

Ed:

You may recall, Ed, how skinny I was "back in the day." Still only 130 pounds when I got married in 1967. Keep it in mind.

OK, time for a sea story. Ed, you know the difference between a fairy tale and a sea story, of course: A fairy tale begins, "once upon a time." A sea story begins, "This is no shit."

This is no shit. Really. When I got out to Johnston, I was a real jerk. I don't know why, maybe it was escaping from Groton and that phony part of the Guard. Maybe it was the Academy Appointment (turned down, the only real regret of my life, although I would never have made it) Maybe it was the top grades in "B" school. I was just full of myself. And---I had no idea that being on a watch billet doesn't make you a part of the crew. It just gives you something to do. And being on a watch billet is "free," but, of course, you have to *earn* your place in the crew. I just didn't have a clue.

Naturally, I was ostracized after the first week or so. It finally got so bad that the only guy who would talk to me was the Jewish FN, who was later hanged out to dry (railroaded) for the loss of the runabout in the now-legendary fiasco of the women on the island---the night of my 30-hour watch/alibi.

The FN told me that *he* didn't stand a chance of joining the crew, but said that *I* did have a chance---if I could just start over from scratch on Johnston. "Right," I said, "fat chance of that." He thought a minute, then said, "You know, you could pull it off if you could maybe disappear for a while---No, I'm serious!--just disappear for a while, then quietly rejoin the crew without giving the impression that you're God's gift to the Guard---you know, without being such an asshole. Think about it. It's the only chance you've got."

Well, I thought about it. Then, I began showing up early for watches. While the watchstander was checking the Loran A equipment at the end of his watch, I'd sign on to the Loran C log, then circle around to catch the Loran A chart recorders while he was returning to the Loran C timer room. At some point I'd holler out that I had the watch, or that I was getting water for coffee---just so he'd know I was on deck. On a few occasions, we'd run into each other---briefly. I ate late and alone on the mess deck, or I grabbed a sandwich in the galley, sometimes coming in the back door. I showed up at the last minute for quarters, then left. I volunteered for watches that kept me out of sight as much as possible. Off duty, I wandered the limits of the island. Of course, I ran into members of the crew on a daily basis, but I moved on as soon as possible, keeping the encounters friendly but brief. The ostracism made this all very easy. I don't think anyone but the FN was really aware that I was deliberately withdrawing myself. For some of them, I'm sure that it was just fine, at the time.

Now, on the long watches at night (I occasionally took watches for the mid or 4-8 watchstanders and became very experienced dealing with the nighttime quirks of the system---you'll recall how that was, Ed). I also began writing notes, observations, jokes, to post for when the dayworkers came in in the mornings.

One night, I found posted the "plan" for an upcoming District inspection. It had been prepared by Charlie Branch, the Chief ET. Everyone had a place to be---stockroom, Loran A equipment rooms, Loran C timer room, Transmitter building---etc. Because I had become the "little man who wasn't there," it was noted by Chief Branch that I would be assigned---not to an electronic space---but to the crumbling, moldy WWII concrete seaplane ramp (see sand island photos)

It both pissed me off and cracked me up. The possibilities met the standard military requirement for an expression of the ludicrous. So I wrote a short piece---like an after-the-fact inspection report---noting the travels of the inspection party from one "station" to another, but, as the inspection party came aboard and made their way between the engineering building and the barracks, they became somewhat puzzled by a skinny, but sharp young swab in dress whites, standing picturesquely near the seaplane ramp. Finally, the piece noted that CCGD14 (Admiral whoever) couldn't stand it any

longer and approached the young sailor, who promptly (and smartly) snapped to attention, highballed the Admiral and squeaked out at the top of his lungs, "Seaplane Ramp, ready for inspection, Sir."

You had to be there---to read the piece, that is---it never actually happened (I wish it had, of course). In fact, the result was that many of the ET's had a good laugh at the prospect of such a disaster (and at the expense of Chief Branch), and, as things predictably turned out, I did not have to stand picturesquely at the sea plane ramp during the inspection.

Not long after this minor victory, I completed a poem I'd been working on---and which I have attached as an image of an original teletype copy, returned to me two years ago by my Navy pal Dick Miller (DD728 USS Mansfield: the handwritten note at the top was to him, in early 1963). I've not had a copy since I left Johnston, so it was nice to see that it had not been permanently lost. The Chief ET in the poem, of course, was based on Branch, as I felt I still owed him for the "seaplane ramp assignment." For the subject of the poem, it was entirely based upon the last line of the poem---which was the first written. There was only one guy I'd met in the Guard up to that time who, as it seemed to me, had just the kind of attitude to utter such a line under such circumstances.

Of course, I would never wish such a fate on that pers on, or even imagine that he could be so screwed up as to deserve such a fate---still, the last line just seemed to fit one guy, a no-nonsense southern gent whom I'd known for only a short time---Ed Stewart.

I posted the poem for all to read one night, and the next night, I found scrawled on the blackboard in the Timer Building "classroom,"

"HILL---NO MORE SLEEPING IN THE CHALK TRAY."

I damn near busted out crying, Ed. I was part of the crew.

---Charlie