn't know what one was it was, they probably didn't have a need for one. They agreed with me and gave permission for me to call the Enlisted Personnel Distribution Office and ask them to fix the mistake. The Assignment Yeoman I talked to at the distribution office said that there was a new Photographic Intelligenceman billet open with the Light Photo Squadron home based at NAS Miramar. He said he would send orders for me to report there the following day.

While this was happening, Lieutenant Commander Kortge, the Air Intelligence Officer for the USS Ticonderoga, was struggling with personnel issues. Mr. Kortge drove over to the enlisted personnel distribution center and informed them that he needed a senior Photographic Intelligenceman to manage his office for him. The distribution center solved Mr. Kortge's problem by assigning me to the Ticonderoga instead of the photo squadron at Miramar.

On the USS Ticonderoga, I assumed the job as head clerk in the air intelligence office. My main job was to support the air wing with maps, navigation aids, and all the modern hush-hush stuff that was needed to successfully deal with the enemies of our country. Because of the secret nature of our work, no one was allowed in my work space unless they had a Top Secret security clearance. A Second Class Yeoman named Hipaleto Otero and four non-rated enlisted men were assigned to help me assist the pilots with their research. Most of the pilots' research was done in the early part of the cruise. They all had the same needs at the same time making things pretty hectic, but everyone cooperated and we managed to get along with each other. Once this initial period was over, we only saw the pilot whenever there was an update required of their material. Once we hit this stage of the cruise, life became rather boring. Except for reading, letter writing, and chess there was little to do.

AIRMAN LYONS - CHESSMASTER

Chess was a sanity saver. No one in the office knew the game except for Airman Lyons. Lyons loved chess and had plans of becoming a professional chess player after his enlistment expired. He was determined to teach us all the game so that he could further sharpen his skills. In the beginning, Lyons was beating us all with little or no effort. After a couple of weeks, we started getting lucky every once in a while and would win a game. I felt that Lyons was probably letting us win an occasional game in order to hold our interest. All the while, Lyons continued boasting of his superior skill and knowledge of the game. Hipaleto seemed to have a natural talent for chess and was beginning give Lyons some pretty good battles. We were all getting fed up with Lyons bragging but it seemed to bother Hipalito the most. After one hard fought game, Hipalito told Lyons that before the cruise was over, he would beat him so often and so bad that Lyons would refuse to play with him anymore. It came to past just as Hipalito said.

As a matter of fact, Lyons' crushing defeat was so demoralizing that he began losing to everyone. By the end of the cruise he gave up the game entirely.

YOKOSUKA

Except for a brief stopover at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Yokosuka, Japan was our first port of call after leaving San Diego. Yokosuka naval base is about fifty miles southeast of Tokyo. The City of Yokosuka is right next to the base and had a reputation for being a good liberty town. "Liberty" is a term that sailors use for the privilege of getting off of their ship and going into town. Everyone seemed to love Yokosuka. Its main attraction was that it had an abundance of bars and nightclubs. It also had a large shopping area called "Thieves Alley" that specialized in souvenir junk that might appeal to a drunken sailor. There were attractions for the temperate sailor as well. Yokosuka also had several good restaurants, Geisha houses, public baths, theatres, and hundreds of taxi cabs to get you from one place to another in a hurry. These Taxicabs were called 80 Yen Cabs, 90 yen Cabs or 100 Yen Cabs. The 80, 90 or 100 referred to the meter rate of the taxi. The 80 Yen cab was a small compact automobile where as the 90 and 100 Yen cabs were larger and charged more accordingly.

The day before we pulled into port, Ensign Brahm, the assistant Air Intelligence officer, took it upon himself to give our office staff an extensive lecture about the evils and dangers that awaited us in Yokosuka. He emphasized that since we were all cleared for Top Secret that we were especially vulnerable, and we should be especially cautious. During his lecture, he asked us all our ages and confirmed that Hiralito and I were the only ones old enough to legally consume alcohol. The legal drinking age in Japan was 21 and the rest of our staff was either 19 or 20. At the end of the lecture, Ensign Brahm handed out printed pledges that he asked us all to sign. He wanted us to all to pledge not to drink or engage in sex while we were ashore. My entire crew lined up and signed his silly pledge. I wasn't about to go ashore and not have at least one drink, so I refused to sign. Mr. Brahm expressed disappointment over my refusal but backed down when I pointed out that his pledge requirement was illegal.

The next day I went into Yokosuka. I wandered up one street and down the other checking out the bars and nightclubs. A few of the more aggressive nightclubs stationed hawkers outside their entrance inviting passers by to come in and enjoy their hospitality. These hawkers would all but drag you in off the street. I would usually stick my head in, size up the atmosphere and move on to the next club. Every once in a while I would stay long enough to have a beer. I quickly learned to avoid clubs with names such as "Black Beauty," "Black Rose" or "Black Panther." All of the clubs that had black in their name catered exclusively to black service men. Later into the evening, I happened to stick my head in this quiet little bar and was delighted to find my entire office staff sitting there quietly enjoying their beer. I made a big mistake in joining them. Just moments after I sat myself at their table, the Navy Shore Patrol came in checking I.D. cards. They rounded up my entire crew, except for Hiralito and me and threw them into the paddy wagon, parked in front of the club. I felt panicky. I could just see Ensign Brahm charging me with something like contributing to the delinquency of a minor or dereliction of duty. One way or the other he would have my sorry ass court-martialed. In desperation, I went up to the Chief Petty Officer in charge of the paddy wagon and told him that it was my crew that he had locked up and he might as well lock me up with them. I went on to tell him about Mr. Brahm and his likely reaction when he found out I had been drinking with underage members of my office staff. The Chief told me that he would drop the charges against

my men if I would take them directly back to the ship. I accepted the Chief's kind offer. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Brahm never found out about this little incident.

CHINHAE ORPHANAGE, KOREA

During our stay at Yokosuka, Lieutenant Commander Kortge asked me if I would like to fly to Korea with him. He had managed to borrow an airplane from the Air Force Base at Atsugi, and he wanted to visit Korea to deliver a ton of love offerings to the orphanage at Chinhae. While attending War College, Lieutenant Commander Kortge had met and become friends with a Republic of Korea Navy Commander named Kim. It was at the War College that Lieutenant Commander Kortge learned that Commander Kim's father ran an orphanage in Chinhae Korea. Shortly after he was assigned to the U.S.S. Ticonderoga, Lieutenant Commander Kortge organized a charity drive benefiting the Chinhae orphanage.

Since San Diego was the U.S.S. Ticonderoga's home port, Margaret Ann and I had rented a house in near by El Cajon, and enrolled Patti in Magnolia Elementary School. At a P.T.A. meeting, we told the parents and teachers about Mr. Kortge's project. We were overwhelmed with donations of clothing and other material goods that would be welcomed by the Orphanage. One lady, who didn't have anything else to give, insisted that I accept a twenty dollar bill on behalf of the orphans.

One of the young sailors that worked for me found out about the twenty dollar bill and was forever pestering me to lend it to him. He was a real "Liberty Hound." A Liberty Hound is a person who is obsessed with having a good time off of the ship. I finally gave in and told him that I would lend him five for ten, due the following pay day. The five became ten and the ten became twenty and so on. By the time we pulled in to Yokosuka the lady's twenty dollar bill had mushroomed into over two hundred dollars. If my young sailor had of saved his first five and did all of that borrowing from his own self, all of that money could have been his.

All of that money presented another problem. Military personnel were not allowed to have "real" money outside the United States. We were required to exchange U.S. Dollars for Military Payment Certificates. While in Japan these certificates could be exchanged for Yen but not for American dollars or Korean money. Since it was impossible to give the money to the orphans, I did the next best thing. I went to the ship's store and spent it all on American candy bars. At the Orphanage, they let me give each orphan one candy bar. The rest would be distributed later by Commander Kim's father.

SUBIC BAY, PHILIPPINES

Our next port of call was Subic Bay, in the Philippines. As a happily married man, I sent most of my money to Margaret. She was trying to live on next to nothing, and I sent her most of my pay. I kept enough for a beer now and then, but my conscience wouldn't let me keep much more than that. Because of this I was dead broke and feeling restless when we pulled into Subic Bay. Just before our arrival, the Navy was alerted to a possible coup d'état. Just to be on the safe side, the Ticonderoga decided to meet it's Shore Patrol requirements exclusively with First Class Petty Officers. Each uniformed city police officer in the liberty town of Olongapo was equipped with a badge, a whistle and a Colt 45. Because of the impending coup, the Philippine army assigned a Private, armed with a sub machine gun, to patrol with each police officer. The Navy assigned a First Class Petty Officer to accompany this duo on their rounds. The Petty

Officer's main job was to protect American interest and keep our sailors out of the line of fire if the Philipinos started shooting each other. We were armed only with night sticks. The reason the Navy used senior petty officers for this assignment was because the Philipinos had a healthy respect for rank. They were trained to obey any and all orders given by a ranking senior.

Olongapo was a gaudy little town with well over a hundred night clubs. All were filled with beautiful ladies with the single objective of entertaining American sailors and relieving them of as much money as possible. As soon as sailors left the base, they were greeted by a never ending line of jeepneys offering transportation at "a special price". The jeepney is a modified remnant of the American jeep from WWII. These jeeps were modified by adding two long bench seats in the rear of the jeep and an awning to protect passengers from the sun and rain. They were sort of like a mini van except not enclosed. The jeepney was then painted in gala colors to make it stand out from the rest. Ironically, the more they tried to look different, the more they looked the same. The jeepneys acted as a bus or taxi service. Some of them worked regular routes and charged only ten centavos to ride as long as you wished, along their route. Others would take you wherever you wanted to go for a special price that was open to negotiation. The ten centavo ride was a real bargain. Ten centavos was about a cent and a half in U.S. money.

The civilian police officer, the army private and I started our patrol by walking the entire length of the main street. This was so that I could get the lay of the land. My patrol companions were eager to please me and were acting more like seasoned tour guides. than public officials. They pointed out the police station, the wholesale outlet for San Miguel beer and the public library. Just past the library, the police officer pointed to a gorgeous lady and said, "Benny Boy", without further explanation. I asked what he meant by Benny Boy and he told me to look at the Adam's apple. He said that females don't have prominent Adam's apples and that she was a he. The police officer then arrested the suspected Benny Boy. He said that we would drop him off the next time we went by police headquarters. After a couple of blocks the Benny Boy suddenly ducked down an alley and made his escape. I was half expecting the army guy to stop him with a hale of bullets, but that didn't happen. My patrol continued until curfew. At curfew we joined the other patrol teams in making sure all of the sailors made it back to the base ok. I went back to the base and turned in my watch gear.

The next day, I heard that Special Services had bought a lot of paint and was looking for volunteers to paint the outside of the Olongapo Public Library as a good will gesture. This sounded like fun, so I volunteered. There were about a dozen of us and we figured we would knock out the job in about a day. We made one slight miscalculation. News of our good will gesture had quickly spread throughout Olongapo, and jeepneys began arriving loaded with good will tributes of food and cold beer. The night club owners had decided to match our gesture with a goodwill gesture of their own. We had such a good time that we had to return the following day to finish the project.

I pulled Shore Patrol in Olongapo one other time. This time I was alone and was assigned to a regular beat that I was expected to patrol. Just about in the center of my beat was a cute little beggar girl who asked me for a cigarette every time I walked by. I only had a few left in my pack. I was worried that I would run out before I got back to the ship, so I turned her down each time. She had other thoughts on the matter, however. She thought I was turning her down because I thought she was a transvestite. The next time I came by she didn't ask for a cigarette, instead she pulled down the tube top she was wearing, exposing her breast and announced, "It's o.k. you give me a cigarette, I no Benny Boy." I gave her a cigarette. I figured

if she wanted a cigarette that bad, she had earned it. The next time I came her way, I thought I would turn the tables and ask her for a cigarette before she had a chance to ask me for one. She managed to find me one among the several packs she had hidden away. I visited Olongapo a lot over the next several months. Every time I went into town I would make it a point to either bum or give a cigarette to "I No Benny Boy." Benny and I had invented a little game that we both enjoyed.

THE CHIEF MASTER AT ARMS

After about two months into the cruise, I was told that I had to be transferred to the ships Master at Arms force for three months. They told me that the Master at Arms force consisted of the Chief Master at Arms and a security force made up of First Class Petty Officers from all over the ship. The various divisions of the ship were required to make assignments based on the number of men in their division. The Air Intelligence Office and the Photo Lab made up the OP Division. The OP division only had two First Class Petty Officers, a Photographer named Weaver and me. Weaver had already served his three months as a Master at Arms so it was up to me to fill the OP Division requirement. Mr. Kortge protested the assignment to the Executive Officer, but the XO told Mr. Kortge that the Master at Arms force was an important military obligation and we must all fulfill our obligations.

The fact that I came from one of the few spaces that was "off limits" to him really bothered the Chief Master at Arms. He just knew that there was something about me that wasn't quite kosher. It bothered him so much that he went to the Personnel Office and pulled my service record. In it he saw that I was a recent graduate of the Naval Intelligence School. That did it. That was all he needed. When he saw Intelligence School, he immediately assumed that I wasn't who I claimed to be at all. He jumped to the conclusion that I must be an officer posing as an enlisted man working on some covert mission. Adding to his confusion, the Photo Intelligenceman rating was fairly new, and I was unable to buy PT rating badges to sew on my uniforms. Since PT badges were unavailable, I was told to wear other rating badges until they became available. Just for the fun of it, I bought a mixture of several different rating badges so that I could wear a different one every day. I would be an Aviation Structural Mechanic (my old rating) one day, and the next day I would be something else. Each day I would wear a badge saying that I was something different from what I was the day before. The Chief figured only an officer would be so screwed up that he wouldn't know what rating badge he should wear. The Chief asked me several times if I wasn't really an officer and each time I told him that I wasn't. Every time I denied being an officer, he became even more convinced that I was. In about the third week of my Master at Arms assignment, I received emergency orders to leave the Ticonderoga and report to a special mapping unit that was being organized at Subic Bay in the Philippines. A Navy aerial reconnaissance squadron home based at Guam would serve as the nucleus of this hastily prepared organization.

THE VIETNAM WAR

America's involvement in the Vietnam War was beginning to escalate, and it was found that maps of Vietnam were totally inadequate. Not only were the maps inaccurate but they were also in the French and not in English. To further confuse matters, French maps use Paris as the prime meridian whereas American maps use Greenwich England as the prime meridian. The difference in prime meridians made it all but impossible to transfer points plotted on a French map on to an American map. Complicating the problem even further, the French measure

latitude from 0 to 100 degrees as opposed to the English 0 to 90 degrees, and the French circle is defined as 400 degrees unlike the English 360 degrees.

Good accurate maps are necessary if you are going to fight a war. Our special unit was tasked to provide our mapmakers with high quality aerial photography so that they could make these maps. After we finished our part in mapping Vietnam, everyone was ordered back to their original units. My mysterious departure from and return to the Ticonderoga cinched it for the Chief Master at Arms. He was now totally convinced that I was an officer on a covert mission.

USS MIDWAY SCARE

As the Ticonderoga sailed from the Philippines to Yokosuka, our final port of call before setting sail for San Diego, I was told that the Ticonderoga would be relieved by the U.S.S. Midway. I was given a list of classified documents to package up for transfer from our custody to theirs. What really through me for a loop was the fact that the Midway didn't have a senior Photographic Intelligenceman and the powers to be had decided to have me transferred to the Midway along with the classified material. I went ballistic. I told them that I had been denied reenlistment leave, when I shipped over almost a year earlier, because of operational necessity. According to Naval Regulations, I was entitled to 30 days of reenlistment leave as soon as the Ticonderoga docked in San Diego and I intended to take that leave. They could transfer me to the Midway if they wanted but it would have to be at least 30 days after the Ticonderoga returned to San Diego. The final word on this issue was that the U.S.S. Midway couldn't wait that long for a senior Photographic Intelligenceman. One would have to be found some where else.

For the moment, I was still upset and insecure over my billet on the Ticonderoga. Because of this insecurity, I decided to request a brother to brother transfer. My younger brother, Luther, was assigned to Light Photographic Squadron Sixty three at the Naval Air Station Miramar. This squadron was the west coast masters of the work I was trained to do. The Navy encourages brother serving with brother requests and it was rare that such a request was ever denied. When I submitted my request, I was asked why my brother didn't request a transfer to the Ticonderoga instead of my asking for his squadron. The only answer I could think of was that my brother wasn't stupid.

Luther was far from stupid. In fact, he had accomplished almost everything that I had in the Navy except he had done it faster and had made fewer mistakes. He was an Aviation Structural Mechanic First Class living at Miramar with a beautiful wife and two kids. Shortly after the Ticonderoga returned to its home port in San Diego I was transferred to Light Photographic Squadron 63.