

Shipmates Four

By

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Jacksonville, FL

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International Standard Book Number 13: 978-1-60452-017-0
International Standard Book Number 10: 1-60452-017-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008932675

BluewaterPress LLC
2220 CR 210 W Ste 108 #132
Jacksonville, FL 32559
<http://bluewaterpress.com>

This book may be purchased online at -

<http://bluewaterpress.com/shipmates>
and
amazon.com

To my faithful wife Charlotte, who has always supported me in my goofy endeavors. To my children, their children and grandchildren. To Charlotte's children, their children and grandchildren. And especially, to all my ex shipmates who sailed with and served beside me in that most terrible of wars. And let us not forget those who did not survive. To all those we will be forever indebted.

PREFACE

The year was 1940. This teapot that we refer to as “our world” was seething and about to boil over. On opposite ends of the globe monstrous hordes were ravaging the land and crushing its peoples. In Europe, in spite of England’s Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s declaration of “peace in our time” the Nazi boot worn by German Chancellor Adolph Hitler continued to wage blitzkrieg (lightning war). The onslaught continued into Poland on the 1st of September in 1939, which was followed by a declaration of war by the United Kingdom and France three days later. Soon Belgium and Holland fell, along with Denmark, Norway and everything in between. Next came France and the British and French armies were forced into the sea at what was to become known as the “miracle of Dunkirk.” A third of a million men were evacuated by every means of nautical conveyance and transported to the already beleaguered British Isles. The English were being steadily bombarded by the ever victorious Luftwaffe, the air arm of the Third Reich.

Contrarily, in the Far East, the Japanese juggernaut had enjoyed complete success in Manchuria in 1932 and had, in fact been laying siege to China since 1931. It seemed that it was only a matter of time before more western victories would be sought. Consequently, their saber rattling was heard and was being taken seriously in Washington. A brutal example of the Japanese murderous elimination of human beings is the “Rape of Nanking,” where literally hundreds of thousands Chinese fell victims to the awful Samurai wielding invaders.

Between these violent continents, the United States was at peace and its citizenry maintained a pacifist attitude, especially toward the enigma that engulfed Europe. As far as Japan was concerned, the consensus of opinion was that the oriental nation could not be taken seriously; that it was only a nation of toy makers. However, President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt differently. He recognized the fact that America would eventually be brought into the conflict, both against the Teuton and the Nipponese warmongers. Thereupon, the wheels had been set in motion. The Selective Training and Service Act was about to be enacted, the Lend-Lease Program was a serious thought in the president’s mind, as was the massing of troops and the building of more aircraft and warships. As it were, our Navy consisted mostly of left over vessels from the World War. We had not yet realized the necessity of numbering the World Wars. All this was about to change.

CHAPTER 1 BOOT CAMP

That's where it all started. Never in the annals of the United States Naval Training Station at Newport, Rhode Island, had four wannabe sailors hit it off in such grand and noble fashion and it had happened immediately. Nobody knew why. Their personalities were extremely opposite, they came from different areas of the Eastern United States and their physical appearances were diversified. They were about the same age, 18 to 22, but so were the other 80 odd recruits.

All eighty of them had passed their final physicals, had been sworn into the United States Navy and had their civilian tresses shorn close to their scalps. Those that complained or asked for a special coiffure received something special all right, known as "the skin-head treatment." They had been issued a full sea bag of various uniforms and all the other accouterments that would sustain them for the next four years. And now they stood in a haphazard formation awaiting their next form of punishment. Sea bags had been emptied, their contents lain out in supposedly neat sacks and the empty boxes refilled with all their belongings; i.e., clothes, jewelry, watches, billfold, money and everything except their natural body parts. So now, this mass of humanity was left in an upright position as naked as the day they were born, shivering and mentally depressed in what appeared to be some sort of gymnasium.

"Awright, listen up," a Petty Officer had entered the hall and bellowed to the throng of melancholy rookies, "In a few minutes your Company Commander is gonna be here to talk to you, so look lively."

"Can we get dressed," a voice in the middle of the formation asked.

"No, the Chief wants to see you just as you are."

"Chief of what?" again from the same man.

"A Chief Petty Officer. Now shut up and stand easy," was the reply from the Petty Officer.

"It aint easy standing here, cold and tired and hungry."

With a disgusted hand gesture the PO stormed from the room.

The young man who had been making the remarks was Angelo Mustari, a prime example of an outspoken individual who understandably wanted some answers. Now he took the chance to look about him to see if everybody else was as unhappy as he was. To his right he thought he heard a whimper. Sure enough, there was a youngster who looked like he wasn't a day over sixteen and there were tears streaking down his cheeks. Oh man, Angelo thought that's a sailor? So as not to be too sorrowfully affected he altered his gaze to his left, stuck out his hand and exclaimed to the fellow next to him, "Hi. I'm Ange."

The short stocky man whom he had addressed gave Angelo sort of a bewildered glance, as if to say, who is this guy. But then he smiled and said instead, "Who?"

"Ange," was the response, "Like in Angelo. I'm Angelo Mustari from Brooklyn."

Then Angelo's new acquaintance firmly grasped the outstretched hand and made his own introductory statement, "Glad to know you, Ange. I'm Sean, Sean Maloney from Pittsburgh. I didn't know if we were supposed to talk or not, but anyway I'm really glad to make your acquaintance. You're the first bloke around here who's said a friendly word to me."

Angelo contemplated this for a moment and came to the conclusion that this guy was all right. He had a good strong handshake and that was a good sign. He thought, you can usually tell a man by the way he shakes hands. There's nothing worse than shaking hands with a guy and it feels like you're holding a wet fish. This guy has got character.

While Angelo was mulling this over, another would-be seaman who had been standing on the other side of Sean stepped alongside the two new friends and, imitating Angelo's approach, stuck out his hand and said, "Since we're all getting to know each other, I'm Mike Thomas. I'm a farm boy from Upstate New York. My folks have a dairy farm up near Syracuse and I wanted to see the world so I joined the Navy."

Once again there were handshakes all around. They all broke into smiles and it seemed that this was the start of a nice relationship. But then

there was another interruption and the fourth member of this panel of fraternal creatures joined right in just like he had been asked in by some unseen mentor. Pete Lubanski nudged his huge bulk into the newly formed threesome and wasn't at all bashful about announcing his presence, "Pete Lubanski here. I've been wondering who I could team up with to make this stay at boot camp a little more bearable. Care if I join you?"

In a case like this, Angelo was always the one to get a conversation going, "Where you from, Pete?"

With only a slight smile Pete scratched his ear lobe, as he was apt to do when he was collecting his thoughts, "Well, everywhere and anywhere. My folks were Navy and moved around a lot. My old man was a Chief and I grew up talking Navy and listening to sea stories. As soon as I was old enough I had to carry on the family tradition, just like my old man and his old man before him. I aint never been to sea, but I know what it's all about. OK?"

Now it was Sean's turn to speak up. "Hey, this is great. Pete can steer us in the right direction and help us learn the ropes."

Pete had an answer for Sean's statement, "One of the things my dad taught me was that there weren't no ropes on a ship. They're called lines. You never call 'em ropes. He says they got ropes in the Army. But you gotta remember, there's a couple of times that you call em ropes. There's the bell rope that is attached to the ship's bell and then there's the man ropes. They hang down from above the lifeboat. When the boat is being lowered, you hang on to 'em to keep from falling into the ocean."

All this chitchat ceased abruptly as their attention was called to the opening of the large door that was the access to the gymnasium. A Chief Petty Officer in all the regalia of his rank, dressed in his finest blue uniform, complete with gold accoutrements, strode triumphantly into the room followed by his ever-present Petty Officer.

Without a word the Chief approached the hapless recruits and proceeded up and down the ranks, pausing periodically to concentrate on a single man. After passing our celebrated foursome, Pete whispered to Mike out of the side of his mouth, "He's got 24 years in the Navy."

The Chief spun around, "What did you say, sailor?"

Pete answered, "I was only remarking, Chief, on the length of your service. I was pointing out to Mike here that you have six gold hash marks."

"Oh. Carry on."

When the Chief reached the next row of naked flesh, he stopped beside one trembling lad and queried, "How old are you son?"

The youngster stammered, "Just 17, sir."

"How come you don't have any hair on your dohickey?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, I'll see you later," said the Chief, and then he walked back to the

front of the group and stood facing them with that stern facial expression that they would see so often in the future.

"Men," he began, "Your body now belongs to the United States Navy. It's your duty to take care of it. If you harm it, you will be punished accordingly. For instance, if you get tattooed and it gets infected or if you get a dose of clap, you could face a court martial."

He paused for effect and then continued, "I'm Chief Bosun's Mate Kane and this is one of my assistants, Petty Officer 2nd Class Abbott. In the next eight weeks you'll see a lot of us and by that time, maybe-just maybe, we can make sailors out of you. I don't know, you don't look like men to me. You look more like boys, but, God willing, maybe you'll come around if you listen to us. Eight weeks seems like a long time to you, I know. But it's really a short time to learn all you've got to learn before you graduate from boot camp and then go out into the fleet. You've got to learn some knots and all the other things that will turn you into a sailor. Most of you will go into the deck force and a few of you will go below decks into the black gang or engineering force. They call it the black gang referring to the old coal ship days when ships were powered by coal. It was dirty work back then, but no more. You'll learn all about how to act aboard ship and how to talk like a sailor. You're not standing on a floor, you're on a deck. There's no ceiling above you, it's the overhead. Over there is the bulkhead, not the wall. The Navy is steeped in tradition and you'll learn all about it."

Doffing his peaked Chief's cap to scratch his head, as if to say how do I tell them this, he continued, "One last thing, 'til you get out of boot camp I'm gonna be your father, your mother and your wife, but don't get the idea you can fuck me. Many men better than you have tried and they still regret it. Keep that in mind."

The Chief looked around at what would be his charges and thought to himself what a sorry looking bunch of boots. He took a deep breath, exhaled and then gave them his next orders, "OK. You can get dressed now. Put on your dungarees and white hat. If you don't know how to square your hat, and I bet you don't, Abbott here will give you a hand. And don't forget your boots. You'll always wear your boots while in boot camp; that's why they call it boot camp. Then Abbott will march you over to your barracks and assign you your bunks and then you can get some chow. That's food to you landlubbers."

PO Abbott had his hands full assisting everybody in identifying their various pieces of clothing and stowing their other gear away properly. He gave them a quick run-down on squaring their white hats; that is, putting the wings on the sides in a seaman like fashion and placing them just over the eyebrows in a straight line. Some of the boys didn't even know what dungarees were and several of them were looking for boots. Abbott

explained that that was what you called the leggings and showed them how to lace them up, there again, in a seaman like way.

"Everybody outside on the grinder," Abbott bellowed.

Complete confusion followed. Like stampeding cattle the eighty-odd boots pushed and shoved their way on to an adjoining grassy field and just milled around, evidently impressed by the Chief's barbaric remarks that had introduced them to Navy life. Only after Abbott had manhandled and manipulated them into some sort of a formation did they begin to understand that they were about to march like soldiers, not the relaxed and seemingly reposed sailors that they thought they were.

"If I wanted to march, I'd have joined the Army," remarked Sean.

"Quiet in ranks," shouted Abbott.

More confusion, but this Petty Officer had apparently gone through this before. There was some tripping and stumbling, but somehow the clumsy ones finally were able to distinguish between their left and right feet as Abbott sang out that melancholy chant, "Your left, right. Left, right."

They were not doing too badly, so Abbott decided to cheer them up a bit and went into his version of a marching song. "Your guide is right, your pants are tight and your balls are swinging from left to right. Left, right. Left, right."

Now it was evening and this first beastly day was about to come to an end. After the welcoming speech by Chief Kane they had marched rather boorishly to the mess hall, got a taste of "good old Navy chow" and then were assigned their bunks in the company barracks. Sean, always the finagler, had talked Abbott into putting the four new pals together. Then the Chief came in and, between him and his Petty Officer, demonstrated how their clothes were to be folded and their gear stowed. He was very meticulous about everything, even their towels. He showed them how towels were hung over a towel bar in their locker with the crease always pointing toward the bow of the ship. In this case it was the front of the barracks.

The four comrades sat on the two bottom bunks facing each other and began verbally going over the events of the day and speculating on tomorrow. All was serene now; the Chief and his PO had retired for the night and they were at last alone with their miseries.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Mike, addressing nobody in particular.

Angelo came back with, "About what?"

Mike injected, "Oh, about boot camp."

As he was wont to do, Pete took the lead, "Well, my old man said that boot camp is the worse part of the Navy. You get through boot camp and the rest is a piece-a-cake."

"Hey, Pete," said Mike, "How come you always call your dad the old man?"

"Shit," answered Pete, "That's a compliment. "The old-er-dad says that's how you refer to the captain of the ship; "the old man." If he's a Navy man, the old man feels good about being called "the old man." Get it? By the way Mike, how come you joined the Navy?"

"Well," began Mike, "When I got outa high school my dad expected me to work on the farm and I had had enough of farm work. As far back as I can remember I had to work my ass off on the farm. On a dairy farm, you're married to those damn cows. They gotta be milked twice a day and they don't care if your sick or you're tired or its Christmas or nothin, those bitches gotta be milked. I got real sick of pulling on tits. Besides that, I'd never been outside the county. Dad didn't like it, but I thought there's gotta be something else besides that, so here I am. It's just like you, in a way, Pete. Your dad expected you to go into the Navy, so you did. But me, I just wanted to get away from all that cow shit."

Then Angelo turned to Sean who was occupying his bunk alongside him, "How about you, Sean? Why'd you join the Navy?"

"Well, it's like this, guys. A guy I knew came home on leave I had known him all through school, but when he came home, he wasn't a jerk anymore and he looked great in those Navy blues. He seemed to have grown taller and spoke all together differently. He wasn't a snot-nose kid anymore and all the gals went ape over him. That uniform got him more fuckin' than I ever had. So, why not me? Ange, how about you? Why'd you join up?"

Now it was finally Angelo's turn, "When I got out of high school I couldn't find a job. I don't care what Roosevelt says, we're still in the depression. There aint no work no where and I like to eat and have a warm bed and not have to worry about where my next meal's coming from. And, like Sean, I like the uniform. Nothin' wrong with that is there?"

There was a giggle or two at that one and Angelo elbowed Sean in sort of an intimate show of friendliness, as much to say, how's that.

Then out of the blue Sean said, "It looks like we'll all be in the- what the Chief called the deck force, right?"

"Not me," piped up Mike, "I'm gonna try to get into the black gang. I've always liked mechanical things and I think I'd like being down where the ship's motors are."

"That's called the engine room," corrected Pete.

"Whatever."

Pete took up on this, "My old man said, 'get on the bridge. That's where all the action is and you'll be in close contact with the officers. All you need is a couple of officers taking a liking to you and you've got it made.' The bridge is also called the con and that's where the ship is controlled. You could learn navigation or signaling and all that good stuff. That's what I wanna do."

"Say," queried Angelo, "Do you think we could get on the same ship?"

"Leave it to me," replied Sean, "I'll fix it so's we do."

A bugle sounded in the distance and the four pals recognized the tune- taps. The barracks door was thrown open and in walked PO Abbott, "Lights out, boots and knock off that chatter. You've got a big day tomorrow. Reveille is at zero-five-thirty."

Then tranquillity reined. All was quiet except for a few of the men snoring and, a few bunks down, a young lad was uncontrollably sobbing. Sean thought that it was probably his first time away from home. Poor kid.

Abbott was right. At five-thirty the bugle sounded reveille, the barracks door flew open and Abbott flew down the corridor with what appeared to be a baseball bat in his hand, all the while banging on a GI (galvanized iron) can cover. Through the horrendous ear-splitting din Abbott's voice sounded vehemently, "Up and at em, boots. Drop your cocks and grab your sox. Roll out. You've got five minutes to get into your undress blues and fall out on the grinder. And don't forget to put on your boots."

Pandemonium was the order of the day, but the boots knew that what Abbott said was what Abbott meant. It didn't take them as long this time to form up and be ready for the next instructions. "Listen up," he bawled, "We're going to have ourselves a little run just to make sure you're awake. Form up in a column of fours, double time. Move out."

Around and around they went. They were in four to a column all right, but it was a very uneven and disoriented group that jogged, stumbling and even occasionally falling, around that dreadful track at that dreadful time of the morning. It wasn't even light out yet. For what seemed like an eternity, the command to halt finally came. Eighty men stood there bending slightly forward with their hands on their knees, wheezing and grasping for breath. Obviously many of them were terribly out of shape.

Abbott stood at the head of the half-dead column, hands on hips and head shaking in mortification. Then he addressed them, "Awright boots, next you're goin' in and clean the barracks. If everything is nice and shipshape and your bunks are nice and neat so's I can bounce a coin off the blanket, we'll fall in out here again and march over to the mess hall for some breakfast. We're gonna have beans and johnnycake. Today's Wednesday and every ship in this Navy has beans and johnnycake for morning chow every Wednesday and Sunday. But, remember nobody eats 'til I say the barracks are squared away. Move out."

Needless to say the boots of Baker Company had a late breakfast that summer morning, but as Abbott made them understand, they would enjoy it all the more.

The rest of the day, like many more days to come, was spent on the grinder learning the fundamentals of close-order drilling. They had been joined by two other Petty Officers, which greatly accelerated their rate of learning and, toward late afternoon, they were beginning to look like an equilateral formation. Of course Abbott wouldn't let them know that. Two more days of drilling and loud exclamations by Abbott and the other PO's followed. Occasionally the Chief would drop in and give them a few words of encouragement or just stand to the side out on the grinder watching their progress. Finally, a miracle happened. When they had finished on Thursday and were ready to march to the mess hall, the Chief came strutting along and asked Abbott how these miserable bunch of boots were getting along. The response from Abbott amazed the entire company, "Chief, this company is the best one we've had the privilege of baby-sitting yet."

"Well, god-damn it, Abbott," voiced Chief Kane, "We'll just have to give them some extra privileges, won't we. Tomorrow they're going to get their indoctrination interview and that'll take quite a while. After that we'll hold field day and clean up this damn joint. Then the rest of the day they can do as they damn please, within reason, that is."

The following morning the future mariners dutifully lined up in alphabetical order, as they would hundreds of times in the years to come. There was a boot in the company named Zeller who could look forward to being last in line to get paid and all the other unforeseeable phenomena that governs a sailor's life. But today each and every boot was to see an officer who would tell each man what the Navy expected of him and what he could expect from the Navy. This was his chance to air his troubles and state his wants from Uncle Sam's naval service.

It went well. It took all morning, but there did not seem to be any particularly serious complaints outside of the usual trivial gripes, like the hardness of the mattresses or the sparseness of the portions of food. All in all the officers that conducted the interviews reported favorable results.

One such officer, a Lieutenant Tucker, made his presentation to his superior, in the company of Chief Kane, in the following manner, "Sir, I've never seen such an attitude in a company as this group of men has displayed. It's phenomenal, sir. What we've got here is that there are four guys who hang around together all the time. These four guys have inspired the entire company. The reason the four of them get along so good is that they all have the same attitude. They come from different backgrounds and have nothing in common, but it seems they're all in the Navy because they want to be. That's the one thing they have in common. This positive attitude toward the Navy and this boot camp has rubbed off on the rest of the men. You can be proud of this company, Commander."

Lieutenant Commander Rodgers presented a slight smile. To have a company under his command like this one was going to be a feather in his cap. He turned to Chief Kane and asked, "What do you think, Chief?"

Chief Kane also grinned, "Mr. Tucker is right, sir. It's an unusual company and those four boots deserve a lot of the credit."

Anything else to add to your report, Lieutenant?" inquired LCDR Rodgers.

"Oh, just the usual little jocular responses to my questions," LT Tucker began, "Like, when I asked them if they masturbated, one guy said, 'Just after intercourse,' and another guy said 'Just before intercourse.' You know how it goes, sir. Ninety percent of them admitted that they did and the rest are liars."

The days at boot camp seemed to fly by, mostly because Chief Kane kept the apprentice sailors busy. In between drilling, the company attended several classes that were intended to ready them for life at sea. At one such seminar the boots were informed about Navy traditions. They soon found out that the service is steeped in that subject. To begin with, they found out what their dress-blue uniform means and why sailors are called "tars." It all revolves around the British Navy and goes back to the days of sail. In those archaic days sailors let their hair grow and kept it braided so as not to be a nuisance. To keep these tresses in place they coated them with tar, hence these men were nicknamed "tars."

As regards the uniform; the flap that hangs at the back of the jumper had a practical purpose. It served to keep the fore mentioned tar from the seafarer's clothing. On that flap there are three white stripes. These had been added to commemorate Lord Nelson's three great sea victories; the Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. The black neckerchief that is worn under the collar is to show mourning for Lord Nelson's death. Over the left breast is a small pocket trimmed in black cord. This was first sewn onto their pockets by Colonial sailors to mark the occasion when America's national ensign was first hoisted on a man-of-war, the Alfred commanded by John Paul Jones during the Revolutionary War. The flap on the front of the bell-bottom trousers is embellished with thirteen buttons, which quite naturally stand for the first thirteen original states. Why bell-bottoms? They also go back to the old sailing ship days. A sailor's trousers were cut this way so that the bottoms of their pants could be turned up once onto their thighs, facilitating easier and safer maneuvering when they were required to go aloft up the shrouds to reef sails or to perform other tasks. This uniform has not changed one iota since those ancient eras.

There are numerous traditional observances that are still prevalent in today's Navy. Most of them have to do with respect shown to our national colors and naval officers. Saluting is a good example. A Navy man never

salutes when he is uncovered (not wearing a hat) or sitting down and an officer must always return the salute. Winners of the Congressional Medal of Honor rate a salute from everybody, enlisted or officer, while he is wearing that medal. Consequently, most Congressional Medals of Honor are awarded posthumously. Nobody aboard ship is allowed to whistle except the Captain. The only whistle you hear aboard ship is that of the boatswain's pipe. The Captain is the only one who paces the deck athwart ships, that is, from side to side. Anybody else can only pace, if he must, from bow to stern. You always wear your white hat squared just over your eyebrows, never sitting loosely on the back of your head. When you go ashore on liberty you are expected to adhere to these regulations. The tradition is that only those who have sailed around Cape Horn may wear their cap on the back of their head. If you wear your hat haphazardly the Shore Patrol will ask you, "Have you been around the Horn, Sailor?" You had better square your hat or he will run you in.

The mess hall has its own set of rules. Everybody stands in line to get his chow. The only people who can go to the head of the chow line are First Class Petty Officers. Chief Petty Officers have their own exclusive quarters. On a lot of ships you will see a table with a sign over it, "Plank owners only." That table is reserved for those who were on board when the ship was commissioned. By all means, don't sit at that table or you will be quickly castigated. Over the years sailors have invented their own mess hall language. For example; milk is cow, butter is cow grease, salt is sand, pepper is fly specks, catsup is red lead, mustard is baby shit, creamed hamburger on toast is shit on a shingle, chipped beef on toast is foreskins on a raft, coffee is joe (that is short for jamoke) and it goes on and on. Speaking of joe; coffee is the mainstay of the Navy. Sailors live on coffee. Another custom you must remember is that when a shipmate asks to have something passed and it goes by you, you may take the liberty to help yourself as it goes by. By all means, don't do this. Pass it on and then ask for it to be passed to you or you again will feel the wrath of your shipmates.

One day they were issued .30 caliber rifles, the model 1903 Springfield bolt-action. They were not only shown how to use the weapon, but also how to break it down and put it back together. They were taken out onto the firing range and got to fire their rifles at targets. A Chief Gunner's Mate demonstrated the Navy standard side arm, the Colt .45 caliber automatic pistol.

The next two days were spent learning the manual of arms. Then it was back to the grinder, but this time it was while shouldering their newly

found toys. Abbott noticed that there was more spring to their gait and reasoned that they enjoyed marching in close-order drill more when accompanied by this killing piece. They were very adamantly instructed that they should never call their weapon a gun. It is a rifle or piece; guns were that heavy caliber ordnance found on men-of war or fighting ships.

More classes. Along with the knowledge bestowed upon them from Pete Lubanski, they were quick learners when it came to being educated on the various subjects that were presented to them by petty officers and commissioned officers. First aid was new to everyone, even Pete, but when it came time to gain information about all the different type of ships of the Navy, their attention was riveted to the instructor.

"Now, here we have it," a blond haired Ensign began, "Today you're going to learn about the ships of the Navy, their various types and how they are named and designated. First we have capital ships, the big ones. Battleships are the mainstay of the fleet. They have the biggest guns of any ship afloat and carry a crew of many hundred men. They are named after states of the union, like the USS Pennsylvania. They, like all our ships, are given letters. In the case of a battleship it is BB. Those letters are followed by a number which designates which ship she is. They're numbered in the order that they were built. So, the Pennsylvania is BB38. Got it?"

There were several nods of approval by the audience, so the instructor turned on a slide projector and a photograph appeared on the screen. It was obvious to all those present that it was a battleship and someone went, "Wow!" It was apparent that the sailors were impressed by the ship's size and armament.

Then a new slide came on the screen and the young officer asked, "Who can tell me what kind of ship this is?"

Many voices answered in unison, "Aircraft Carrier."

"Good," announced the Ensign, "Anything pertaining to aviation carries the letter V. An aircraft carrier is a CV. Notice the number 3 on her superstructure. That means she is the CV 3, in this case the USS Saratoga. Carriers are sometimes called flat-tops and they too carry a large crew. They are named after famous battles or warships. The Saratoga and Lexington are sister ships and they are named after two famous battles of the revolution. Their job is to take warplanes to the far reaches of the earth. Our leaders think that aircraft carriers will take a very important part in the next war.

'Next we have a heavy cruiser, the USS Baltimore. Obviously cruisers are named after cities. The Baltimore is a heavy cruiser, the CA68. We also have light cruisers, CL's. This is the USS Brooklyn, CL40. Cruisers are smaller than battleships, some times called wagons, and they carry smaller guns and are faster.

The Ensign looked around to see if he had the attention of his charges and then continued, "Now we come to destroyers. They're named after famous naval heroes. Here's one, the USS Dewey, DD349, named after the famous hero of the Spanish-American War, Admiral Dewey. Destroyers, called tin cans or cans for short, are very speedy ships used for escort duty and submarine warfare. They are equipped with sonar detection gear and depth charge racks that are used against submarines. Subs are called boats by their crews. Incidentally, do you know the difference between a ship and a boat?"

With this question, Pete Lubanski was quick to raise his hand, "Yes, sir. According to my old man, who was a CPO, a boat is a vessel that can be hoisted aboard a ship."

The boyish Ensign was quick to commend Pete, "You're absolutely right, sailor."

The teacher continued, "Speaking of submarines; they are named after fish, like the USS Bluefish DD222. Then we have mine sweepers which are named after birds; for example, the USS Skylark, AM63. And now for the various auxiliary vessels. The USS Solace is a hospital ship, AH5. AK's are cargo ships like USS Saturn, AK49. All cargo ships are named after stars or constellations. There's attack cargo ships. Here's the USS Athena AKA9 and this is the USS Castor AKS1. She's a general stores issue ship.

"Incidentally, an old-time Chief told me the other day why they call a ship a she. He said it's because they're always all painted up pretty-like, when they get in a fight they make a lot of noise and they've always got a sailor on them."

The response to this was barely a snicker.

"Here's an oiler, the USS Cimarron, AO22. They deliver fuel to the ships in the fleet. Oilers or tankers are named for rivers, as you can guess." AP's are troop transports, AR's are repair ships, AS is for submarine tenders, AV means seaplane tender and that's just about it.

"Now that you've seen them all, what kind of ship do any of you guys think you'd like to serve on?"

Angelo Mustari was on his feet for this one, "Sir, us four guys don't care what kind of a ship it is just so's we can be together. If you can get us on the same ship, we don't care if it's a battleship or a tugboat. OK?"

The reply from the Ensign was a sincere one, "Sailor, it's not up to me and frankly the Navy doesn't make promises. The Navy sends you to wherever you can best serve the Navy and where you're needed. You might talk to your Company Commander though, but I don't think he could do anything for you. OK?"

Angelo said, "I'll do just that, sir."

"Class dismissed."

Learning the basics of becoming a sailor in Uncle Sam's Navy tends to bring out the best and sometimes the worse in young men. As we have seen, the camaraderie that developed between our four messmates tended to sharpen their desire to become accomplished followers of the seafaring trade. Along with the amateur tutoring by the "Polish Professor," Pete Lubanski, who had earned that nickname because of his knowledge of Navy lore bequeathed to him by his salty father, the quartet shaped up into a formidable group of students. However, on the opposite side of the ledger there was a fellow called Moose, because of his muscular build and statuesque body. It was a probability that Moose got tired of being badgered by Petty Officer Abbott and, like all bullies, had to take it out on someone, anyone that was smaller than himself.

The episode was the aftermath of an occurrence that took place at the camp indoor swimming pool. The entire company had lined up alongside the pool in the area of a platform that arose eight or nine feet above the water. The appearance of this array of naked bodies was not unlike the same gathering that was first observed when they had arrived at the training station. The absence of obesity was noticeable indeed. Could it be that the alteration from boys to men had taken place?

The instructor stationed on the top of the menacing stand explained the technique for going over the side when the order would be given to abandon ship. He demonstrated how to hold the collar of a life jacket down with the right hand so that it wouldn't snap your neck when you hit the water. But, it was only a simulation because nobody present had a life jacket on, or anything else for that matter. Next, he showed how the shipboard evacuee would hold his private parts with his left hand to protect them when the surface of the sea was broken. Then it was just a case of stepping off the side of the ship; in this case, the seemingly 100-foot structure.

When they had first entered the pool area the boots noticed several long poles with padding on the ends lying about the projecting edge of the pool. Also, in attendance were a number of swimsuit clad sailors. Their use soon became apparent. As each man stepped up, the instructor repeated last-minute instructions. Then, one by one each man stepped off the platform into the pool and swam about. Every once in a while one man would hesitate and the instructor then shoved the would-be swimmer off the platform. Immediately, one of the men alongside the pool jammed a padded pole directly at the thrashing person who obviously couldn't swim. There was a great deal of flailing of arms and legs and much gulping of both water and air as the hapless individual struggled to stay afloat and finally in desperation grabbed the pole that was thrust at him. Then, the unfortunate creature was dragged over to the edge of the pool and was helped out of the water onto the safety of the tiled floorboard.

As Sean Maloney climbed up the ladder to the level of the structure he was directly behind "the kid." That was the youngster who had periodically wept and the boots had pinned the moniker on him, the kid. Sean noticed that the kid was almost in tears at that moment and then he heard him say, "I can't swim, sir." The instructor paid the kid no heed; he just gave him the customary push and grinned obtrusively. Almost immediately Sean repeated the act. This time it was the surprised instructor who got shoved into the water and right behind him was Sean, who followed him into the pool. They both surfaced simultaneously and Sean was heard to exclaim to the off guard instructor, "You forgot to grab your nuts."

That same afternoon Sean found himself standing at attention before the desk of the Battalion Commander, Chief Warrant Officer Callahan. He tried not to look ashamed or by the same token defiant. Sean new he had committed a grave error, but at the same time he wasn't the least bit sorry for what he did. He felt the act had been justified because he really felt sorry for the kid. He had ever since their tenure in boot camp began and the kid was often heard crying to himself, but lately the kid wasn't sobbing as often.

"Well," the chisel-faced CWO began, "Maloney, isn't it? Do you realize what a serious offence it is to shove a Petty Officer into the swimming pool? Was it an accident?"

Sean wondered why the Officers, Chiefs and Petty Officers always called him by his last name. Why couldn't they call him by his first name or even his nickname that the boots had given him, Irish? He decided to tell this officer the truth, "No sir. It was not an accident."

"You mean you deliberately pushed the Petty Officer into the pool?" questioned Mr. Callahan.

"Yes, sir."

"Why, for Christ's sake?"

"Well, sir, I felt sorry for the kid. He couldn't swim and that Petty Officer seemed to relish shoving the poor kid into the pool to almost drown."

"But, sailor, that's the way we do things in this man's Navy."

"I know that, sir, but I just thought that Petty Officer should have a taste of his own medicine," was all Sean could think of to say and he thought well, here's the end of my Navy career.

There was a possibility that a slight grin came to that weather-beaten countenance and then CWO Callahan motioned with a hand that seemed to curl up as if it had handled too many lines aboard too many ships, "Stand easy, Maloney. Have a seat."

Sean plopped down in a leather-covered chair and waited for the worst that this white-haired officer could dish out. Mr. Callahan looked the quivering boot square in the eye and started in, "Maloney, I'm

disappointed in you because you've got off to such a good start in the Navy. I think you would make one helluva good sailor, but you've got to get it through your head that Petty Officers are not made because of their good looks. They've earned their promotion. They've also earned all the respect you can give them. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you ever do anything like this again I'll personally kick your fucking ass. Now get the hell out of here and rejoin your company. Dismissed."

Sean jumped to his feet, came to a perfect example of a disciplined sailor at attention and delivered a peerless mariner's salute, "Thank you, sir. It won't happen again sir."

Now it was Sean's turn to permit a slight grin to cross his face and he marched steadfastly out of the officer's office convinced that he had just been in the company of a real naval officer.

A few evenings later the four pals sat around two of their adjoining bunks while the Polish Professor was going over the proper way to tie a bowline. What he was trying to teach them was the seaman's way to tie the knot, not the Boy Scout way that was generally acceptable in the civilian culture; the fallacy of something about a rabbit going around a tree and into a hole, or some such thing. Pete was explaining how sailors "bend the knot on a bite." It wasn't very easy to get the point across."

The three men were staring at Pete's hands and trying to concentrate on the technique of tying the knot when Mike Thomas, whom the boys had given the nickname of Silent Night because of his quiet demeanor, happened to glance at a couple of guys a short ways away. He then nudged Sean on the arm and nodded his head in the direction of the scene that was taking place and Sean said, "What is it, Mike?"

"Look at that. Moose is picking on the kid again."

In a split second Sean was on his feet having sized up the situation immediately. He thrust out his chest challengingly and strode over to the two in question, "Leave the kid alone, Moose."

Moose swung around instantly, a threatening glare on his face, "What's it to you, Irish?"

"I just don't like to see you picking on the kid, that's all. He's a good kid, so leave him alone. OK?"

Moose's neck veins began to bulge out, a sure sign of uncontrollable anger, "I was just havin' a little fun with the kid. Mind your own fuckin' business, Irish."

Sean scratched his chin a little bit, kind of grinned a little bit and answered Moose, "I can't do that, Moose."

"Look," Moose blurted out, "Get off my back or I'll punch your lights out."

It was obvious to those in the vicinity that Moose was spoiling for a fight, but Sean seemed to the onlookers to be completely at ease and in control of his thought processes, "Tell you what, Moose. The Chief said that Saturday night we're gonna have some boxing matches and he wondered if anybody wanted to fight. Why don't you and I get in the ring to settle this. OK?"

"Why you little shit, replied Moose, "I'd kill you but if you've got the guts, I'll see you in the ring."

"You're on," said Sean and with a gentle hand on the kid's shoulder, said, "C'mon, Kid. Let's go over to my bunk and good old Pete will teach you how to tie some knots."

So, the pair joined the group by their bunks and Mike Thomas addressed Sean, "Are you nuts, Sean? We heard the argument between you and Moose. You can't fight him. He's got 50 pounds on you. What'd you do that for?"

"Oh, I dunno, Mike," replied Sean, "I just couldn't stand to see him pick on the kid."

"He'll kill you," interjected Angelo, "He's too big for you. Let me fight the son-of-a-bitch."

"Nah, it's my fight," said Sean, "I can handle the bastard. Say, kid, let Pete show you how to tie a bowline the Navy way."

With this interruption of the problem at hand, Pete resumed his course in knot tying. After a few basic instructions for the kid's sake, Pete doubled the line and proceeded to tie a bowline on a bight, another variation of the popular sailor's bowline, and then he asked, "Did you ever see a dragon bowline?"

A chorus of head shaking and shoulder shrugging motivated Pete to further demonstrate his prowess in seamanship. He deftly began tying the standard bowline and then bent over and dragged it over the deck of the barracks to the accompaniment of guffaws and elbow nudging. "There," he said, "That's a draggin' bowline."

Abruptly, Sean queried of the kid, "Kid, why did you join the Navy, anyhow?"

The kid answered, "To get away from my father. He was always drunk and beat me any time he felt like doing something. Just for kicks, I guess. Sean, you don't have to fight Moose for me."

"Aw, I don't mind, kid."

Saturday night rolled around and so did the rumors that there was going to be a grudge fight. Nothing stimulates the interest of young men more than the possibility of seeing two of their peers in mortal combat in a boxing ring. The fact that the fisticuffs that the entire battalion was going to witness would be between men who had had a serious disagreement made it all more the more exciting. This was called a grudge fight.

The stage was set. At first Chief Petty Officer Kane disallowed the fight between Moose and Sean because of the difference in their sizes, but somehow the Chief was convinced it should go on when he heard about how Sean had gone to the defense of the kid. Sean's standing up against a fellow boot half again his weight had impressed the Chief and he had a gut feeling that, because of Sean's impassive demeanor, he might fool his many critics. Maybe, just maybe, Sean would be able to take care of himself. The Chief, an old boxer himself, had always prophesied that one has nothing to fear from the man that boasts about how he would massacre you. It's those quiet ones you have to look out for. In any event, the battle was a "go." Because of the publicity that was generated, the decision was made to have the "grudge fight" last or the main event.

The preliminary bouts went off very nicely. The boots and the permanent company at the boot camp seemed to enjoy them and there was plenty of clamorous shouting for the favorites of certain companies. However, there was no doubt about what the audience was anxiously waiting to see: the famous Moose versus Irish grudge fight.

This was it. The two fighters came striding down the aisle clad in their robes of office and their hands wearing the over-sized gloves so that nobody would get seriously maimed. As was befitting of their respective personalities, Moose skipped along gingerly, poking at the air in a mock display of shadow boxing and Sean was his usual phlegmatic self, just casually loping down the passageway and nodding right and left to the cheers of the crowd. When he came to the area where two of his pals were sitting in the front row, he stopped momentarily and tapped them on the shoulder in a friendly gesture. When he turned toward his corner of the ring, Mike was heard to whisper, "Poor Sean."

Sean climbed into the ring and into his assigned corner. He was greeted there by his second, Angelo Mustari, who had volunteered to act in that capacity. The corner contained all the necessary equipment to succor a boxer. There was the accustomed bucket, a bottle of water, a towel and a few pieces of medical appointments: band-aids and styptics, which had been supplied to Angelo by a medical officer.

Now the referee called the combatants to the center of the ring. Sean noticed that it was one of the Chiefs he had seen around the base. That was good, he liked him. He would be fair. The referee gave them their instructions about hitting below the belt, no gouging, etc. and then motioned the fighters to their corners and said, "Come out fighting and may the best man win." This was it.

The bell rang. Some thought it was the knoll of death. Sean stepped out toward the center of the ring but he never got there. Moose came at a running charge toward him, both fists swinging like a madman. Sean

thought, this bozo fights like a girl, poking at the air in a downward motion. Sean's left went out in the classic jab blow and he moved to his left to throw Moose off balance. He just kept pushing that left out in a steady staccato of straight punches into Moose's face. He knew the big man was right handed and if Sean kept moving to his left, jabbing, bobbing and weaving, moose would soon get fatigued. Sure enough, Moose took a step backward and dropped his hands just a little. Sean knew what to do. He dropped his left, keeping his right in the protective position, and swung the left at moose's mid-section. Moose instinctively dropped both hands to protect his stomach and Sean hooked a left to Moose's jaw. This set up the proper range and Sean followed with a right cross right to the button, the old one-two. That was the last thing Moose remembered, the clicking bone against bone feeling below his left cheek and it was all over. The referee didn't even bother to count Moose out.

Later that night, back in the barracks, Mike Thomas said to Sean, "Where did you learn to box like that?"

"Well," answered Sean, "My dad got me started boxing. He was a pro when he was young and he taught me a few things. Then he hooked me up with a boxing manager and I fought all through high school, in smokers mostly. My manager was an old-time fighter name of Rocky Farley and he had what they called a stable of fighters. And we fought in firehouses and halls at smokers and such and could pick up a few bucks. Then, if there was a local good-old-boy, we could pick up a little extra just to make him look good."

The conversation got interrupted when Moose appeared on the scene. "Boy, you sure can fight, Irish. Here's my hand on it."

Sean stood up and grasped the massive hand in a firm grip. Then Moose announced, "I'm sorry, Irish. I won't pick on the kid no more."

The two boots just stood there for a moment, shaking hands, and everybody thought, there is the start of a lifetime friendship.

The days at boot camp dragged on but the Navy saw to it that the future sailors were not bored. In between marching and classroom courses came service week, where all the boots were assigned areas and projects to exercise their cleaning abilities. Some served in the mess hall, helping the cooks or running the dishwashing machines. Others served in the chow line dishing out the victuals to the other boots and personnel stationed at the base. The lucky ones got easy cleaning tasks or painting assignments. The Petty Officers gave out the plush jobs to the best students and, of course, our four buddies reaped the harvest of these details.

Angelo Mustari was assigned to the task of keeping the Chief's Quarters shipshape and he didn't mind it at all. It gave him the chance to

see how the upper echelon of the enlisted ranks lived. He soon showed the station Chiefs the proper way to keep their quarters neat and tidy. He was bent on making sure they were kept happy as far as their living conditions were concerned. They no sooner were out of their bunks in the morning when Angelo had their beds made up nice and seaman like and before they were dressed their "cup of joe" was right beside them. He was careful not to wash their favorite coffee mug, for that was a mortal sin to ruin a Chief's pet "joe cup" and could cause eternal damnation.

Early one summer morning Angelo was sweeping up the Chief's quarters when Chief Kane came striding in dressed in his newly pressed khakis, plumped down in a chair by the table, pulled a paperback out of his pocket and began to read. Angelo thought, this is my big chance. He's alone. Ange took off his white cap and tried to act humble, holding the hat between his hands in Sunday hymn book fashion, "Chief, could I bother you for a minute?"

"You gotta sweep here, Mustari?" replied the old Chief.

"No, Chief. I'd just like to talk to you about something, that's all. It would only take a minute." Angelo was a little nervous but he decided to go ahead with his request.

Chief Kane presented an expression that seemed to mean, don't bother me, kid. But then he thought more about it and recalled that he had a reputation for always being there for these kids, "Sure, Mustari, what is it? Sit down and tell me all about it. What's on your mind?"

To be invited to sit down with a Chief at the Chief's table was an unheard of honor and the solicitation didn't help to calm Angelo's uneasy composure. "Well, Chief, us four guys--you know, us guys that hang around together--thought that you being the greatest Chief in the Navy could use your vast influence to do something for us."

"Yeah, Mustari, I know all about you four guys. Spit it out. What can I do for you?" the Chief tried to act compassionate and yet still maintain his tough guy attitude.

Angelo cleared his throat, wiggled in the chair a little bit and "spat it out," as the Chief had put it, "Well, Chief, I thu-"

"And don't give me that greatest Chief shit. Flattery won't get you nowhere." Exclaimed the Chief.

"OK," remarked Angelo, now a bit more at ease, "If you could arrange for us four guys to get on the same ship, you'd sure make four sailors awful happy and we'd be one hell of a team. I think any ship would be glad to have us in her crew and we'd do a great job for the Navy. There," Angelo lightly tapped his fist on the table for emphasis, "What do ya say, Chief?"

The Chief thought, I like this kid, but he had to level with him, "In the first place, don't call yourselves sailors. You're not even out of boot camp

yet, let alone havin' any sea duty," But then he displayed his more benevolent demeanor, "I think all four of you guys are going to make good sailors and I'd sure like to see you all stick together, but that's not the way the Navy works. The Navy puts their men where they'll best serve the country and it's not our job to try and tell the top boys how to do their job. You've got about as much chance of getting on the same ship as I have of making Admiral. I'm sorry, Mustari, but that's the way it is."

"Just thought I'd ask," said Angelo, "Thanks anyway, Chief."

Angelo stood up, obviously dismissed, and started to continue his sweeping, but then suddenly turned again toward the Chief who was following his movements with mournfulness, and blurted out, "You're still the greatest Chief in the Navy."

Then he went about his chores.

As the weeks rolled by less and less time was dedicated to drilling and physical fitness. The hours were spent in classroom work learning the finer points of Navy routine. Seminars were conducted in naval organization; that is, the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary of the Navy, through Admirals and down to the lowest seamen. The various bureaus that comprised the naval structure were discussed along with their functions. Among these were the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Bureau of Ships, Bureau of Ordnance, Bureau of Yards and Docks, Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, Bureau of Aeronautics and the Office of the Judge Advocate General. They also found out that the United States Marine Corps was a part of the Navy.

A break in their routine occurred when they were introduced to chemical warfare. This involved a practical demonstration of poisonous gas and the boots took an active part in an experiment to show the effectiveness of tear gas. They were made to take off their gas masks to experience its effect and many of them succumbed to the harmful fumes, but they survived, although they didn't know why at the time.

The men's interest peeked when they were briefed on ship organization. They learned about the Watch, Quarter and Station Bill and how to find out what their duties were during each emergency, either in the form of a drill or the real thing. These emergencies include General Quarters or Battle Stations, Man Overboard, Fire, Collision and Abandon Ship. The Watch, Quarter and Station Bill also tells one where his duties lie when the ship is coming in or out of port, is going to dock or anchor.

Some classes provided films, much to the enjoyment of everybody for it was not only a relief from an instructor's boring monologue, it also prompted catcalls and witticisms. Other seminars touched briefly on such subjects as aircraft identification, gunnery, navigation, signaling and the

handling of small boats. The object of boot camp is more of a preparatory training curriculum, not meant to be the intense development of a seafaring man. Most seasoned sailors will tell you that it takes years to produce an American bluejacket.

Every boot in the company knew that the time was drawing close when their sojourn at boot camp was nearing an end. Every evening in the barracks the conversation was about what was going to happen after graduation from training station. First, was the graduation and who would be there to see them ceremoniously terminate their stay at this asylum of apprenticeship. Second, they knew they would get a short boot leave and that topic resulted in various announcements about where and how they would spend their escape into freedom. Quite a few professed the desire to get drunk, some stated that they were going to sleep for the entire leave period and still others were anxious for the company of a pretty girl. This last allegation resulted in assertions about sexual prowess that reverted back to the reputation all sailors enjoy. These young men thought they might as well act like sailors. Third, was the anticipation of what ship would be their next assignment? They understood that they would first go to OGU (outgoing unit), but the question still remained, would it be a battleship, a destroyer, or what?

Angelo was one who said he was going to get "falling down drunk," Sean piped up that he was going to look up an old high school sweetheart, Pete was going to sleep until noon and then chew the fat with his father and Mike, he just shrugged his shoulders. When interrogated further he said, "I really don't know."

The kid happened to be in the vicinity so Sean, always the kid's mentor, said, "What're you gonna do, kid?"

The kid imitated Mike by shrugging his shoulder and then replied, "I don't wanna go home, so I think I'll hang around the boot camp. I like the chow here."

"Why did you join the Navy anyway, kid?" asked Sean on a whim.

The kid hung his head like he usually did when he was requested to give information and sheepishly answered, "To get away from my old man. He's always drunk and he beats me all the time, just because he wants to."

Silence permeated the air. They all thought, poor kid.

"Rope-yard Sunday." In Navy lingo, that is a Saturday that is set aside to perform all the picky little jobs, like splicing some "small stuff" or doing some "fancy work." Fancy-work is the braiding that encircles certain rails or stanchions (posts to a landlubber) that gives them a more decorative

and nautical look. The very artsy pull-cord on the ship's bell is a good example of fancy-work. It is made up of "turk's heads" and straight braiding and is the pride and joy of a conscientious Bosun's Mate. Any other picayune tasks are usually done on rope-yarn Sunday, including personal neatness tasks.

This is what we find our four favorite boots doing just two days before graduation. Sailors customarily do not mind rope-yarn Sunday for it gives them a chance to "shoot the breeze" while they are doing a little fussing around. The striplings were using their time shining shoes and generally getting all their clothing in ship-shape condition.

Then on a sudden the barracks door flew open and in strode Chief Petty Officer Kane. Close on his heels was Petty Officer Abbott. The two walked directly to the bunks occupied by the four stalwarts and the Chief exclaimed in an authoritative articulation, "You four," pointing an accusing finger in their direction, "In the office, on the double."

Without another word, the Chief did a quick about face and charged into the office, followed by four meekly acting boots who were no doubt thinking, what did we do now?

After everybody was settled in the office with the door closed, the Chief, seated in his chair of superiority behind his desk of superiority, spoke softly for the first time that day, "Well, I've got good news and I've got bad news. Which do you want first?"

There were shrugs of the shoulders and askance glances toward neighbors, but no verbal responses so the Chief continued, "All right, I'll give you the good news first. That'll relieve the tension for a little while. Well, I've got all four of you guys assigned to the same ship."

The mood quickly changed. Now there were elbow nudges of approval and gleaming smiles that fairly lit up the room

"She's a new ship the Navy has just taken over from a merchant steamship line. She's been completely remodeled to suit the Navy's needs and guns have been installed on her. She's a supply ship by the name of Venus."

The Chief paused for effect and then Angelo took a step forward, "Chief, begging your pardon, isn't Venus the name of that dame that hasn't got any arms? Yeah, Venus de Mario. That's it."

"Milo," the Chief replied, "Venus de Milo, you idiot. It's also a planet. You should know that they name supply ships after heavenly bodies. So what?"

"A ship named after a dame?" Angelo responded, "That doesn't sound right, but if we're gonna be in the same crew, what's the difference?"

"Mind if I go on?" the Chief was obviously perplexed at Angelo's remark, "Now the bad news. She's in the Brooklyn Navy Yard getting ready for her shakedown cruise. She's not even in commission yet and they're going to have the commissioning ceremony in a few days and then

she's going to be shoving off so they need you guys right away. That means you won't get boot leave and you'll miss the graduation from boot camp. Well, what do you say? Do you wanna be shipmates or not?"

Once again there were sideways gesture but the glints in their eyes indicated what they were thinking. Then Pete removed any doubts by remarking, "Hell, Chief, we'll go. The chance to stay together won't come up again, will it?"

"That's for sure," the Chief answered. "Now, here's the scoop. You gotta get movin'. You gotta get your seabags packed and catch a train to Brooklyn right away. The yeoman is typing up your orders as we speak.

"There's one more thing. They need six men right away, so I'm sending the kid and Moose with you. I'm sending the kid so you can take care of him, especially you, Maloney. Also, the reason I'm sending Moose is so you can keep an eye on him. Both of those guys need someone to watch over 'em and, between the four of you, you can keep them straight. Understood?"

Almost in unison, the answer was, "Sure, Chief."

Angelo piped up, "Chief, we want to thank you for all you've done for us."

"Stow it," was all the Chief said and then added, "Get your asses moving if you want to make that train."

The old Chief got up, indicating they were dismissed, but then paused and broke all protocol, "Good luck, you guys."

There was much ado while packing their sea bags and the barracks reeked with conversation and congratulatory hand shaking. Then they were gone. The four shipmates were on their way to go to sea and to see the world---maybe.

CHAPTER 2 WELCOME ABOARD

The four shipmates congregated on the dock in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and then began slowly walking toward the Venus. As they strode toward the gangway, they scrutinized their new home and made conversation about the ship's characteristics. Lagging behind were Moose and the kid, who were also mesmerized by the supply ship.

Angelo Mustari said, "Well, she ain't no battleship, is she?"

Sean Maloney, "She sure ain't. Hell, she looks more like some merchant steamship."

Pete Lubanski, "But, look guys. Look at those guns on the bow and stern and I can see machine guns on the bridge. What d'ya say? Shall we go aboard?"

Mike Thomas, "Why not?"

The four men, followed by the kid and Moose, climbed the gangway that seemed more like a precipitous mountain to these landlubbers, fresh out of boot camp. When they reached the quarterdeck they were confronted by an officer in freshly pressed khakis with a spyglass tucked under his arm. Boot camp had taught them he was the Officer of the Deck and that they were required to face aft, salute the colors, then salute the officer and ask his permission to come aboard. They all did this in grand military style. Pete was the first to perform this ritual because he had been put in charge of the group by Chief Kane, "Permission to come aboard, sir?"

"Permission granted," was the routine reply by the Officer of the Deck, "Have you got some orders?"

Pete handed over his and the others' orders to the officer and then the Officer of the Deck turned to a seaman standing by and said, "Messenger, go get the Jimmy Legs and have him come up to the quarterdeck."

Mike turned to Pete and inquired, "Jimmy Legs?"

"That's the Master of Arms," replied Pete, "He's probably going to show us to our quarters."

Mike, "What's the Master of Arms?"

Pete, "He's the guy who's in charge of all the compartments below decks. You know, he sees that the sleeping quarters and all that are cleaned up and that everybody behaves themselves. You might say he's like a policeman, the boss down below. He's a top Petty Officer."

"Sorta like Abbott?"

"Yeah, I guess so. This must be him coming now."

Out of the hatchway appeared a short, stocky First Class Machinist's Mate, wearing undress blues. That was no doubt the "uniform of the day," which is posted daily to be worn by all hands. Undress blues is the regulation blue uniform which is minus the fancy stripes and stars on the collar and has no cuffs on the jumper, or shirt. It was noticeable that all the sailors in the vicinity were dressed in undress blues except our six new members who wore their dress blues.

The Jimmy Legs approached the men who were busy gawking at their surroundings, actually confused, but at the same time enthralled by this display of nautical environs.

"What have we got here?" queried the Jimmy Legs. "Looks like six new young uns, fresh out of boot camp. Grab your sea bags, sailors, and follow me. We'll get you stowed away and then I'll show you around the ship. Hop to it now."

A few of the men displayed a grin for it was the first time anybody had called them sailors. They hurriedly picked up their sea bags and proceeded after the Master of Arms. A couple of them stumbled over the hatch combing and Moose hit his head as they started into the passageway and then came to a stairway, called a ladder, that led below decks. The Petty Officer stepped aside at the head of the ladder and said, "After you, boys."

Mike was first in line and he hesitated as he viewed the sharply descending row of steps. He thought, how do I do this? At the bottom of the ladder was the mess hall where he could see a couple sailors sitting around and he knew he might be made a fool. But, here goes, he thought. Clumsily juggling his sea bag, which was quite heavy, he started down with his back to the yawning depths below. It wasn't easy for he couldn't

see behind him, but he finally made it to the deck. It was a slow process and he thought that it sure wouldn't do in an emergency. A muffled giggle caught his attention.

The Jimmy Legs standing at the top of the ladder did not muffle his laughter and then he threw one of the sea bags to the mess hall below and said, "Here guys, let me show you how to go down a ladder. You go down front ways like this."

He grabbed the rails, one in each hand, swung his feet out and stepped off into space. He virtually slid down the side rails with his feet merely skipping over the steps. In fact, they barely touched the steps and he arrived at the deck below in a split second.

"There," he exclaimed to the gaping faces on the deck above, "That's how an old salt does it."

The rest of the admiring group then proceeded to imitate the Master of Arms and descended the ladder one by one. It was evident that they were surprised how easy the maneuver was.

They were taken into the living quarters, which was quite spacious, and were assigned lockers. Their gear was stowed away and then the Jimmy Legs took them into the head. That is sailor talk for the bathroom. The young men looked around a bit and were quite surprised that the sit-down toilet was one long trough that looked like it could accommodate about eight men. It had movable seats placed upon it. Then Sean spied a urinal that had him baffled. It was like all the other urinals except that it had a seat built into it. He thought, what the hell is that? He noticed Angelo looking at it in dismay also. Sean thought to himself that he wasn't going to be the one to ask about it.

"OK, sailors," bellowed the Jimmy Legs, "Let's go topside and I'll give you a tour of the ship." Boy, thought Mike, it sure feels good to have someone call us sailors instead of boots.

Lieutenant LaFever happened to be glancing out the porthole of the captain's cabin at just about the time the bevy of sailors emerged from the passageway below onto the main deck. He slightly shook his head in a disgusted manner and turned toward his captain, who was sitting at his desk leafing through some personnel files known as service jackets, "Captain," the Executive Officer remarked, "Jimmy Legs is down on the well deck with new boots in tow." The idea crossed his mind that it was funny how you could always spot a boot a mile away. They just didn't have that seaman like walk. The exec, as Lieutenant Louis LaFever was casually referred to, had been invited into the captain's cabin to discuss the upcoming commissioning ceremony and the immediate future of the ship's agenda. He walked over and faced his captain, Lieutenant Commander William "Willie" Willer.

LTCDR Willer was a United States Naval Academy graduate, as was his father before him, and his assignment as captain of Venus was a necessary curriculum to be reckoned with on his way up the promotion ladder. This experience step was one of many to come that would bring him closer to flag rank. Flag rank is Rear Admiral and above, so called on account of that rank being one that warrants the distinction of having a blue flag with appropriate number of white stars displayed on occasions. A flag officer has this symbol of his office exhibited on his staff car and on the ship to which he is attached. Venus' captain wasn't exactly thrilled with getting command of a supply ship, but as was his customary intention, he would give the project his best effort. He was duty bound to make his father, Rear Admiral William Willer Sr., substantially proud.

LT LaFever, on the other hand, was the product of the enlisted ranks. He had joined the Navy at the age of seventeen and dedicated himself to his chosen profession through the World War and beyond. He worked hard and rose to the rank of Chief Quartermaster and eventually received an Ensign's commission. Now at the age of 40 he was second in command of USS Venus. He was much older than his captain, but the two enjoyed a good rapport for they had served together before.

"Sit down, Louis, and I'll order us a cup of coffee," said the captain, "I've been going over the service records of the new boots who just reported aboard. Four of them got out standing marks in boot camp and received good reports from their Company Commander. I think they're going to make good sailors. Kind of keep an eye on them, will you, Louis?"

"Aye, aye, sir. We are going to need some strikers in the other divisions," replied the Exec, "I'll keep them in mind."

The Executive Officer was referring to the other divisions besides the deck force where just about everybody is assigned when they arrive aboard ship from boot camp. A striker is the nautical equivalent of an apprentice in civilian life. This is how a sailor learns a more sophisticated function, as opposed to the rigorous routine of the deck divisions.

The captain spoke again as he nodded to his Mess Attendant who had just entered the cabin, indicating they were ready for some coffee, "One of the new men, a Michael Thomas, shows an aptitude, according to his Chief, for mechanics. So, let's get him into the Engineering Force. OK?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And now, Louis," the captain began again, "Let's talk about the immediate future. Tomorrow is the commissioning ceremony. I presume everything's ready and the ship is neat and tidy?"

"Yes, sir, I walked around the entire ship this morning and it's in shipshape condition. Also, the men's morale seems to be pretty good and

there's a rumor floating around that we are soon to be shoving off," the Exec was happy to report to his superior.

"That's not just scuttlebutt," Captain Willer used the age-old vernacular that was the synonym for a rumor. It goes back to the old sailing ship days when sailors gathered around the fresh water barrel to partake of a drink of water and, while doing so, exchanged the latest rumors. This water barrel was called a scuttlebutt.

Captain Willer continued as the two officers started sipping their newly arrived cup of joe, "As soon as we can get the ship ready and the provisions on board we'll be shoving off on a long cruise. I can give you a complete rundown if you like, Louis."

"Let's hear it, sir."

The captain took a deep breath and started in, "First, we are going down to the Norfolk Navy Yard and pick up cargo. Then it's off to Gitmo Bay (short for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba) for a few days. Then it's through the Panama Canal up to San Diego and Long Beach. From California it's off to Hawaii and then we really take off."

Another sip of strong brew and the captain continued, "We are going to make a few stops in China, a few ports in India, back through the East Indies to the Philippines and then back to Pearl Harbor, which will be our home port. Of course, we'll have to stop to refuel, probably at Johnson Island."

"Christ, sir, we'll be gone a year," interjected the Exec.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" was the affirmation.

Meanwhile, down on the main deck, the Master of Arms was escorting our friends toward the bow to familiarize them with their future home. If they had known about the conversation in the captain's cabin there wouldn't be the cajoling that accompanied their trek past three cargo holds and up to the forward gun mounts. The Jimmy Legs did a good job of explaining the deck gear as they strutted along. As they passed the hatches that were battened down at the time, he pointed out the cargo winches and booms that were used for loading and off loading cargo.

They ascended the ladder that led to the gun mount and then the Master of Arms attempted to interpret the specifics of the two weapons by which they all gathered around, "This here is our secondary battery," he began, "I'm not up on ordnance, engineering is my specialty. Anyway, these are what's called 3-inch fifties. Three inch is the diameter of the shell it shoots. I don't know what the fifty means."

Sean Maloney spoke up, "They're kind of old, ain't they?"

"Yeah," was the reply, "But, you've got to remember that this is a supply ship the Navy took over from the Cuba Mail Line and it had to be

outfitted in a hurry. You know, guns put on and all that other stuff that the Navy requires. These 3-inch fifties are left over from the World War and we got two more back aft, but our main battery is a 5-inch 38. We'll walk back there and give it a look-see, then we'll go up on the bridge."

Then the Jimmy Legs stepped to the forward part of the gun mount and motioned the group to join him as he gazed down upon the forecastle (pronounce focsl), "Now, down there is the focsl and what you're looking at is the anchor gear. See those big chains? They're connected to the anchor and the chain goes down into the chain locker. By that is the bosn's locker where cables are spliced, for instance, and all the gear pertaining to the deck divisions is kept; stuff like handy billies (portable pumps) and blocks and tackle and all that."

The Jimmy Legs traipsed through the passageway with the six seamen in tow. As they passed through, the Master of Arms pointed out different sections, such as the Sick Bay. At this particular area he lectured on the function of the Medical Department and the hours of sick call, when crew members could report a certain malady, with permission of course. He showed them the Yeoman's office where personnel records and other documents are kept. Also, he told them the duties of the Yeoman (the ship's clerk, sometimes referred to in jest as a titless Wave). He is the Petty Officer who makes out leave papers and transfer orders, etc.

Now they were once again out onto the open deck space, namely the well deck. As they ambled along, they again were tutored on the various nautical items that make up a ship, "That's a cleat," said the Jimmy Legs, "That's for securing lines to. That's the scuppers where the sea flows out when it washes over the deck. That part of the ship is the gunwhale (pronounced gunl)."

After passing the after two cargo holds, they came upon the two after 3-inch 50's and then found themselves adjacent to the 5-inch 38 that Jimmy Legs called the main battery. Next to the 3-inch 50's this gun looked enormous and it was far more impressive, what with all kinds of instruments attached and two seats upon it. Looking through the barrel of this mighty weapon was a sailor dressed in undress blues. The sailors could tell from the rating on his right sleeve that he was a Gunner's Mate First Class. The Master of Arms seemed to know this Petty Officer for he walked right up to him and said, "Hi, Gunner, how's it going?"

"Just fine, Jimmy Legs," was the answer, "Who you got with ya?"

Jimmy Legs, "This here is six new additions to the Venus. Boys, I want you to meet Gunner Robinson. He's one damn good Gunner's Mate and if you ask him real nice I think he'll explain to you what he's doing and maybe even explain this here gun to you guys. How about it, Gunner?"

"Sure, Jimmy," the smiling Gunner replied, "Step right up boys, and I'll give you a little lesson in gunnery."

Right away Sean Maloney's ears perked up, "Hey, that's right up my alley. I'm really interested in this sort of thing."

Gunner, "OK. Now what I'm doing is bore sighting this here gun. That means I'm lining up the sights. If you look down the barrel you'll see an instrument in there. What I do is line up that instrument with the sights, in this case, that church over there on the beach. Now, you each can take a look down that barrel and in the sights too. OK?"

"Awright!" shrieked Sean. He was the first to step forward and take a gander down the barrel of this mighty cannon. By the way, you don't call it a cannon. They have cannons in the Army.

Each of the six sailors squinted down the barrel and into the two sights and then, when everybody was back and ready to learn about the gun, Gunner continued, "OK? Now I'll tell you all about this here gun. It's manned by a crew of six: the gun captain, No. one loader, the pointer, the trainer, the sight setter, the hot shell man and the rest of the loaders, called the ammunition train. OK? The men in the ammo train are not part of the gun crew. They just pass ammunition from the magazine up to this here gun. OK? Now, the gun captain, he's in charge and he operates the breach. That's this mechanism right here. The gun captain opens the breach, like this, and the No. one loader inserts the shell into the breach. This kind of shell is called semi-fixed ammunition. OK? Then the sight setter, he stands right here, wearing head phones, and when he gets the range from the fire control man on the bridge, he sets the range on the sights, like this. OK? Now we come to the pointer and trainer. The pointer is the most important man on the team. He turns this here wheel that moves the gun vertically and he's the guy that pulls the trigger with his thumb on this here button. Why is he so important? Because, to get the gun on target, that's the toughest job. He moves the gun up and down and, don't forget, the ship is rolling and pitching. That's why. Over here is where the trainer sits. He moves the gun horizontally and then there's the hot shell man. He catches the case from the shell when it comes out of the breach and, let me tell you it's red hot. He wears a pair of asbestos gloves that go right up to his elbows. OK?"

They all shook hands with the Gunner and he received thanks from those that had just been educated on the finer points of firing a 5-inch 38. Then the whole menage climbed a few ladders and stopped to take a gander into officer's country. "That," said Jimmy Legs, "is where the officers live and over there is the wardroom where they chow down (eat). Maybe, if you've got what it takes, you'll be eating chow in there--in about 30 years."

Finally they arrived on the bridge (sometimes called the con, for control) and entered the pilothouse. Again there was a Petty Officer on duty and once again the Jimmy Legs seemed to be acquainted with this sailor who, also dressed in his undress blues, sported his rating on his

sleeve, crossed flags. Pete Lubanski turned to a couple of his shipmates and whispered, "He's a Signalman. That's what I want to be and I hope it doesn't take 30 years."

The Signalman broke into a huge smile, showing a snowy white set of perfect teeth. The feeling among all was that this was his character symbol, as if that infectious smile was what he wanted to be known for. They all thought, it's not a bad idea. Friendliness is the first impression one gets.

"Hi, Flags," as usual Jimmy Legs made the first attempt at a conversation, "This here is a group of new sailors, fresh out of boot camp." Angelo Mustari thought, if I here that phrase once more I'll shit.

The fellow called Flags came back with, "And how are you, Jimmy Legs, and all you new guys? Welcome aboard the Venus. How would you like to have me show you around the bridge?"

"Sure," was the consensus answer.

Jimmy Legs, "Guys, this is Signalman McGinnis. We call him Flags. Shake hands with the Navy's best Signalman. He's a great guy, too."

Handshakes all around once more and then the Navy's best Signalman began his well-schooled oration. It was obvious he had conducted this full circle tour many times and enjoyed ushering people, especially landlubbers, through his unique domain. He started at, to him, was the most noteworthy part of the bridge, the pilothouse.

"Now this," he began, "This is the ship's wheel or helm that is used to steer the ship in the right direction. It controls a big motor back aft in the steering engine room. That engine moves the rudder that makes the ship turn. In front of the helm is the binnacle that houses the compass. Of course, you know the importance of that instrument. If you have any questions, don't be afraid to interrupt."

"I have a question," stated Mike Thomas, "What's that paper with writing on it hanging from the binnacle?"

"That," Flags was glad for the opportunity to further express his naval wisdom, "is called the binnacle list. It's for the purpose of informing the Captain or the Officer of the Deck of the men in sick bay. We call it the sick, lame and lazy list.

"Now, over here we have the engine room enunciator that is connected to one in the engine room. When the Captain wants to change the speed of the ship he calls out, 'All ahead full,' for instance, and the man on the enunciator throws this lever to ahead full, the engine room answers on their enunciator and then gives the ship more steam or whatever whoever is in control wants."

"Now, step over here and I'll take you into the chart room." The group crowded into the chart room and Flags continued, "This is where the navigating takes place and courses are set. This case by the chart desk

contains the ship's chronometers. They are very accurate and highly refined clocks that are useful in navigation and fixing the ship's position. Overhead there you see a shelf with volumes of books on it. Those are Sailing Directions. They contain information about anywhere in the world; every island or port you can think of. Now, let's go out on the wing of the bridge."

Once more the sailors followed their escort out to the port wing of the bridge, where he explained about the gyro repeater and how it was used to take bearings. Then he took them back aft a ways to where the flag bag was and informed them of the use of signal flags and their halyards. Up the ladder to the flying bridge they all climbed to see the 36-inch searchlight and "big eyes," the powerful telescope. Back down to the wing of the bridge because Flagg had forgotten to demonstrate the 12-inch signal light, but he did just that.

At that very hour, a knock on the door of the Captain's cabin preceded the entry of LT LaFever into the Skipper's realm, "You wanted to see me, Captain?"

"Yes," was the reply, "Come in, Louis, and sit down, we've got some things to talk over."

Of course, coffee had to be ordered and inquiries had to be made about each other's spouses and then, after the mess attendant had been dismissed, the Executive Officer could tell by his Captain's demeanor that it was time to get down to business.

"As you know," the Captain started out, "I was ordered over to District Headquarters this morning and I had a nice conversation with the Admiral. To begin with, he decided to come to the commissioning ceremony tomorrow, so that means we have a lot to do to get ready for his presence. We are going to have inspection in the morning and I assume you are all ready for that. Correct?"

Exec, "Yes, sir. I'll check things out this afternoon and I'll alert the division heads."

Captain, "Very good. Make sure the signal gang has his flag ready to break at the yard arm when he hits the quarterdeck and you better rehearse the side boys and the Bosun's Mate."

Exec, "Aye, aye, sir. Anything else?"

Captain, "Well, Louis, I thought you would be interested in the talk we had about the Navy and about the world situation."

Exec, "Yes, sir, I would."

Captain, "Well, to begin with, Roosevelt wants a bigger Navy and we are doing something about it. As you know, we've commissioned a new

aircraft carrier, the Wasp. Also, a new battleship has been launched, the Washington. And, the CNO (Chief of Naval Operations) has asked congress for four billion dollars to construct a true, two-ocean Navy. It looks like we are going to sign that agreement with England to trade 50 destroyers with them for some Navy bases. And it looks like they are going to call up the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves."

Exec, "Captain, what does the world situation look like? Does the Admiral think we'll be getting into the war?"

Captain, "He sure does, Louis. He thinks it's only a matter of time. The German submarine danger is getting worse all the time and Italy has declared war on France and Great Britain. But, the Admiral thinks Japan is a bigger danger to us. Everybody in the civilian sector thinks they are a nation of toy makers, but our intelligence tells us they are building a big Navy and Air Force. And you know what they are doing in China. That's why we're going to the Pacific. The idea is to build up the Pacific fleet."

Exec, "What do you think, Captain? Do you really think the Japs are a threat to us?"

Captain, "Who knows, Louis? Well, we both better get ready for tomorrow."

Exec, "Aye, aye, sir."

At 0800 hours the next morning the ship and its crew were ready for inspection. Breakfast was out of the way and the final sweeping and swabbing down had been executed. By 0900 the entire crew and officers were dressed in their dress blues and were waiting their call to quarters for inspection. At 0900 the call came as the Bosun's pipe trilled throughout the ship, announcing that Vice Admiral Josephus D. Follett was due to come aboard. At 0907 side boys were at attention, lined up on each side of the gangway on the quarterdeck. The Officer of the Deck, in his freshly pressed dress blues and his spyglass in hand, stood in the vicinity. Next to him, also at attention, were the Quartermaster of the Watch and the Messenger. The Bosn's Mate of the Watch arrived within an instant, took his place by the side boys and prepared to pipe the Admiral aboard with his shining pipe attached to its gleaming white cord that draped around his neck. On the bridge, signalmen stood by anxiously watching down the dock for the Admiral's car. Flagg himself was holding the blue flag with its three white stars, already hooked onto the halyard, soon to be hoisted and unfurled at the yard arm.

At 0912 a shiny black sedan came around a warehouse at the north end of the dock, its Admiral's flags waving in a slight breeze on each fender. On the bridge and on the quarterdeck, they all saw the car approaching at the

same time. Flags shouted, "Here he comes!" The Officer of the Deck, a very young Ensign, shouted, "Here he comes!" The car pulled to a stop at the bottom of the gangway, a Petty Officer exited from the driver's seat and opened the rear door on his side. Then he saluted as the Admiral emerged, the Admiral returned the salute and started up the gangway. By this time, Captain Willer was standing by the Officer of the Deck, waiting to greet the Admiral. By his side was his Executive Officer, LT La Fever.

The Bosn's Mate's pipe trilled the appropriate tune as he saluted with his left hand. (This is the only time any sailor is allowed to salute with his left hand.) The side boys saluted in precise unison and the Admiral stepped aboard. His flag unfurled from the yardarm at the same instant. Admiral Follett faced aft, saluted the colors and turned toward the Officer of the Deck, "Permission to come aboard, sir."

The youthful Ensign knew what he was supposed to say, but nothing came out of his gaping mouth. He tried, but his tongue seemed to get in the way. All he could do was stare at that row upon row of colorful campaign ribbons and then emit a barely audible squeak.

If you were in the immediate vicinity, you might have noticed a hint of a grin on the Admiral's countenance and then hear him mutter very softly, "Never mind, son. I am aboard."

Venus' Captain stepped forward, saluted and stuck his hand out to the Admiral. After returning the salute, Admiral Follett shook the extended hand and said, "How are you, Commander?"

"Just fine, sir. I would like to have you meet my Executive Officer, LT Louis LaFever. Louis, this is Vice Admiral Josephus Follett," said the Captain.

After the usual introductory remarks, the Captain said, "Sir, should we retire to my cabin for some coffee?"

Admiral, "No, thank you, Will. I'm ready to inspect your ship, if you don't mind."

Captain, "Of course, Admiral. Right this way, sir."

The tour of the ship the day before was repeated, but this time it was much more formal and the absence of companionable chitchat was evident. Along with surveying the ship and its readiness for sea and possible combat, the inspection party paid careful attention to the crew and officers. Along the way, the Admiral stopped intermittently to talk with a sailor and sometimes make a remark, either favorably or adversely. Several times he would ask a sailor where he was from or inquired to how he liked the Navy. Then again he would request that a sailor straighten his neckerchief or square his hat more evenly over his eyebrows. Included in the group was the ever-present Captain's Yeoman, who, being prompted by the Captain, made an occasional note on his pad.

A slight incident occurred that effected one of our friends when the party was inspecting the mess hall. It seems that, just that morning, the kid was assigned to duty in the mess hall as a mess cook. This was not unusual for it is protocol to choose the youngest man of a new contingent for this job and it is always explained to the unhappy fellow that he can only get mess cook duty once. He is also told that it would go in his record that he had served his time in that capacity. It is a three-month stint that nobody is too overjoyed about. It follows that, at this particular time, the Admiral and his entourage entered the mess hall where all the mess cooks were lined up in military fashion. The bevy of inspectors examined the surroundings thoroughly and then concentrated on the sailors lined up and waiting for their scrutiny. As luck would have it, the Admiral stopped right in front of the kid and surveyed him studiously.

Looking directly at the kid's chin which sported a slight hint of facial hair, known as peach fuzz, the Admiral asked, "Did you shave this morning, sailor?"

"No, s-s-sir," the kid managed to stammer out as a lump formed in his throat.

"You shave every day, whether you need it or not," Admiral Follett sternly ordered.

The kid's knees started to shake and he wondered if it could be noticed. He tried to swallow and a tear dripped down his youthful cheek as he stuttered, "I-I-Aye, aye, s-s-sir."

It was fortunate for all present that Sean Maloney was not in the area. He would have challenged the Admiral to a boxing match.

The inspection party ended up on the bridge and the Admiral paid special attention to two of the anti aircraft machine guns (there were two on each wing of the bridge). "Captain," he addressed the Skipper, "If I'm not mistaken, these are .30 caliber Lewis machine guns, left over from the World War. Is that right?"

"That's absolutely right, Admiral," replied the Captain, "I've wondered about that myself, sir."

"Do you really think you could shoot down an airplane with these pop guns?" queried the Admiral.

"Sir, I've heard there have been some very fine anti aircraft weapons developed lately. In fact, the British have one that is superb, they tell me, sir. What are my chances of obtaining something more effective, sir?" asked Captain Willer.

"Almost none, Willie. I guess that winds up the inspection, doesn't it? What time is the commissioning scheduled for?"

"1600 hours, sir."

"Then I'll take you up on that coffee now," stated the Admiral.

Their coffee having been consumed and the Executive Officer having been excused to prepare for the ceremony, the Admiral and the Captain found themselves alone in the Captain's cabin beneath the pilot house. There seemed to be an electric charge between them and Admiral Follett sensed that Venus' Captain had something on his mind.

"Admiral," LTCMDR Willer began, "I've got a question, if you don't mind, sir."

Admiral, "Shoot, Willie. I knew you've got something on your mind."

Captain, "Well, sir, I've been wondering. I know you are an awful busy man, sir. It's beyond me why you took the time to take part in the commissioning ceremony and to inspect the ship. She's just a little old supply ship and not a battleship or even a destroyer. Why us, sir? I'm flattered that you take an interest in Venus, but I don't know why. I repeat, why us, sir?"

Admiral, "Well, Willie, I guess it's time to level with you and let you in on the scoop. Now, listen up, Willie. The Venus is not just a little old supply ship. She could be very important to the Navy and our country if and when we go to war. Here's why. President Roosevelt is convinced that Japan is our biggest threat and he wants to be prepared for that inevitability, so he's building up our Pacific bastion as much as he politically and practically can. He wants to do so without Congress knowing about it because Congress, like everybody else, thinks Japan is a weak and diminutive nation and that we shouldn't waste our efforts on preparing for that eventuality. The CNO wants every Commander in the Navy to be aware of the President's theory and act accordingly. The rest is my idea, Willie. Venus might look like a little old supply ship, but she's more than that. She was selected to go to the Pacific because she's got speed and range. She can maintain over 15 knots for a long period of time and her fuel bunkers can take her to the far corners of the earth. We know she can go a long time without refueling, but we don't know how long. That's what you are going to find out. If and when we go to war this kind of ship would be invaluable for transporting supplies and even crucial personnel. That's why you are going on an extended cruise, to see just how far and long she can go. At the same time, Willie, you will be able to scout out our potential enemy. Well, what do you think?"

Captain, "Sir, it sounds like an exciting and challenging concept. Tell me, Admiral, when do you think we'll get in the war?"

Admiral, "My guestimate is in a year, maybe two."

Captain, "Guestimate, sir?"

Admiral, "That's a word I picked up from an old Skipper of mine when I was a junior officer on the Arizona. I've been using it ever since. It means 'an educated guess.' Well, Willie, I guess it's time for the ceremony."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Commissioning ceremonies are usually pretty boring and this one was no exception. There were the traditional speeches by the Captain and the Admiral, followed by the raising of the commission pennant to the main mast by Flagg McGinnis. The Captain spoke on the maintaining of morale as a factor to success and that the need for drills being tantamount to a well-prepared ship. The Admiral did a little better for he was more informing about the upcoming cruise. He gave a rough outline of their voyage and those that were not so experienced at world travel welcomed the chance to visit those far away places one reads about on the recruitment posters. On the other hand, the married men did not relish the idea of being way from their families for a prolonged odyssey. Then, as an added colloquy, the Captain stepped forward again and made his final announcement, "When we break ranks, the next order of business is to get the ship ready for sea for we'll be getting underway the day after tomorrow. There will be port and starboard liberty tonight and tomorrow night. The six new men will get liberty both nights because they didn't have boot leave. Our next port of call will be Norfolk Navy Yard and then it's on to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Good luck to all hands. Dismissed."

There was hustle and bustle both topside and below decks as preparations for getting underway were already started. In the crew's living quarters, those off duty immediately began the ritual of showering, shaving and shampooing, the preliminaries required for going ashore. The four shipmates of notoriety gathered in the berthing compartment and proceeded to make plans for their first night on the town.

"Well, where we going?" was the query from Sean Maloney, "Boy, a tall cold one is sure gonna taste good."

"I'm sorry, guys," Angelo Mustari piped up, " I'm gonna hop home and get some good old home cooking. My folks live in a cold water flat over on Myrtle Avenue. That's not far from here." You could surely tell Angelo was from Brooklyn. He pronounced Myrtle "Moitle." As an afterthought, he bellowed down the compartment, "Hey, kid. Wanna come home with me and get some good spaghetti?"

"Nah." The kid said as he sauntered over toward where the four sailors were donning their dress blues, "Thanks anyway, Ange. I want to hit the sack early. I'm bushed. This mess cookin' ain't easy. You guys have a good time."

Sean was taking a lot of time with his hair, combing and checking it many times in the little mirror that was attached to the inside of his locker. He didn't even turn away from the mirror to ask again, "Well, where will we go? Anybody know where we can get some suds and maybe a couple dames?"

Mike Thomas was buttoning up those thirteen buttons as he answered

Sean, "A guy down in the engine room told me that right outside the gate is a whole bunch of bars. You got your choice of a shithouse full of them."

"What are we waiting for?" cried Pete Lubanski, "I can almost taste that beer and smell those luscious tomatoes." To Pete, an alluring girl was a tomato.

Four thirsty and lecherous cavaliers fairly charged and stumbled across the decks and up the ladder to the quarterdeck. They came to an abrupt halt before the Officer of the Deck and formed a line at attention before his observant eye. The officer scanned the men over and nodded his approval of their appearance. Two seconds later the shore-bound sailors were down the gangway and skipping down the dock, causing some civilian workers in the area to turn the heads and smile with envy at these young rapsallions. Even the Marine at the Navy Yard gate, having had heaps of experience at checking on sailors going on liberty, sensed that these were not your normal celebrants. These were what you may call *bon vivants* or cosmopolitan men about town.

Just outside the gate is Sands Street, perpendicular to the Navy Yard. The bustling byway, even at this time of afternoon, was teeming with raucous happenings. The three sailors came to an abrupt halt and just stood there surveying the scene before them. The street was a panorama of bars from which there emitted all kinds of noise; laughter, harsh words, vile language and an undertone of music. Here and there a few sailors stumbled from one saloon and into another.

Suddenly, they were jostled from behind and two sailors came running through, interrupting their reverie. They wore leggings, a web belt and a brassard around their upper arm adorned with the letters SP. When the three shipmates saw that they were sporting long billie clubs, they knew what they were, Shore Patrol. The two shore patrol men charged into one of the bars and subsequently emerged with two sailors in tow that had obviously been in a duel of fisticuffs. They were dragged unceremoniously toward a waiting van just as if the incident was a matter of course.

As the van sped away, Pete Lubanski said, "Well guys, what are we waiting for?"

The next step was to choose a site to wet their thirst, which they did. They chose one that seemed a tad less noisy and entered the premises to find that the room was overflowing with sailors and here and there a girl or two, all in good spirits and imbibing in libation.

As they stood up to the bar, the barkeep approached, wiping his hands on his apron that looked like he had worn since the previous year, "What'll it be, sailors?"

"Three big beers," piped up Sean Maloney.

The order was filled, consumed and was followed by another and another and then they took a look around.

"Over there," said Pete, "There's three dames that look like they're just dying to meet three handsome sailors."

They didn't seem to be escorted by any members of the male sex, so three handsome sailors moseyed over toward the three unescorted girls.

"Hi, girls," said Pete, "Want some company? I'm Pete. This here's Mike and this here's Sean. Can we buy you a drink?"

"Sure, why not?" one of the girls said.

The unshaven bartender appeared before the words were out of her mouth and poured the three girls each a drink in a cocktail glass that looked mysteriously like ginger ale.

"That'll be nine bucks, gentlemen," the bartender demanded.

Sean's eyebrows arched, revealing that he was flabbergasted, Mike Thomas swallowed a lump in his throat and Pete said. "Jeese."

They caught on quickly.

A few bars and quite a few beers later, the three found themselves just about out of money. They were depressed and discouraged and about to suggest returning to the ship when, in what would probably be their last saloon visit, a couple of Pete's "tomatoes" trotted into the establishment. Of course, the boys gave the girls the once-over and the looks on their faces indicated this might be a prospect worth investigating. One problem remained; they were just about out of ready cash.

"Mike," said Pete, "Why don't you give it a try. You're the strong silent type and you're always a gentleman. Pull up alongside those two tomatoes and see what you can do." It was noticeable that Pete was already using the seaman's language.

As was his habit, Mike just shrugged his shoulders but, much to the surprise of Sean and Pete, Mike started for the ladies. He ambulated slowly but surely and with that debonair aura only he could display to the area of the bar that was graced by the young girls. On reaching his objective, Mike doffed his cap, smiled a toothy grin and said, "Good evening, ladies. Would you girls like some company?"

One of the girls answered gruffly, "Shove off, sailor. You couldn't afford us. We don't date Second Class Seamen, only Petty Officers and up."

"Just a minute, Judy," the other girl interrupted, "He's cute and a gentleman too. What did you have in mind, sailor?"

"Well, ma'am," Mike began, "It's like this, see. I'm outa dough, see, and I thought you'd like to take a lonely sailor home and just carry on a nice conversation, see."

The girl called Judy changed her demeanor, "You're right, honey, he is cute. What if we do take you home like you say, sailor? You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Mike came back with, "I've got two shipmates with me, ma'am. That's them over there."

"No deal," said Judy, "What do ya take us for, anyway? Shove off, sailor, and take those other Sand Street commandos with ya. Now hoist anchor and screw." Mike thought, these dames are more nautical than I am.

These three sailors would remember tomorrow that their first night ashore was a complete bust.

The next day, just before evening chow, the four buddies gathered in the crew's quarters as they were wont to do. The previous night's liberty was hashed over and lamented about for Angelo's sake. Being a real shipmate, Angelo Mustari expressed pity for his companions. Then the talk revolved around to the subject of money and that put a damper on their expectations of an excursion ashore that would be anything but enjoyable.

All the while, Angelo had been musing quietly as if he were deep in thought and then he jumped up, snapped his fingers and announced, "Tell you what, guys. There's a phone booth down on the dock. Let me get permission from the OD to leave the ship for a minute and I'll give my broker a call."

The other three seamen looked at one another in dismay, but before they could challenge Angelo's sanity, Ange had bounded out of the compartment at double time.

"Who's he shittin'?" said Sean.

A few minutes later they were about to go to chow when Angelo came spurting back into the area where the sailors were lined up for their evening ration, "It's all set, guys. Get out of the chow line and get your dress blues on. We're gonna eat and drink in style tonight."

"What are you, nuts or something?" asked Pete, "You ain't got no stock broker."

Angelo answered him with an air of braggadocio, "My brokerage is a partnership and they said tonight the sky's the limit for me and my three shipmates."

"Come off it, Ange," commanded Pete, "What's the name of your brokerage?"

"Awright," said Angelo, "I'll level with you guys. My Mom has invited us all to her house in Brooklyn for all the spaghetti and meatballs and Italian sausage you can eat and my Pop has got an unlimited supply of Chianti. My brokerage is named the "House of Mustari."

"Hot shit," spoke up Sean, "Dago Red."

Mike Thomas piped up, "Ange, we can't impose on your Mon and Pop. That's just not kosher."

Angelo, "You're damn right it's not kosher, it's Italian and you don't know Italians, none of you guys. They're the most hospitable people in the world. What's theirs is yours. Any shipmate of mine is a member of the family. So, stop your yakking and let's shove off."

"*Awright!*" was the chorus from all four and they broke all records for changing from dungarees into dress blues.

On the way out of the Navy Yard and just before they reached the gate, Mike gestured for them to halt, stopped short and said, "Wait just a minute, guys. I've been wondering what that is over there. I'd like to see it"

They strode over to where Mike had indicated and stood before a strange looking contraption and Mike said, "Well, I'll be damned, it's a submarine. You mean to tell me somebody went underwater in that funny looking gismo."

The four shipmates discovered there was a plaque describing the ancient submarine and Mike took it upon himself to read it aloud for the benefit of all, "First practical submarine with efficient source of power was developed by an American inventor, John Philip Holland, launched in 1898. His submarine used a gasoline engine for surface cruising and an electric motor for underwater power. The boat was purchased by the United States Government in 1900 and named the USS Holland."

Pete Lubanski added, "That's the way our subs today are propelled, only by Diesel on the surface, but still by batteries when they are submerged."

Angelo prodded them on, "Let's go, guys. We don't want to keep Mama waiting."

On arriving at the cold-water flat on Myrtle Avenue, the four young men received the conventional Italian greeting. There was a hug for everybody from Mama and a firm handshake from Papa. Mama guided the sailors into the living room with much boisterous grandeur, all the while commenting on the handsomeness of these sailors in their pretty blue suits. Mama kept repeating over and over, "Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming."

Papa was displaying a little impatience and finally couldn't restrain himself any longer, "Mama, enough already. These boys are thirsty. Everybody sit down and make yourself comfortable and I'll get some vino for you boys."

Papa dashed from the room and Mama just kept smiling at everybody and wiping her hands on her apron. While Papa was getting the vino and Mama was still shaking her head in admiration of the blue-clad sailors, the boys had a chance to admire their surroundings. The room was decorated in typical Italian style, with flowered upholstery on the chairs

and sofa and the windows bedecked with velvet drapes and corded tiebacks. On a mantle were antiquarian photographs in ornate frames, probably relatives and, Pete thought, they all look so grouchy. Except for the photo in the middle that dominated the rest of the pictures because of its size and content. It was a picture of Angelo taken in boot camp and a thought came to Sean's mind, he looks saltier now, even though he hasn't even been to sea yet. He hasn't got that boot look.

Presently Papa Mustari returned with a tray that held six water glasses. Then, off he cantered again and this time he came back swiftly, tugging at the stopper of a gallon jug that was filled with a dark red liquid, the "blood of the grape."

Papa sure was not stingy when it came to filling the glasses that were really meant for water, except for Mama. "Just a drop," she said.

Papa raised his glass toward the four young men in a salute, which he said in Italian. They all drank heartily, even Mama, who said, "Mmm. I'll have a little more, Papa."

Their tongues loosened by Papa's sweet tasting vino, the sailors related in turn to Angelo's parents about the incidents that took place at boot camp and their first days aboard ship. Papa listened very intently and Mama kept up a mouthy clicking noise and every once in a while she would say, "You poor babies."

When, at one point, when the story of their deep friendship was unfolding, Mama interjected her opinion, "Angelo, you always did pick good friends, even as a young boy."

"Mama," said Angelo, "A sailor could not have better shipmates than these guys. I kid you not."

At which, Papa asked, "What do you mean, son? What exactly is a shipmate?"

Angelo replied to his paternal relative, "Papa, any man cannot have a better friend than a shipmate. It's the closest you can ever come to a buddy. Why? Let me tell you. You not only work with your shipmate, you eat at the same table with him, you sleep in the bunk next to him and, when you go ashore on liberty, who do you pal up with? Your shipmate, that's who. Our Chief at boot camp says that some day you may go into battle alongside your shipmate. That's what a shipmate is, Papa."

"Your friends are gentlemen too, Angelo," interposed Mama, "When they came into Mama's house, they took their hats off." Mama did not know that Mike Thomas had set the good example, but they had earned her respect anyway.

A little more interlocution followed between the partakers of Papa's full-bodied nectar until Mama called from the kitchen, "Dinner's ready. Come and get it."

Amazement filled the faces of three of the sailors as they entered the huge dining area, but Angelo's countenance remained placid for he was used to such extravagance as lay spread out before them. There were bowls of cooked spaghetti along with tureens of steaming sauces. Trays of Italian sausages and meatballs were strewn about the massive table and here and there were plates of Italian bread from which the smell of garlic inundated the festive air. Papa's place at the head of the table was unmistakable for, by the side of his table setting, was the legendary jug of wine, always ready to be served to guests. However, the four boys all felt they had had enough of the strong brew.

As the family and invitees sat down, each of the four young men had his own thoughts as they bowed their heads while Papa said grace. Sean thought, who's gonna eat all this food? I wish the kid was here. Pete, he couldn't stop pondering over tomorrow's sailing into an unknown future. Mike tried to concentrate on the grace that was being said and Angelo was just thankful to have such a wonderful Mama and Papa. Then he thought it's time to break the news.

"Mama," he began, "We're leaving tomorrow. We're going to sea early in the morning with the tide and we'll be gone for quite a while."

"Angelo," Mama fairly shrieked, "You're going on the ocean?"

"Yes, Mama. That's what sailors do."

Mama, "But, Angelo, you've just got home. You should stay with Papa and me for a while. Tell them to wait a little while before they go to ocean."

Angelo, "I can't do that, Mama."

Mama, "I'll go tell them to wait."

Angelo, "That's not the way the Navy works, Mama. You can tell them and they'd maybe smile, but the Navy would just do what the Navy does anyway."

Then Papa spoke up, "Enough already. Son, you just go and do what you have to do and make us proud of you. You go to sea and serve these United States like a good boy and you and your---shipmates---make us proud."

"Yes, Papa."

As the four shipmates were saying their good byes to Mama and Papa Mustari in Brooklyn, a lone figure was waiting in his private quarters in the White House. Beside his wheel chair was a silver tray on a mahogany table containing the makings of one of his specialties, a dry Martini, but the setup contained enough of the libations to serve more than enough for one. It would probably be enough for four to six. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was expecting two visitors at this moment and he knew that both were very punctual men. However, he was glad for these few minutes to meditate over the problem at hand that would be discussed when his

administrative colleagues arrived. The purpose of the meeting was to decide on the upgrading of the United States Navy.

A knock on the door of his study momentarily interrupted his brooding, so he called out, "Come in, boys and join me in a drink."

The first to enter was Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, followed by Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations. The Admiral was the first to speak, "Good evening, Mr. President. May I congratulate you on your recent reelection, sir?"

"Why, thank you, Dick," was the President's congenial reply, "Will you two Navy men have a Martini?"

"Don't mind if I do," remarked SECNAV (the Navy shortens titles with phonetic symbols).

The CNO merely nodded, signaling his assent.

The President immediately began his ritualistic concocting of his piece de resistance, which he insisted on doing himself. He didn't even trust the chore to his dutiful wife, Eleanor. He always said that she made them too weak; too much dry vermouth.

Amid the clinking of ice cubes against the cocktail shaker, the President expounded on the technique required in the mixing of the unsurpassable Martini, "The secret is to stir the drink enough, but not too much. Twenty one times; no more, no less. Here we are, gentlemen. As you Navy men say, down the hatch."

While enjoying their masterful cocktails, inquires were made into the health of family members and flattery was extended toward certain offspring. Then the President felt it was time to get down to business.

"Gentlemen, the war in Europe is going badly for our friends. Just the other day, 15,000 tons of bombs were dropped on London and the people of Britain are in real trouble. Their morale is good, but they can't hold out much longer. Now, the latest information that has come across my desk is that Hitler has a date set for the invasion of England. Still, the American people don't want to get into the war in Europe. They are saying that it is not our problem. Do either of you have any ideas along those lines?"

Frank Knox was the first to answer, "Mr. President, you are right about the British morale. Did you hear Winnie's latest speech? I particularly like the part when he said, 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' Mr. Churchill has really been holding the English people together."

Winston Churchill was referring to the Royal Air Force who were going up against the mighty German Luftwaffe with the few Spitfire fighter planes that were available and those were being flown into combat with a minimum of spare parts and petrol. Being outnumbered and outgunned, they never the less waged a courageous "Battle for Britain."

The President spoke again, "The reason I wanted to talk to you two was because my opinion is that the answer to our future is the Navy. As you both know, I've always had a soft spot in my heart for the Navy, but it goes beyond that. I think the Navy is going to be needed in the Pacific because I just don't trust those Japanese. We all agree we need a bigger and more powerful Navy, so let's you Navy people concentrate on that."

The President sipped his Martini and beamed at the tastefulness of his masterpiece. Then he abruptly turned toward Admiral Stark, "Say Harold, where are those fifty destroyers we promised Great Britain?"

"Mr. President, they are on the way, the Admiral replied, "And they should arrive in England any day now."

"And Frank, how is the recruiting going in the Navy these days?" the President asked of SECNAV.

SECNAV was quick to respond, "Sir, since you signed the Conscription Bill, enlistments have gone up dramatically. A lot of it is that the young men feel they will be drafted into the Army and they don't want that. Then, of course, some think they might as well enlist and get their obligation over with. What we also need are officers. We'll get a lot of them from the college ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) and once we get that other program into full swing, that three months training deal, we shall be in good shape for officers. The men in the fleet are calling those three-year college men Ninety Day Wonders."

The two Navy administrators got the feeling that the President was about to call an end to the meeting. His cocktail glass had been polished off and a yawn indicated he was getting tired. Admiral Stark thought the Chief Executive seemed to be getting tired more easily lately and, after all, he had just been elected for his third term of office. He remembered seeing a picture of him when he first took office and there was certainly a remarkable aging difference in his appearance. Eight years as President and all the responsibility that goes with it is enough to make anybody old before his time. The thought went through his mind, will he run for an unprecedented fourth term? He certainly is the popular choice of the American people, but would he last that long in this distressing job?

"Will that be all, Mr. President?" the Admiral asked.

"I guess that does it for now, boys," the President replied, "Don't forget what I told you. We want the greatest Navy in the world, manned by the greatest boys in the world and I'm going to tell Cordell (Cordell Hull, Secretary of State) to keep an eye on those goddamn Japs. Good night."

His faithful servant and confidant appeared from nowhere and wheeled the President out of the room as Mr. Roosevelt's head was starting to nod toward his chest.

Back in Brooklyn, four sailors decided at that same time of the evening that they had had enough of Papa's vino and they too were getting tired. It was time to say goodbye, thus Angelo, who supposed it was his responsibility, started the departure proceedings, "C'mon, guys. We've got to be shoving off."

Immediately, Mama began a series of mournful chants and cries of, "My baby."

Papa, holding back the tears, kept repeating, "We're proud of you, son."

Mike Thomas took the initiative by kissing Mama on the cheek, shaking Papa's hand and thanking them both for the lovely dinner and being such gracious hosts. The other sailors followed suit and then they were on their way, white hats once more installed and the execution of a jaunty stride implemented. They looked back at Mama and Papa, who stood in the doorway, and waved a final valedictory.

A short while later, while walking through the wide-ranging Navy Yard, Sean Maloney remarked, "You know, guys there's something sad about a navy yard at night. You know, all the lights and the yard workers hammering away at their jobs and the ghostly-like appearance of the big ships. And tonight it's doubly sad because we're shovin' off in the morning for God knows where and who knows when we'll see our families again."

"Shut up, Irish," said Angelo, "You've got me missin' Papa and Mama already."

"Knock it off, you guys," remarked Pete Lubanski, "We gotta get aboard and get some sleep. Jimmy Legs said we're gonna have early reveille tomorrow morning."

And so they did. The Jimmy Legs was shaking bunks and grabbing blankets at 0430 hours. The cursing and loud replies of sleepy sailors who had been ashore too late the night before mixed with the Jimmy Legs' shouts to "hit the deck" and "crawl out." Then a Bosun's Mate appeared and roared loudly for, "Deck gang, fall out and topside, on the double. We're getting underway in half an hour."

At this point, all the four revelers of the night before, except Mike, were bona fide members of the deck force, that department of the ship that maintained everything concerned with the topside area. Their duties involved handling of blocks and tackle, lines, rigging, anchors, cables and the engines relevant to all the nautical mechanisms of the main deck. A throng of muscled bodies hurried into their dungarees and scurried, stumbling and weaving, up the ladder and onto the main deck. Sean bellowed, "For Christ's sake, it's still dark out!"

The shrill of a Bosun's pipe sounded over the loud speaker and a hearty voice announced, "Sweepers, man your brooms. Clean sweep down fore and aft."

More running about and brooms appeared from nowhere. Our three shipmates found themselves on the end of a broom and, in a manner of minutes, the entire deck was free of loose dirt and debris. A tall, brawny chap was supervising the action and then he was interrupted by another announcement over the PA, "Single up all lines."

To and fro again went the crewmen and lengths of braided hawsers were dragged aboard the ship that had been removed from ballards on the dock. The three new men were amazed at the agility of the deck hands and the harmonious manner in which they coiled the lines neatly on the deck, leaving the surroundings in shipshape order. They were also astounded at how easily they fell into the routine and were able to help with these unfamiliar tasks. It also surprised them that the darkness of the early morning did not seem to interfere with the performance of their duties.

Just as the crew was taking a breather, there came from the bridge a series of orders from an officer who was yelling through a microphone. The experienced crew seemed to know what to do when certain phrases were used, like, "Take in the bow line. Take in the spring line. Take in the stern line."

As the three shipmates were admiring the sunrise, it suddenly came to them that they were moving away from the dock. Sean looked at Angelo and exclaimed, "We're moving. Goddamn it, we're underway."

The first realization that a ship is underway is a feeling of excitement to the landlubber. It will soon lose that thrill as the years go by but, at least for a few days, there is no ecstasy comparable to that first feeling of a deck rolling even lightly beneath one's feet. That is exactly what the ex-boots experienced as the USS Venus slowly made her way down the East River and then under the Brooklyn Bridge. The bulk of the crew that was not on watch hurried below to partake of breakfast, but not the ex-landlubbers. They had been joined at the rail by the fourth shipmate, Mike. The quartet stood quietly, watching the shoreline pass before them, mesmerized by the thought of actually going to sea. Little did they know they were about to miss out on breakfast.

The odyssey had begun.

CHAPTER 3 THE ODYSSEY BEGINS

USS Venus was scheduled to sail from the Brooklyn Navy Yard to Norfolk, Virginia. However, after just a short time at sea, a radio message was received that caused her to change course. Her captain had intended to implement various drills, but instead preparations were to be made to have the ship degaussed at a small town called Solomons in Maryland.

This degaussing procedure was to be performed to demagnetize the hull of the ship, a process that had become necessary as a result of the Germans using magnetic mines that were secured below the surface of the sea and were attracted by the magnetic characteristics of a ship's steel hull. While they were very effective for the Nazis, the mines did not know the difference between a British, French or American vessel.

So, Venus sailed through Chesapeake Bay and into the mouth of the Patuxent River. She dropped anchor just off the coast near Solomons and prepared to receive the crew that was to carry out the intricate process.

On the cruise down the coast our four shipmates got to stand the routine watches that were necessary on a naval ship underway at sea. Down in the engine room, Mike Thomas learned the various duties that were those of a Machinist's Mate and also got acquainted with the other jobs that were not very popular with the men of the black gang, like cleaning bilges, for one thing. The other three were educated in standing lookout watches and even