



# Fist of the Fleet Association

a non profit 501 (c) (19) military organization

## NEWSLETTER

July 2012

Preserving the Past Providing for Today  
Promoting the Future

### SUMMER EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

The Fist is finally home! A few days off and then it's back to work training on and transitioning to the Super Hornet. And after that it's back to sea; which after all is where sailors belong. But for a few days anyway they can rest and tell the stories of their latest line period. We all carry stories from our times in the Navy, but it seems that those born on the oceans are the ones worth remembering, and the ones that have the greatest impact. During the '76 cruise, and I believe before we reached Subic Bay, Ranger (CV-61) came to a stop. I had just finished some task down aft and was coming on to the hanger deck when I noticed the commotion at Hanger Bay 4. The side crane was lifting a ship out of the water. I think it had two tan masts and deck with possibly a white deckhouse of some sort but what struck me the most and what I chiefly remember was the bright blue color of the hull. But she was a wreck. I have no idea how long it had been in the water, nor what was keeping it afloat. Also I don't think any one was aboard. After a short while the crane let go of her and she slipped back in to the sea to finally find a harbor with those who dwell beneath the waves. I was bothered and wondered about it for a while. Was it a fishing vessel that was caught up in a storm and did the crew abandon it to be rescued? Did it slip its moorings and just drift out of sight to be pounded to pieces by the waves? Or worse, was it a refugee ship out of Vietnam full of families escaping the communists? And then what: caught by pirates? They would be very easy prey, to be taken captive or simply murdered and thrown overboard. The "boat people" left Vietnam by the thousands, many to be lost at sea, never to be heard from again. The waters around the Philippines are littered with the wreck and refuse of war as well as the honest fisherman who were taken below, and if the people of this unknown ship were assaulted and then given to the bosom of the sea then they rest in gallant company. But unless Capt. Nicholson allowed someone to board this wreck to look for evidence or information, and I don't think he did, no one can ever really know where this ship came from, or the fate of those aboard. But this incident has stayed with me all these years to become just another sea story, a small, poignant vignette set against the great events of the world.



There are typical of the over-crowded small boats used to flee Vietnam.

Because this issue is one of two that gets printed and mailed out we promised Warner Butler we would rerun the Departure Notification page primarily for Lex Lefon, but we also run Robert Curtis as a shipmate of his sent us a remembrance. In these print issues going forward we will also include any New Member information we receive.

Correction: The Lex Lefon bio was put together by Greg "Shifty" Peairs but his name was inadvertently left out.

#### Mission Statement

**Perpetuate the history of Naval Aviation Squadrons VT-17, VA-6B, VA-65, VA-25 and VFA-25,  
Remember deceased veterans and comfort their survivors,  
Conduct charitable and educational programs,  
Foster and participate in activities of patriotic nature,  
Assist current active squadron members, and  
Provide assistance to family members in times of emergency.**

[www.fistofthefleet.org](http://www.fistofthefleet.org)

## President's Message

It's time again to begin planning for our next Fist reunion. Discussions are ongoing with your BOD and several members have also offered opinions regarding where we should hold our next get together. Cities under consideration include San Diego, Visalia/Lemoore and Reno concurrent with Tailhook 2013. As always there are positives and negatives to any choice. SD is always a great vacation destination and we had a very successful 09 reunion in that venue. Visalia/Lemoore offers a return to where many of us were based from the early 60's on and the possibility of interaction with the squadron if they are available. Beyond that there is very little of interest especially for the wives and it is difficult from a travel standpoint. The Assn last attended 'Hook in 05 and I am told it was well received. Since then we have grown and it is now difficult to accommodate all attendees comfortably in a Ready Room consisting of one or two adjoining rooms or even a larger suite as we had in Pensacola. We also require larger space and banquet facilities similar to those we had in Pensacola. These are good problems to have with a growing organization.

Obtaining the appropriate size space from most any hotel necessitates the requirement that refreshments be supplied by the hotel, in particular any alcoholic beverages due to their liquor licenses. This results in a potential added expense to all attendees in order to not be crammed into a smaller and inadequate space. Success has its costs. In my opinion we have reached the point where we must face this dilemma and provide a more appealing room size for our reunion attendees as they gather to visit and renew their friendships with fellow shipmates and family members.

I am in contact with Tailhook and the Nugget Hotel catering staff and as example they offer a solution to our size group. Tailhook will arrange with the hotel for a room, which is adequate for the number of FOFA attendees. It will serve as our RR/Hospitality Suite on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Nugget. This will be at no cost to the Assn. All alcoholic beverages however, will be purchased through the Nugget Catering Dept. They will allow us to bring in our own snacks, which will help defer some of the added expense. I will continue liaison with both Tailhook and the Nugget for additional information before a final decision is made by the BOD. If we settle on 'Hook a special email and mailing will be sent out soon with the necessary instructions for making reservations at the hotel and links to registration with Tailhook. More to follow.

Tailhook offers the opportunity of reconnecting with other shipmates from other squadrons as well as former and current Fists who will be in attendance and are not currently members of FOFA. It gives us a chance to market FOFA to a larger group of fellow Naval Aviation shipmates and perhaps gain additional membership. Tailhook handles the heavy lifting relative to the various events that we can pick and choose from to attend. The "Bug" Roach Friday mixer and the Saturday evening banquet would fit in nicely for our group to attend in mass with Fist tables at the banquet. There are several other items to choose from each day based on individual interests. Take a look at their website <http://www.tailhook.org/> for examples of the various activities this year. We would probably add a FOFA exclusive breakfast or lunch buffet where we could hold our business meeting concurrently.

### OFFICERS

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Attending Tailhook will cost a little more, but we will gain a very usable space for the RR and plenty of variety in activities. The cash jar will be in full view and I would suggest we try to collect a few donations well in advance over the next year to make this work. So there you have it. If you feel pro or con please email or call your Board members with comments. Keep an eye on the website for additional information regarding Fist 13. We'll be in touch! Gary "Dome" Kerans"



### Blue Angels Tour Dates

Jul 1 Portsmouth NH	2/4 Boston Harbor, MA
7/8 Dayton OH	14/15 Pensacola Beach FL
21/22 Sioux Falls SD	28/29 Twin Falls ID
Aug 4/5 Seattle WA	18/19 Chicago IL
25/26 Summerside Prince Edward Island, Canada	
Sept 1/3 Cleveland OH	8/9 Little Rock AFB AR
15/16 NAS Oceana VA	22/23 Grand Junction CO
29/30 MCAS Kane'ohe Bay HI	

## Departure Notifications

Carroll "Lex" Lefon

By Greg "Shifty" Peairs

Carroll "Lex" Lefon a stalwart member of VFA-25 the "Fist of the Fleet" from 1987-1990, perished in an aircraft accident at NAS Fallon, NV on March 6<sup>th</sup>. He was flying a F-21 KFIR aircraft for the Airborne Tactical Advantage Company (ATAC). It goes without saying Lex was extremely well respected in the Naval Aviation Community both for his flying ability, leadership skills, and personality. In addition to his flying acumen he was well known for his exceptionally well-written blog "Neptunus Lex." In light of Lex's passing Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus wrote "I mourn the passing of a great naval aviator, a professional analyst of all things naval, and a soulful and compelling writer of poetry and prose."

Lex was born in Washington, DC and grew up in Alexandria, VA. He attended the US Naval Academy, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science in 1982. In his senior year, he captained the varsity fencing team and earned honors as a first-team All American during the NCAA national championships.

Upon commissioning, Lex accepted a language scholarship in Tours, France, subsequently reporting to flight school in Pensacola, FL in December of 1982. Following completion of primary flight training, he reported to Meridian, MS for basic and advanced jet training. Earning his wings in April, 1985, Lex remained in Meridian for eighteen months as a flight instructor before reporting to NAS Lemoore, CA for transition training in the FA-18 Hornet.

Lex reported to Fist in 1987. He participated in three extended deployments to the Western Pacific and North Arabian Sea, flying off the USS Constellation and USS Independence. Shore duty brought him to Key West, FL in 1990, where he taught advanced air-to-air tactics as an adversary pilot flying the F-16N, F-5E and A-4E aircraft. He returned to Lemoore in 1993 for refresher training in the FA-18 in preparation for his department head tour at Atsugi, Japan, again deploying off the USS Independence. In 1996, Lex reported to the Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) as an instructor. While at TOPGUN, he managed an integrated product team developing an integrated academic and flight training system for strike fighter pilots before becoming the school's Executive Officer. Having screened for command of an operational FA-18 squadron in 1998, Lex joined VFA-94 in Lemoore for duty first as Executive Officer, and then ultimately Commanding Officer. He deployed aboard USS Carl Vinson.

Upon completion of his command tour in 2001, Lex reported to USS Constellation to serve as Operations Officer for two deployments, including her final, 2003 deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. When the ship decommissioned, he reported to the Commander, Carrier Group ONE as Operations and Plans Officer (N3), and participated in the training of five West Coast carrier strike groups. His final tour of duty in the Navy was as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Training (N7) under the Commander, Naval Air Forces. During this tour, Lex pursued a Master of Science degree in Systems Engineering Management and Product Development from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

Lex retired from the Navy as a Captain in the summer of 2008. A great guy, incredible pilot and officer, and an amazing husband and father, he will be missed.



Capt. Robert "Bull" Curtis on 2 February 2012

Bob Curtis received his wings in 1966 and began flying combat mission in the Vietnam War in the A-4E Skyhawk with VA-144 aboard the Kitty Hawk. He later transitioned to the A-7E with VA-25 in 1971 completing a further 3 combat tours with the Rangers' air group. He finally amassed a total of over 410 combat sorties over North Vietnam including raids during the Tet offensive (when he was shot down), attacks on Hanoi and on the port facilities of Haiphong. Bob retired from the Navy in 1992 with a total time in cockpit of over 4000 hours including helicopters. Bob was an annual Member of the Fist of the Fleet Association.



**Have you paid your 2012 Dues?**

Annual Dues: \$25/YR

Life Time Dues \$200

Mail dues to Financial Officer:

Chuck Webster 39224 132nd St. Bath SD 57427

**Only Voting Members receive a copy of the Directory**

**Become a Voting Member!**

**Visit the Base Exchange at**

**[www.fistofthefleet.org](http://www.fistofthefleet.org)**

**\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ FINANCIAL NEWS \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$**

By: Chuck Webster

I am pleased to report that the financial condition continues to improve for the FOFA during 2012. We received an additional \$550 for Life and Annual membership payments. \$125 was given in memory of Bull Curtis. The daughters, Rebecca Faeder and Susan Ziemianski, of Marvin Duncan sent a gift in memory of their father of \$5000 for the Educational Grant Program. We have an ending balance of \$27,960.22 in our Navy Federal accounts.

During this turn around and change of aircraft, VFA-25 personnel should be able to take additional educational classes and apply to FOFA for reimbursement from the Educational Grant Program. The Association takes this commitment to the squadron very seriously and we welcome grant award applications.

Annual membership payments are down this year but we have picked up three new life members. We now have 98 paid life members but only six annual members have paid their yearly dues giving us 104 voting members.

Submitted: 26 June 2012 by Chuck Webster, FOFA Treasurer

**FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM**

By: Dennis Laack and Zip Rausa

At present there are no applications, but the Skipper assures us that "we are soliciting inputs and applications for the grant program and will put the "word" out to ensure our Sailors take advantage of this benefit!"

We are expecting an up-tick in program applications shortly.

**FIST FLY-IN MAY 2012**



## SKIPPERS CORNER

I am elated to start this letter with greetings from sunny...and warm Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. As most of you know the squadron returned from a six month WESTPAC deployment on 23 May and it is an understatement to say all of the Sailors of this great squadron are ecstatic to finally be home with family and friends. I will briefly mention some of the amazing accomplishments this squadron endured during this last deployment, what we have been up to since returning home, and finally, what lies ahead for us in the future. The success enjoyed during this last deployment included nearly 1,200 sorties and 200 combat missions in support of Coalition troops on the ground in Afghanistan with an astounding 98 percent sortie completion rate. Our superb maintenance professionals continually supplied mission-ready aircraft above fleet averages despite facing emerging issues with the aging FA-18C fleet. Our aircrew employed precision guided and 20mm with lethal precision while carrying the squadron



to seven of the last eight Top Hook awards spanning two deployments. We also played a crucial role during the engagement with regional partners during port visits to Hong Kong, Dubai, Chennai, and Perth, Australia and participated in exercises in Kuwait, Oman and India. Our Sailors and families have performed superbly well and should be very proud of their accomplishments.

Since returning home, FIST Sailors and families have enjoyed post-deployment POM and much needed time away from work. I am proud to announce that the squadron advanced 53 Sailors to the next paygrade, well above the fleet average for the exam cycle. Additionally, we *made* two new SCPOs and one MCPO—a true testament to the professionalism and leadership that makes this great squadron so successful.

In closing, the squadron is gearing-up for the transition to the FA-18E Super Hornet where maintainers and pilots alike will attend differences training and learn how to maintain and fly one of the world's most advanced multi-mission strike fighters. As we prepare to turn yet another page in the *Annals of Fistory*, I can undoubtedly say the FA-18C has earned a distinguished position for the years of service it has provided this squadron and the US Navy. For those Hornet drivers out there, I am sure you can attest to the fact this fine aircraft has been a joy to fly and to work on.

As always, we would be unable to complete our mission, whether ashore or afloat, without the endless support of the families, friends, and the Fist of the Fleet Association. Hope to see you at HOOK 12, until next time...

Sincerely, Fist One

**FROM THE COCKPIT** By: LT Dan "Tigger" Owens, VFA-25 PAO

The Fist is finally back home to Lemoore after a successful combat deployment in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The fly-in on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, followed by the Carl Vinson return to home port, marked the culmination of two back-to-back combat deployments. After the break of post deployment leave, the memories of ship food, ladder wells, and knee-knockers have faded to the familiar sights, sounds, and smells of being home in Lemoore.

For the last week of transit from Hawaii back to San Diego, FIST Sailors were able to bring family members onboard the USS Carl Vinson for Tiger Cruise. Tigers were treated to an airshow that is only possible on an aircraft carrier at sea. They saw supersonic passes, a simulated dogfight around the ship, and live bomb drops. Additionally, the Tigers were able to see the daily routine of a warship at sea. After Tiger Cruise and the return to home port, VFA-25 was able to enjoy their well-earned post-deployment leave.

Upon the FIST's return from leave, the CO Strike Fighter Wing Pacific, Capt. Mark Black, visited VFA-25 in our hangar to recognize the squadron for its excellence in several areas. First, he noted that VFA-25 and CVW-17 had completed the rare feat of deploying, returning, and leaving for a second deployment within a 12-month period. He commended VFA-25 on rising to the challenge and excelling in their mission of supporting troops on the ground with the professionalism and pride that has become known as FIST standard. The Commodore then presented VFA-25 with the LTJG Bruce Carrier Award, which is an award given for excellence in Aviation Maintenance. LTJG Bruce Carrier was killed in 1975 when his A-4F Skyhawk suffered a series of preventable mechanical failures while deployed in the South China Sea. After this incident, the Navy renewed its focus on safe maintenance practices, and every year one squadron is recognized for their excellence in Aviation Maintenance. Setting the standard is nothing new for FIST maintenance. While on deployment, they received the coveted CVW-17 Golden Wrench. VFA-25 maintenance continues to excel as they ready their F/A-18Cs for transfer in preparation for their transition to the F/A-18E in July.

The Maint. Dept. is not the only part of VFA-25 that has excelled. The latest advancement cycle showed that FIST Sailors across the board have been working hard studying and training in order to make themselves professionals in their individual fields. The Fist of the Fleet set the standard with one new Master Chief, two new Senior Chiefs, and 52 petty officers who advanced to the next rank. VFA-25 greatly exceeded navy-wide averages in every category. In the E6 category, 41% of Sailors advanced, more than doubling the navy-wide average of 17%. Now that VFA-25 is back, the focus has shifted from the fast-paced lifestyle of boat life to reuniting with family and preparing jets, Sailors, and aircrew for the upcoming transition to the F/A-18E Super Hornet. As VFA-25 transfers their last few F/A-18C Hornets, FIST Sailors prepare to earn their Super Hornet quals and pilots return to the VFA-122 for the FRS transition syllabus. After 29 years of flying the legacy Hornet, VFA-25 couldn't be in a better position to transfer to a new airframe and continue their reputation for excellence.

## **FIST MEMORIES**

By: Scott Smith

Just before the Vietnam War, VA-25 learned we would be giving our SPADs to the South Vietnamese Air force at the end of the cruise. This required that each aircraft go through Atsugi (Japan) Overhaul facility for some minor changes to the communications system. Two by two, the planes cycled through Atsugi. I was scheduled to lead a section (two aircraft) to Atsugi, and then pick up two aircraft that had already completed the installation.

We launched from the ship in clear weather and flew for some time over water. We finally crossed the Japanese coastline about 80 miles south of Atsugi and promptly became engulfed in broken clouds. We were flying above all the local mountains, except Mount Fuji. About 50 miles out, I contacted Atsugi Approach Control. They located us on radar and cleared us to descend in preparation for landing. At about 8,000 feet, we broke out into a small hole in the clouds. I could see the ground straight down, but only clouds ahead.

I cannot explain what happened or why. Up to this point everything had gone like a textbook instrument approach. For some unexplained reason I got a very uncomfortable feeling. Sweaty palms, perspiration and an upset stomach. I looked over at my wingman, Jack Feldhaus, but he didn't seem bothered by anything. Anyway, I decided to make a descending 360 degree turn.



A-1E of the South Vietnamese Air Force

We completed the turn as we broke out below the clouds. There were still mountains between us and Atsugi. On our previous course, we would have probably collided with the mountains while still in the clouds. I've always harbored a deep mistrust for ground control instructions since a night flight from *MIDWAY* in 1953. The vector took me towards the Black Sea. I had flown outside of communications range before anyone in CIC noticed. My controller had gone out for coffee or something. His voice sounded a little panicky after I turned around and flew back into communications range.

Anyway, Jack and I zigged and zagged our way through a mountain pass and landed safely at Atsugi. We picked up the other two aircraft the next day and had an uneventful flight back to the ship.

Jack probably never realized how close we came to having permanent wings. It made very little difference to the aircraft. They were probably trashed by the South Vietnamese within a year. Jack did get a couple of more years before he was killed 8 October 1966 while flying with VA-152 in Vietnam.

By Jack Phillips, FIST 72-75:

I was saddened to learn the passing of Bob Curtis, he was still a young man and as I learned a very accomplished aviator. I had no idea he was shot down before he came to the Fist and I knew him. I have nothing but good memories of him being a friendly guy to us plane captains every time he manned up, I will miss him. I can remember an incident one day onboard Ranger off the coast of Nam, we thought we could do a fresh water wash of A/C 400, my bird, in between launches. Now just the mere thought of this was crazy, but crazy was the order of the day during cyclic ops and we gave it our best shot and nearly pulled it off. Everything was done and Double Nuts was nice and shiny when Bob handed me his helmet bag and started his preflight. Man up was normal; he launched off the waist cat and I picked up my chains and before I could get off the deck I was being called back up to the bow for recovery of #400. It just so happened we had not removed the tape on all the static ports, and he flew off with a plane that not all the instruments were working and as I'm told played hell inside his helmet with some very loud screeching sounds. He trapped and taxied up to the bow, climbed down and that's when we learned what we had missed. I turned beet red in the face and offered up "I'm sorry"; he was just as red in the face and said don't be. He said you didn't see it and I didn't see it and the final checkers didn't see it we are all in good company, and said we should never play poker together at the same table and just walked away tugging on his ears. He was one of my favorites, so sorry to lose him.

## **NEW MEMBER DATA:**

Michael J. Murphy VA-25 1969- 1971  
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## SPADS OVER 'NAM: A CRUSADERS' VIEW.

Recently I was prying around the web and stumbled on this article. Used by permission of the author Scott Ruby of VFP-63 it is edited for structure but not for content. The original can be found at [http://www.vfp62.com/war\\_stories.html](http://www.vfp62.com/war_stories.html)



VA-25 was quite a Spad squadron. On one of our earlier strikes, the air wing went after some stupid bridge up north. It was a pre-cursor to the Alpha strikes. Willie - one of the other pilots in the det- provided BDA [Battle Damage Assessment]. After the strike pulled off, Willie goes in. It did not take them [the North Vietnamese] long to figure out that if something got bombed, a photo pilot would soon follow. At that time we were going in below 100 feet, and as fast as the RF-8 would go. Depending on the airplane, we could get 625-650 [kts] out of it. Stupid, but we had not learned our lesson yet. He pops up over the target takes the pics, and drops down to the deck. And running like hell he leaves the cameras running being too busy to turn them off. Looking at the film afterwards, here were these two big bomb craters in a rice paddy a couple of miles down-track from the strike. From their size they

were 2,000 pounders. The only aircraft carrying 2,000 pounders were the Spads. We went to the squadron and said: "OK, which one of you missed the target that far?" Nope, nobody raised their hand. After a stare-down, we said, "OK, it looks like we will have to go see CAG and show him the results." At that, one of the JO's admitted he did it. Seems the Spads were using 85 degree dive angles - hanging in their straps. Better accuracy it seems. When it came to release, he kept pickling, and the bombs didn't come off. He finally realizes he is LOW, and does a high-G pullout. Still pickling, the bombs finally come off during the pullout, and he tosses them down the valley. We deleted those pictures for CAG.

Another occasion with VA-25 involved PT Boats. I was looking for a ferry that was supposedly in an inlet a little north of Dong Hoi. Once again I was below 100 feet, and as fast as I could go. Taking fire from various sites I happened to notice that for some reason this rock was leaving a wake and also firing at me. Ah Ha! PT boat! Found a couple of aircraft, and they managed to kill a few fish. This was in 1965. PT boats were instant targets. We went back to the boat and CAG put together a full strike. We go back up there and go trolling. As near as we could tell, at least 7 "rocks" got underway. They

would just sit there in the middle of the inlet, wait for the A-4's to release, and then move one way or the other. With 15-20 bombers dropping, we believe they managed to slow one down. They also increased the food supply with all the fish they killed. Went back to the boat again and now CAG is really pissed so he sends 4 Spads late in the day loaded with napalm. One Spad would draw fire, and another Spad would make his run. Soaked down three PT boats, and left them burning hulks in the water. Willie is doing BDA on this one once again below 100 feet. We had a picture with the burning hulk of a PT boat with the shadow of an RF-8 right next to it. What we didn't show was a few frames later with the same shadow with fuel streaming from the left wing. A 23 mm from another PT boat that was firing at him goes in parallel to the wing, and blows the top and bottom of the wing off. A hole big enough for two people to crawl through. Broke the main spar, but it managed to stay together long enough for him to get to Da Nang. Willie was a three-fifths black ace that deployment.



VFP-63 provided photo recon for the West Coast, VFP-62 for the East Coast.



May 15, 65 Bill "Willie" Wilson's RF-8 over the burning PT Boat

## **DID YOU KNOW? NAVY, MILITARY AND OTHER INFORMATION:**

Submitted by: Lynn Hughes

I'm a Sailor

I liked standing on deck at sunrise with salt spray in my face and clean ocean winds whipping in from the four quarters of the globe. I liked the sounds of the Navy - the piercing trill of the Boatswain's pipe, the syncopated clangor of the ship's bell on the quarterdeck, harsh, and the strong language and laughter of sailors at work.

I liked Navy vessels -- plodding fleet auxiliaries and amphibs, sleek submarines and steady solid aircraft carriers. I liked the proud names of Navy ships: Midway, Lexington, Saratoga, Coral Sea, Antietam, Valley Forge. All memorials of great battles won and tribulations overcome.

I liked the lean angular names of Navy "tin-cans" and escorts, mementos of heroes who went before us. And the others - - San Jose, San Diego, Los Angeles, St. Paul, Chicago, Oklahoma City, named for our cities.

I liked liberty call and the spicy scent of a foreign port. I even liked the all hands working parties as my ship filled herself with a multitude of supplies, needed to cut ties to the land and carry out her mission anywhere on the globe where there was water to float her.

I liked Sailors - Officers, Chiefs, & other Enlisted Men from all parts of the land, farms of the Midwest, small towns of New England, from the big cities, the mountains and the prairies, from all walks of life. I trusted and depended on them as they trusted and depended on me -- for professional competence, for comradeship, for strength and courage. In a word, they were "shipmates"; then and forever.

I liked the surge of adventure when the word was passed: "Now Hear This" "Now station the special sea and anchor detail - all hands to quarters for leaving port," and I liked the infectious thrill of sighting home again, with the waving hands of welcome from family and friends waiting pier side. The work was hard and dangerous; the going rough at times; the parting from loved ones painful, but the companionship of robust Navy laughter, the "all for one and one for all" philosophy of the sea was ever present.

I liked the fierce and dangerous activity on the flight deck of the aircraft carriers, earlier named for battles won but sadly now named for politicians. Enterprise, Independence, Boxer, Princeton and oh so many more, some lost in battle, and sadly many scrapped.

I liked the names of the aircraft and helicopters; Skyraider, Intruder, Sea King, Phantom, Guardian, Demon, Skywarrior, Tracker, and many more that bring to mind offensive and defensive orders of battle. I liked the excitement of an alongside replenishment as my ship slid in alongside the oiler and the cry of "Standby to receive shotlines" prefaced the hard work of rigging spanwires and fuel hoses across the narrow gap of water between the ships and welcomed the mail and fresh milk, fruit and vegetables that sometimes accompanied the fuel.

I liked the feel of the Navy in darkness - the masthead and range lights, the red and green navigation lights and stern light, the pulsating phosphorescence of radar repeaters - they cut through the dusk and joined with the mirror of stars overhead. And I liked drifting off to sleep lulled by the myriad noises large and small that told me my ship was alive and well, and that my shipmates on watch would keep me safe.

I liked quiet mid-watches with the aroma of strong coffee -- the lifeblood of the Navy permeating everywhere. And I liked hectic watches when the exacting minuet of haze-gray shapes racing at flank speed kept all hands on a razor edge of alertness. I liked the sudden electricity of "General quarters, all hands man your battle stations," followed by the hurried clamor of running feet on ladders and the resounding thump of watertight doors as the ship transformed herself in a few brief seconds from a peaceful workplace to a weapon of war.

And I liked the sight of space-age equipment manned by youngsters clad in dungarees and sound-powered phones that their grandfathers would still recognize.

I liked the serenity of the sea after a day of hard ship's work, as flying fish flitted across the wave tops and sunset gave way to night. I liked the traditions of the Navy and the men and now women who made them.

I liked the proud names of Navy heroes: Halsey, Nimitz, Perry, Farragut, John Paul Jones and Burke. A sailor could find much in the Navy: comrades-in-arms, pride in self and country, mastery of the seaman's trade. An adolescent could find adulthood.

In years to come, when sailors are home from the sea, we still remember with fondness and respect the ocean in all its moods - the impossible shimmering mirror calm and the storm-tossed green water surging over the bow. And then there will come again a faint whiff of stack gas, a faint echo of engine and rudder orders, a vision of the bright bunting of signal flags snapping at the yardarm, a refrain of hearty laughter in the wardroom and chief's quarters and mess decks.

Gone ashore for good, we grow humble about our Navy days, when the seas were a part of us and a new port of call was ever over the horizon.

Remembering this, I stand taller and say: I'm a Sailor!

## **NEXT TIME IN FISTORY: LANG VEI - AN INTRODUCTION**