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## **Gunnery Practice, Subic Bay, ca 1957**

By Robert Humphrey

I was the telephone talker on Mount 28, a 20 mm on the starboard side aft, just under the aft 5 inch, Mount 52.



*20mm with Mk 14 computing gun sight*

If you were aboard at the time you may recall some AA and surface gunnery practice took place while we were in Subic Bay. In any event things were going on very well on the AA portion. They towed a large orange sleeve across our stern behind a C-47. I don't know what our gunner was thinking of or looking at but you could see the tracers falling off well behind the target. I don't know if the sights were wrong or what. In any event I began to bang on his shoulder yelling, “Lead it, lead it.” Finally he caught up with and passed along the sleeve making a number of hits. Then a little too far forward and one round exploded in the opening of the sleeve and broke the tether. They were really pissed because they had to reel in about 1000 feet of cable and rig another sleeve. In the course of our second round of firing we had a miss-fire. One round was stuck in the chamber. The gunners mate put on some heavy gloves to catch the now very hot round, and opened the bag used to catch the empty cases. One of the other guys pushed a ram rod down the barrel and shoved the round out of the chamber.

The gunners mate missed it when it came through the open bag and it fell into the empty casings on the deck. Of course this was a high explosive round. Everyone bailed over the side of the gun tube to get away from the impending explosion. I tried but my phone cord was too short and I was stuck.



I saw the live round rolling around on the deck and grabbed it and threw it over the side. It exploded when it hit the water.

Good stuff.



*Twin 40mm rapid fire anti-aircraft*

Of course all this time the 40mm were also shooting and it got rather noisy on the open deck.

Late in the morning it was time for the 5 inchers to have their fun. Figuring it was now REALLY going to get noisy, I called the gunner officer, Mr. Whipple, and asked permission to secure the phones and take shelter under the overhang of the boat deck. He must have been having a bad hair day as he said, “Stay the hell where you are.” The rest of the crew ran forward and took shelter. I hunkered down against the bulkhead and made myself as small as possible and clamped the sound powered phone against my ears as hard as I

could. I could look up and see the end of the barrel from Mount 52 about 20 feet above my head. I sat through about 30 rounds as they banged away at the passing sleeve. Each time 52 went off I felt a “whole body” flash of pain from the concussion. Not to mention all of the burnt cork and crud they used to seal up the mouth of the cartridge cases, and the smoke and flame from the powder. When 52 was done, we were through for the day.



*5-inch 38-caliber single mount*

The next day, the 5 inchers were setting up for practice at a towed sled for surface fire. All of the empty cases from the previous day had been policed up, put back in their respective metal cans and stacked on the boat deck near 52 and just over our 20mm mount. There was a large stack of the square cans for the 40mm, lots of cans from the 20mm and a large pile of the steel tubes used to contain the 5 inch cartridge cases. The pile was about 5 feet tall and perhaps 20 feet square, a lot of scrap metal. I started thinking about this 5 inch now only about 8 feet over my head and not wanting to go through all that pain again, I called Mr. Whipple and requested permission to take cover. He said, “Okay, go ahead.” I unplugged the sound powered phones so the noise would not go through the system, took a couple of extra life jackets and stacked them on top of the phones I had unharnessed from and ran forward to be under cover.

The concussion from the first round of Mount 52 blew the whole stack of cans off the boat deck and buried our mount. It was covered and not

really visible. The gun sight on the gun was crushed and the tub has sustained some damage as well. It took 20 minutes to dig out enough crap to find my phones under the life jackets. While I was looking at the pile of scrap, Mr. Whipple came walking down the deck. He looked at the damage, looked at me, just shook his head and walked away. I am glad he did not have another “bad hair day.”

I also recall there was a problem with one of the 5 inchers. We were firing at a large towed sled. It was about 2000 yards out. One of the 5 inchers fired and there was no splash from the round. They fired again, same result. The gunner officer came back to the mount and determined that the gunners mate had dialed in an extra zero in the range setting. It was actually firing at some 20,000 yards out. I don't know how far out the gunnery range extended, but I bet they were looking at who might have been out there. The projectiles were landing over the horizon.

On our trip to Kaohsiung Formosa we had entered the harbor, which apparently was very shallow, as we were stirring up a lot of mud. We tied up to the dock, I think sometime in the morning. A swarm of little boats came around, all of the people in the boats begging for what ever we might be willing to give them. They had long handled nets and were reaching up while they begged. One of the men in a little sampan looking boat had a net on the end of a bamboo pole perhaps 20 feet long. He was very loud and very insistent.

One of the things they really wanted was brass, in any shape or form. Apparently it was very useful in their society. Opposite where he was located was the practice machine for the 5 inch guns. It was used to help build up the speed of firing of the 5 inchers. They had a dummy cartridge case and a solid brass projectile that weighed about 50 pounds. One of the guys, I do not recall who, went to the machine and picked up the dummy projectile and took it to the rail and showed it to the guy in the boat. He was jumping up and down in anticipation of getting it. The sailor laid the projectile on the deck and rolled it through a scupper. It fell about 20 feet before encountering the boatman's net. The next thing I saw, the boat

was empty and rocking in the water. The man in the boat was gone and so was his net. Inertia is a wondrous thing. A minute later the guy came to the surface screaming and shaking his fist at us.

Not only did he not get the brass, he lost his net. It is kind of sad in retrospect, but funny as hell at the time.

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## Stay on the good side of the corpsmen and the cooks

By Robert Humphrey

There was a guy aboard I'll call Smitty. Smitty was a little guy and very likeable. However, Smitty had a problem with "mouth in motion before brain is in gear". I recall our first deployment from San Diego we had to detour past Hawaii and they sent a boat out to transport Smitty to the hospital in Pearl to repair a broken jaw. I don't know what he said, or to who but it had repercussions.

Then one afternoon while we were at sea, I was walking through one of the compartments on the way to the mess hall. I came across Smitty and a very large individual who grabbed Smitty by the shirt front and slammed him back against a bulkhead. Then, straight arm, slid Smitty up the bulkhead until they were eye to eye. He said, "You little f---, you are going to come up missing some dark night" and dropped him back on the deck.

Several months later I had head cleaning duty and I was scrubbing and polishing when I heard this commotion on the deck above. I could hear someone running and they heard them come down the ladder just outside the hatch. Smitty came slamming through the hatch and shut the hatch and dogged it down. Some one else came running right behind him and with Smitty hanging on the the handle on the dog on the inside was trying to open it from the outside. I could hear this hysterical screaming and cursing on the other side of the hatch. A minute or two later I could hear a scuffle on the outside of the hatch and the person on the other side was apparently carted away. I then noticed that Smitty was in terrible shape. His dungaree shirt was ripped, he was scuffed and bleeding in several places.

It seems that one of the guys in 2nd Div. got on

the wrong side of one of the Petty Officers and was given a task. He was handed a chipping hammer and told to chip and repaint the deck on the fantail. That is a lot of deck. So, here he sits in the blazing sun, in a puddle of sweat, chipping away at what must have seemed like acres of gray paint. Enter stage left, Smitty. In all innocence Smitty walks up the the sweating, laboring sailor and said, "That would go a lot faster if you used an electric chipping hammer." The guy snapped and managed to get Smitty a couple of swipes with the chipping hammer before Smitty could get away and run for it. I think the guy did like a three-month stint in the brig for his actions.



Then, it came time for polio shots. Of course we all lined up on deck outside of sick bay and got our shots. I got there a little early and got my shots and then sat around to BS with one of the corpsmen that I knew. I noted that the 2nd Class corpsman kept getting up from his desk and would periodically walk to the hatch and look down the line at the people waiting for shots. He did this several times. Finally he looked on one occasion and came back in. He walked to the tray of needles, picked one out and walked to the scuttlebutt. He soundly tapped the point of the needle on the stainless steel top of the scuttlebutt and then took it to the autoclave. He put it in, steamed it thoroughly then took in back and placed in in the tray, separate from the others. Of course now he has my interest and I stayed around to see that would happen next. Yep, Smitty stepped into sickbay. The 2nd Class stood up and said, "I'll do this one." He selected his carefully prepared and sterilized needle from the tray and placed in on the syringe. I swear from 10 feet away I could hear the pop when the needle went into Smitty's bicep. With no small amount of



effort the dosage in the syringe was delivered and the needle extracted, along with a fair size piece of Smitty's arm. Smitty practically went to his knees.

As Smitty walked out of sick bay, the 2nd Class said, "See you next time." Smitty staggered out.

The Corpsman took the "modified" needle and flipped it over the rail. I don't know what Smitty said or did but it must have been interesting.

I learned early on, there are two people aboard ship that you stay on the good side of; the corpsmen and the cooks.

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## Heavy Weather, Heavy Damage

By Robert Humphrey

I am a little fuzzy on the time line, but I believe it was on our last trip back from Japan in Feb 59.

I do recall that we were in a following sea and the swells were tall enough you had to look up to see the tops when standing on the fantail. In any event, I was in the after mess hall, I am pretty sure it was lunch. I was sitting at one of those large metal folding tables, sort of hunched over my food, wrapping it with my arms to keep in front of me while the ship rocked back and forth.

I finished eating and stood up and picked up my mess tray. I caught a sense of motion out of the corner of my eye and looked to my left in time to see one of the large metal cabinets holding film reels and projectors, break away from the bulkhead and fall. It landed lengthwise on the table I just stepped away from. Another man had been sitting across from me, I had seen him around but did not know his name. He also saw the cabinet falling and tried to get up. Too late. The cabinet hit the folding table and the whole mess did not slow even a trifle until it hit the deck. The impact of cabinet and table, I was told, broke both of the guy's legs, above and below the knees. One more bite of food or swallow of coffee and I would have been right there with him.



*Stokes Litter*

Now we are both on the deck sliding around in food, spilled coffee and assorted other liquids. The kid is screaming in pain as he is sliding around. A couple of other sailors came over and we held him still as best we could while we waited for the corpsmen.

They arrived shortly after and then we had to get him up to sick bay. We managed to get him in a Stokes Litter and tie him down. The litter was too long to make the turns to carry him up so a line was dropped down the ladder well and he and the Stokes were pulled vertically up the ladder well. Men were stationed at several levels to keep him from banging back and forth as the ship rolled. I have no recall of what happened to him but it must have been a miserable trip as we were more than a week and a half out of San Diego.

I also recall one of the machinists came into a compartment in that same frame. There was a hatch in the deck that covered a metal stores area. He had come around to make sure that things were secure. He undogged the hatch cover and opened it, locking it in the open position.

As he started to step over the coaming, a large billet of brass came sliding out of the storage rack, slid across the ladder leading down inside that stores area and banged against the bulkhead on the other side of the ladder.

The machinist looked down as the ship rolled back and the billet slid back into the rack. He stood there looking down for several seconds, then said, "Looks good to me." He unlocked the cover, closed it and dogged it shut again. No fool there.....

Another time, again not sure of the time frame, we were on our way from Sasebo to Kobe, maybe

Yokosuka. In any event, we were headed north and a typhoon was headed south. My friend Billie Caldwell and I had mid-watch. It was about 3 or 4 am, the wind was blowing about 90 knots and the raindrops felt like small stones hitting you. We were up on the signal bridge standing behind the coaming. We found that there was a space about 8 inches high at the top of the coaming where the wind carried the rain up before it started going sideways again. If we hunkered down we could look over the edge of the coaming without getting the rain in our faces.

I really don't know what they expected us to see in that storm, as it was as black as the inside of a

cow. Doc was climbing the swells and then sliding down the swell and then up again. We were looking around as best we could and talking. Doc started climbing up, and up, and up. I looked at Billie and he looked at me and we both said, "Oh shit", and grabbed onto the coaming edge. The swell swept out from under the bow and Doc dropped into the next trough. The impact was huge and there was green water all the way to the bridge. We could hear things falling all over the ship. I was told that several guys in First Div. went out the ends of their bunks and there were some broken bones as a result. Not a good night, there were guys aboard with 20 plus years at sea and they were getting sick.