

# The Hard Core 100

## Terry Cribb Gunners Mate Striker

Forward by R. Gilhooly: After the collision the Belknap was towed to Naples. Some crewmembers volunteered to remain with the ship during the tow and perform any necessary work that was needed to keep the Belknap afloat and improve her condition. These volunteers were to become known as the Hard Core 100. Here is the story as told by one of those 100, Terry Cribb.

I am sending this remembrance from my time as a member of the hard core 100.

A word or two might be appropriate here. During the effort to get the men off who were injured or hadn't gotten a full uniform to take them to safety, I had managed to get my shoes, but no shirt. I would have to leave the ship if I had no shirt, but a crewman that had no shoes gave me his shirt, and I remember the name over the pocket was "SIX", He was taken off the damaged vessel. Then I found a pair of glasses that were only about a hundred points off my 20/800 lenses and they let me manage to stay aboard. My wallet showed up later, but it was minus the two-hundred fifty dollars I was going to send my wife.

After we got to Augusta Bay, I reached under the oily, jet fuel smelling water in the passageway where I exited and found my own glasses, thank goodness! Yet, the very day I found them, I witnessed the injury to a man on the ocean-going tug just ahead of us. The day was overcast and cool. We were all on deck to secure the lines and to do the other things that accompanied the job of moving from moorage to the open sea. The tug's crew were pulling our anchor chain onto their ship and as they pulled, a crewman was working over the line. There was a sudden slack slip and then catching on the line that caused that line to virtually twang under the sailor. He was thrown up into the air level with the deck above him and when he came down, he didn't move anymore. I don't know if he was alive or dead, but it shook me to the core to actually see that happen. Well, they called a medic to the man and soon had him inside and another sailor finished up the job.

After we were secured to the other vessel our work began in earnest. When we weren't working with pry bars and hammers on the melted aluminum of the helicopter hangar (others worked with torches to cut away the melted, twisted and curled steel and pushing the scrap over the side) we were sleeping in usually wet bunks or rooms that still smelled of jet fuel and smoke. I used my lifejacket as a pillow most of the time and seldom did I sleep in the same bunk twice as we would move to another part of the ship. It seemed that it was a kind of nightmare and that all there was, was short sleep, cold rations and long hours of work.

We started working from the opposite ends with half the crew on each working toward midships. One day, I can't remember when, but it seemed we were at the docks, we were throwing things over the side and came across a lot of oxygen breathing apparatuses. We began tossing them over and when one of the officers saw what we

were throwing, he nearly went into apoplexy. He called for us to not throw them in the water as they may explode when the seawater found the chemicals inside. We had to wait as he looked up the proper way to dispose of them in our situation before he told us to puncture the canisters, before we threw them over the side. "Now," I thought, "wouldn't that introduce the water to the chemicals faster?" But then I concluded, there wouldn't be a confined place to cause the explosion, just a slower explosion or escape of gases. Science was one of my favorite subjects in school.

One day, as we were surveying the next part that we were to clear, we heard the rotors of a helicopter and they flew around us at about a thousand yards. I learned they were taking photos of the wrecked ship for the news and for posterity. I later saw some of those photos and I could remember the scene and my approximate location among the men on board. Another time, we were cutting a very long and wide piece of aluminum and as I was holding the pry bar we were using, it slipped and of course it had to fall on my great toe on the left foot. I still have a deformed toenail that grows thicker and thicker until I get a Dremmel tool and a certain stone to sand it down.

I didn't seem to mind the hard work, as I recall the time among those hundred men as we worked, we talked and learned more about each other. I really learned more about myself as I heard them tell why they volunteered and though I can't seem to remember names, I still recall the faces. By the time we were tied to the dock in Naples, we had cleared the vessel of nearly everything that could cause a problem as they towed her to the states. The work was hard to be sure, but when you are among people that are also decent and sharing the workload I find that hard work is not as bad as it could be. Actually, since I was raised as a farmer and we all know how hard that job is, I can't really say the the title "Hard Core Hundred" was a fitting name. However if you weren't raised that way, it had to have been in the same vein as a nightmare and the hardships we endured were probably viewed as the worst conditions men could work in. I was, however, very happy to reach harbor and eat a hot meal again (okay I tried very hard to stuff myself to the extreme). I think it took me several days to feel comfortable in the stomach. It felt good also to be knowing there would not be any need for a crew to stay aboard as the Belknap was towed to the US. But, make no mistake, I still think the smells of Naples are nearly equal to an open cesspool, but that is just my opinion.

I hope it helps people understand and maybe shed a little more light on a story that one man cannot hope to cover completely.

Terry L. Cribb