

MY NAVY STORY

by Mike Abbott

Editor's note: Shipmates have great stories to tell and have led very interesting careers. We've seen this time and time again with the book STARBUSTER being the best example. Tell us your Navy story. In the meantime, Association President Mike Abbott tells us his:

After lettering in baseball, soccer, and basketball my senior year in high school, and already having an induction date for the Navy, friends and I mostly chilled during the summer of '64.

We arrived, on the morning of 3 Sept. '64, my youngest brother's 3rd birthday, at the Induction Center in Phila., only to be told that we were too early and to go get some breakfast. Returning from White Castle an hour or so later, we were again told that we were too early and to grab some buckets and swabs and clean the heads! Should have gotten the hint then... We finally took the oath at 14:03 - there was a clock right in front of us.

After boot camp in Great Lakes, we were to return there from boot leave to start FT"A" School. We had barely gotten started when we broke again for Christmas leave which put me deep in the hole on leave, taking another nine months to get even.

FT"A" School was in two phases, with only 6-year obligors going to the second phase. Previously, the entire school was conducted at the same location, but we were the first class where the second phase went to either Bainbridge or Mare Island, depending on where our "C" School was to be. Since I was going to Dam Neck, VA for my "C" School, I went to Bain-bridge. This was also the home of

the Naval Academy Prep School, Waves Boot Camp, and Nuclear Power School. We marched everywhere; to school, to chow, and back to the barracks.

After school in Dam Neck, I got orders to Belknap, but had to bunk on USS Sierra (AD-18) while awaiting her return from Gitmo. I assisted in an effort to re-gun USS Bache (DD-470) that had just come back from the gun line in Vietnam. No luck. They had fired so much that



the barrel had "welded" itself in the breechblock and couldn't be removed. Don't know what the end result was.

After reporting aboard Belknap, I was immediately assigned to "permanent" shore patrol on Granby St. in Norfolk! Permanent meant 18 days, but it was enough! The bright side of reporting aboard was that I was already FTM3 because of extensive schooling, and the CO's policy was that technicians didn't go mess cooking...

Served for six years and 22 days on my first tour, including cruises to Northern Europe, several to the Med and twice to Vietnam, making FTM1 before leaving for shore duty in Dam Neck as an instructor. I made FTMC during that tour. Taught several different classes while there, including Terrier System and Combat System classes. Some of these included Italian Naval officers who also had the Terrier Guided Missile System on a couple of ships. It was during that time in Dam Neck that the disaster at sea occurred between

Belknap and Kennedy.

When it was time for me to return to sea duty, no decision had yet been made about the future of Belknap, so I received orders to USS Biddle (CG-34). When I had served aboard Biddle for two years, I was eligible to "cross-deck" to another ship to complete my sea tour. Luckily, Belknap was in the very early stages of reconstruction, so I requested, and received orders to Philadelphia Naval Shipyard as part of her future crew. For eight months, I was 50% of the crew, the other half being MMCS John Agnew. John was responsible for all engineering spaces and other spaces below the main deck not covered by me. I had all weapons spaces and the superstructure, which was still non-existent at the time. While in Phila., I made FTCS.

It was a great time seeing Belknap come back to life! And, a proud day when she was re-commissioned. After completing refresher training in Gitmo and other evolutions, my sea tour was running down, but I wanted to make one last cruise, the upcoming Med cruise in '81-'82. In order to do this, I had to contact the Bureau for permission so that I could extend to complete the cruise. My detailer told me that it would work perfectly because they were eyeing me for a Detailer position and the timing was good. That did not sound like a good thing to me, but I wanted to sail with Belknap so I went through with the extension.

The day we returned from the cruise, I again called my detailer. My question: "In the event that I was selected for Master Chief, would I still be coming to DC"? His response, "Well there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is that you made Master Chief. The bad news is you're still coming to DC".

I have to say that the Detailer tour was very rewarding. Starting out as only the FTM Detailer, within a few months, I had taken over the office for all FT/GM/GMT personnel in the surface navy. During my tour, we were able to up the 6-year reenlistment bonus for FTs to \$36,000, increase first term reenlistments from 22% to over 60%, and provide a training pipeline for senior petty officers who would have previously never had a chance for retraining. In addition, I served as detailer at the only time up to then where women were allowed into the field. That period was rough because women were not then allowed to serve on warships, so that the only place we could put them after training was in a shore billet, taking it way from guys who were coming off a six-year sea tour. That experiment was discontinued for some time after that, and I am not sure when it was restarted. When my tour was up, I would have to make the decision about going back to sea as a Master Chief or retiring. The choice was easy. On Belknap, I left as the Senior Enlisted. If I returned to sea, I might go to a carrier and be 50th on the list, or be a Senior Enlisted on some other command. I even had two shore commands offer to create a billet behind a desk that would be labeled as sea-duty. I declined, as that was not a real choice since I had been sending guys back to sea after three years ashore and it was rightly my time to go too. So, on 30 June, 1985, I transferred to the Fleet Reserve only five days after my 39th birthday and the day before the whole surface rating was changed to FC. In total, I served 10 years in Belknap, more than anyone else in history. While aboard, I was promoted to FTM2, FTM1, FTCS, and FTICM.