

Eric Maurice Johnson ETN-3 USS Bordelon

I served onboard the USS Bordelon, from 1973-1977. I remember the Mediterranean cruise pretty well. GOD was there for all of us. I remember someone asking the question, " are there any nuclear weapons on the ship. Nobody was sure. Word had it that sailors doing their job flooded the 54 inch magazine locker. I remember the sea calmed down and it started to rain. I believe the Commadore was on the USS Ricketts, however that was a take charge ship and we USS Bordelon soon followed. General quarters, general quarters, this is not a drill, all hands man your battle station. The alarms, the bell and man did we go. No practice all instincts. After yokes had been set for a while, word came through as to what had happen. My GQ station was in radio 2 across from radio central for I was an ET. Eventually I heard a hatch open and I also opened my door. LORD help us, the ships looked like they were stuck together and on fire, then they separated, the USS Kennedy moving off to the right. The Belknap was just a burning on exploding. Boom, boom one after another. I can't help remember thinking that with all these explosions why didn't it sink. All I could was say thank you LORD. Ricketts was Johnny on the spot moving in to fight the fire and so were we along with other ships. Our firefighting teams fired up Big Bertha (Huge Diesel Pump). I heard that it split the hose and they had to change it. We got real close to Belknap to fight the fire. We were so close I could see khaki shirts holding on to the hoses fighting the fire, and think it was the captain as well as any other officer. There was no where else to go. It was the same back aft. Both ends fighting the raging fire in the middle. We maneuvered to the other side of the ship. Nobody slept that night. All sort of reports and rumors were coming and going. The next day we towed the Belknap to an Italian port. One person was not accounted for and they found he where he was doing work on some of his equipment. We all shared our experiences the next day in the ET shop where we worked. Our LPO was a 1st Class P.O. of the ECM rate, his name escapes me now. He was on watch in the forward ECM room in CIC. I mean plenty of equipment including a Reel-to-Reel tape recorder. He immediately started to tape all the traffic coming over the speakers. He said these words "RIGHT FULL RUDDER, RIGHT FULL RUDDER, TURN, TURN,...TOO LATE. Another amazing incident happened when towing the Belknap, a damn Russian ship flanked us along side and was gaulking at us, a little more than the distance of refueling when all of a sudden another ship, I'm thinking Ricketts came out of nowhere like John Wayne right between our ship and the Russian ship. Man, that's what I'm talking about. We all thought that was very, very righteous.