

This is nothing less than a GRAND occasion. Shipmates that are drawn together by the memory of our great ship USS Monticello.

I entered the Navy on March 26, 1969 just 26 days after turning 17. I weighed a whopping 125 pounds! I progressed through boot camp in Great Lakes and was finally sent to San Diego to begin my duty aboard the Monticello. The ship's crew was preparing for their journey to Bremerton, Washington for an extensive dry dock period. I settled into my job as a deck ape without much trouble and began to like the jobs that I was being assigned. I served in the for Fours years, eight months and seventeen days. I will never forget the my service in the Navy.

It will come as no surprise to you that I liked the Navy!

I liked standing on the bridge wing as port lookout at sunrise with the salt spray in my face. And clean ocean winds whipping in from the four corners of the globe. The ship beneath me rolling and pitching as her engines drive her through the seas!

I liked the sounds of the Navy. The piercing trill of the Boatswain's call. The clang of the ship's bell. The harsh squawk of the 1MC. The strong language and laughter of my fellow Sailors at work! The Navy is where I truly learned to cuss!

I liked the ships of the Navy, darting LSTs, the fast Des, majestic battleships, sleek submarines and the steady solid carriers.

I liked the proud names of Navy ships – MIDWAY, LEXINGTON, SARATOGA, CORAL SEA, memories of great battles won and great men who died in them.

I liked the tempo of a Navy band as we pull away from the oiler after we refuel at sea! I liked liberty call and the spicy scent of a foreign port. I can still remember the smells of the Hong Kong streets and the Olongapo River.

I liked talking to "the ladies of the evening" and giving my spare change to the ever-present children of the street.

I liked all hands, men from all parts of the land, farms of the Midwest, from Nebraska, New England, the towns, the cities, from all walks of life. I trusted and depended on them as they trusted and depended on me for comradeship! I had one young sailor ask me to tie a double bowline for him so that he could hang over the side, because he trusted my ability.

I liked the surge of adventure in my heart when the word is passed, "Now station the special sea and anchor detail. All hands to quarters for leaving port." And I like the infectious thrill of sighting home port again with the waving hands of welcome from family and friends.

I liked driving the LCVP-2 as the liberty launch in Hong Kong and Diego Garcia. The work was hard and dangerous. The going is rough at times. The parting from loved ones painful, but that made the welcome home even sweeter.

I liked our guns! The loud bang! I liked seeing the sleeve flutter to the water after we hit the tow line.

I liked the serenity of the sea after a day of hard work as flying fish skimming across the wave tops.

I liked watching the porpoise play chicken with the bow of the ship.

I liked the Navy in darkness, the masthead lights, the red and green port, starboard, and white stern lights.

I liked drifting off to sleep, lulled by the countless noises that tell me that the ship is alive and well and that my shipmates on watch will keep me safe. I feared total silence.

I liked the quiet midwatch with the aroma of strong coffee permeating everywhere.

I liked the hectic watches when the exacting minuet of haze gray ships racing at flank speed kept all hands on a razor edge of alertness. I like the sudden electricity of general quarters, "All hands man your battle stations."

I liked the traditions of the Navy and those who made them.

I liked the slang of the Navy: Fore, Aft, Port, Starboard, Snipe, Deck Ape and "Turn to."

I liked the names of Navy heroes: Halsey, Nimitz, Perry, Farragut, John Paul Jones and the Sullivan brothers.

A Sailor can find much to like in the Navy: comrades-in-arms; pride in self and service to country; mastery of the seaman's trade. A young man can find adulthood.

And so in the years to come, when Sailors have come home from the sea, they will still remember with fondness and respect the ocean in all its moods. The impossible, shimmering mirror calms, and the storm-tossed green water surging over the bow. And then there will come again a faint whiff of cordite from the guns, the odor of stack gas, a faint echo of engine and rudder orders, a vision of the bright bunting of flags snapping at the yardarm, the faint refrain of hearty laughter in the mess decks. Chief's quarters and ward room. Gone ashore for good. They will grow wistful about their Navy days when they were part of the sea and a new port of call was over the horizon.

And so I ask you to stand tall and say with me, "I WAS ONCE A MOBOAT SAILOR."