



NAAV NEWS

Members' Publication of the National Association of Atomic Veterans

2nd QUARTER 2016



Sedan Crater at Desert Rock - Part of Area 51 Tour



Atomic Testing Museum

Las Vegas Convention Details

Well Gentlemen I hope you are making plans to be at the convention in Las Vegas come September. We have the program locked in as you see in the column on the right. We will have hotel room rates, and other fees in the next news letter.

As you can see we have planned a bus tour for Area 51 for those that wish to go. Seating is limited so you will need to let Fred know when you make you reservations for the convention so we can make sure we have space. Prices for the convention and banquet will be in the next newsletter as well as numbers to call for the hotel reservations.

As soon as Fred gets all locked in we will get the information on the NAAV web-page. So those of you that visit that will be able to get early information, just keep visiting the CDRS page at NAAV.COM.

Four new board members are needed at this years meeting, so if you are interested please let Fred know. Be ready to step up and accept a position and if you are wondering what board members do just give Fred a call and he will fill you in. Looking forward to a great meeting in September. See you all then.

Convention Program

WEDNESDAY • SEPTEMBER 14TH

9:00AM to 11:00 AM Check in and Register

1:00PM to 3:00 PM Atomic testing Museum

7:00PM NAAV Board Meeting

THURSDAY • SEPTEMBER 15TH

9:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Testing Grounds Tour Bus Persons Min 30 to Max 50

FRIDAY • SEPTEMBER 16TH

9:00 AM NAAV Meeting

11:30 Lunch break

1:00 PM to 5:00 pm NAAV Meeting

5:00 PM Close convention

6:00 PM NAAV Banquet

Johnston Island 1961-1964

At Hickam AFB, Hawaii we figuratively had Johnston Island for breakfast on the air freight midnight shift as I learned on my first day at work in July, 1961. Every morning, 7 days per week at 8 a.m., a C-124 left for JON, its airport code, with a full load of cargo - mostly food and support equipment. It was floor loaded and stacked as high as possible, then covered with tie-down nets and straps. It usually was about 50,000 pounds and took several hours to load. It was back-breaking physical labor taking it off the freight carts, loading it onto the aircraft elevator, taking it up into the aircraft, the stacking it as high as safety permitted, then tying and strapping it down. The loadmaster coordinated our efforts and computed the weight and balance of the aircraft. If we were lucky, we got done in time to make it to breakfast at the chowhall which closed promptly at 9 am and did not recognize the 24 hour operation of MATS.

We had been handling nuclear components from the time I started in July 1961. However, my official exposure to nuclear weapons began on April 5, 1962 when I was assigned to the Hickam AFB Nuclear/Missile Loading Team. We were an elite group of 15 to 20 airmen who periodically received specialized training in the loading, offloading and handling of nuclear components and missiles. I would be on the team for the rest of my enlistment. The title of the team changed to Hazardous Cargo/Missile Loading Team in 1963. At first our work was mostly with the U. S. Army at Schofield Barracks about 20 miles north Hickam. The 25th Infantry Division was headquartered there and they had nuclear weapons such as the Davy Crockett weapons system with a nuclear warhead. The M-28 or M-29 Davy Crockett Weapon System(s) was a tactical nuclear recoilless gun for firing the M388 nuclear projectile that was deployed by the United States during the Cold War. Named after American soldier, congressman, and folk hero Davy Crockett, it was one of the smallest nuclear weapon systems ever built. My friend Bob Owen also had them in his army unit in Gelnhausen, Germany when I visited him in April, 1966.

The Army made a really big deal out of it when they received nuclear components. They would surround the aircraft with MPs carrying submachine guns who stood at attention in a huge circle around the aircraft. Their weapons would be held upright in the right hand ready for use. Then the brass would go through the motions of signing off the manifest and accepting the cargo. Meanwhile my crew would offload the

components and forklift them onto a trailer which would leave with MP escorts in front and back along with a large sedan carrying the brass. I have to admit it was impressive.

There came the day when I had already put in twelve hours on the ramp wrestling cargo on and off aircraft and I got a call to report for Nuclear Loading Team duty. It was a single large very heavy crate on a C-121 aircraft which the civilians called a Connie. The C-121 sits very high off the ground and we were unloading the cargo from the rear cargo door. That necessitated extending the forklift boom to its maximum to reach the door.

In a mischievous mood brought on by fatigue and being full of the Army's pretentiousness, I told my crew to leave me about a foot of slack on the chains with which we secured the cargo to the forklift boom. I slipped the forklift prongs under the crate and my crew chained it up as I had asked. Then I slowly lifted the crate and backed clear of the aircraft preparatory to lowering the boom. Before lowering it I tilted the cargo slightly forward so that the crate slide about a foot before the slack in the chains ran out and stopped it. There was a huge audible gasp from the MPs and brass! I'm sure they thought they were goners. So I nonchalantly tiled the boom back, lowered the boom and loaded the cargo on the trailer. Off they went and nobody besides my crew knew that what happened was deliberate. It did my heart good to scare the living shit outa the Army brass.

Once the last U. S. atmospheric nuclear tests started up in early 1962 we didn't see that much of the Schofield bunch. This was Operation Dominic and consisted of 36 tests conducted at Christmas Island and Johnston Island. We were busier than ever and got no help with increased manpower or upgrade of equipment. We were on duty 12 hours on 12 hours off a great deal of the time past the last tests in November 1962. The purpose of the tests were to pressure Soviet Russia into agreeing to President Kennedy's Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which he signed October 7, 1963. The last U. S. atmospheric test was conducted on November 4, 1962 at Johnston Island. Its code name was Tightrope.

Johnston Island, also know as JI, Johnston Atoll and JON (the airport code), is about 800 miles southwest of Hawaii. The United States got control of it in 1898 when Hawaii was annexed. It was APO 105 for

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Johnston Island 1961-1964

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mailing purposes. In reality it was an atoll aircraft carrier and the dredging barges never stopped tearing out the coral to add to the island while I was there.

By 1964 it was 2 miles long and a half mile wide, about 625 acres - slightly less than one square mile. The runway at 9000 feet took up nearly the entire length of the island. Large parts of it were off-limits. The big government contractor was Holmes & Narver and most of the civilians worked for them. There were a lot of burly "beach boy" type Polynesians who were very clannish and resented the "haoles", their term for whites. MATS personnel worked NW Orient DC-7 contract flights in addition to our own flights which hauled both freight and passengers to and from Hickam. There were no women or dependents stationed on the island so the stewardesses on Northwest were a big treat. We usually had a gang of lollygaggers around when Northwest came in. I was at Johnston twice - one month each time - October/November 1963 and January/February 1964 and worked 12 hours on 12 hours off - no days off.

The MATS operation was on the north side of the island which actually faced more northwesterly. The ramp was at the top of the triangle formed by the runway and the taxiways. The single runway, 23/5, took up the length of the island. By 1964 it was about 9000 feet long. To the east of the ramp were air freight and base ops, each in a quonset hut. Between them, in a square blockish looking building, was the air terminal. West of the ramp were the two launch pads for the nuclear test rockets.

Originally an atoll, the U.S. Navy had a continuing program of dredging up coral to extend and enlarge the facility. The runway took up the length of the island and our barracks was about midway down the runway - just about where the aircraft reversed their props when landing. It made for noisy living and sleeping. JI was the site of the last U.S. atmospheric nuclear tests and there had been some accidents so we figured the island was "hot". The folks in charge poo-hooped that and would not even issue dosimeters. Years later the facility was converted to destroy chemical weapons via an atomic furnace. Then, after that they decided to make a wildlife refuge out of it. That's when they "discovered" it was contaminated and the island had to be de-contaminated before it could be used as a refuge. It cost millions to do it.

Operation Dominic included 36 tests. The majority of the tests (29 airdrops) were weapons development tests, intended to evaluate advanced designs that the labs had been cooking up during the years of the moratorium and before. Five rocketlaunched tests were conducted to gather further weapons effects data on high-altitude phenomena. Two tests of operational weapon systems were conducted - the Polaris submarine launched ballistic missile and the ASROC anti-submarine rocket.

The most dramatic of the tests took place on July 8, 1962 at 11:00 pm, Honolulu time. It was the Starfish Prime nuclear test using a Thor missile launched from Johnston Island. The 1.45 megaton bomb exploded at an altitude of 240 miles. The explosion was visible 1500 miles away at Kwajalein Atoll; an artificial aurora lasted seven minutes. I was never able to visit "Kwaj" because it was a high security area. But I sure loaded a lot of cargo with KWA as the destination. The unforeseen and most militarily significant effect of the blast was the electromagnetic pulse (EMP) generated by the test. This caused power mains surges in Oahu, knocking out street lights, blowing fuses and circuit breakers, and triggering burglar alarms (and this in the days before microelectronics). The explosion supercharged the Van Allen radiation belts, resulting in several satellites malfunctioning and disrupting radio transmission traffic across wide areas of the Pacific Ocean.

The planned test was widely publicized in Hawaii and we eagerly anticipated it. We were 800 miles away from where the event took place. A large number of us got on the roof of the three story Hale Makai barracks at Hickam to view the explosion. I clearly remember the way the nearly midnight Hawaiian sky way lit up bright as noontime upon ignition then the atmosphere went thru the spectrum, slowly darkening, until it became a dense purple color then back to darkness. It was the most dramatic and memorable experience of my life until I saw the horrible spectacles of 9/11 nearly 40 years later. The Hawaiian newspapers published several photographs and articles about the test and the problems it caused in Hawaii. Not many folks knew about EMPs back then.

Conducted as part of Operation Dominic was a series of ten high altitude tests at Johnston Island from June 1962 until November 1962 known as Operation Fishbowl. These tests were Thor missile launched

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Johnston Island 1961-1964

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warheads detonated at very high altitudes (30-248 miles) to evaluate the destructive mechanisms and effects of high yield explosions against ballistic missile RVs.

The first test scheduled for June 1, 1962, Urraca, was cancel-led. Bluegill, June 3, 1962, failed and was destroyed at +15 minutes after launch. Four test failures occurred with missiles being destroyed in flight by range safety officers when electronics failed (Bluegill - June 3), when rocket motors malfunctioned (Starfish - June 20 and Bluegill Prime July 26), or when the missile veered out of control (Bluegill Double Prime* - October 16). The Bluegill Prime test was particularly disastrous since the missile was blown up while still on the launch pad, requiring complete reconstruction of the demolished and plutonium contaminated Thor launch facility.

The third attempt (Bluegill Double Prime) was made at 21:14 on 15 October 1962. The missile was launched on a true bearing of 150 degrees. Between 86 and 90 seconds in to the flight booster failure occurred and the missile began tumbling, the missile was destroyed by remote control 156 seconds after launch. Some radioactive debris fell back on to Johnston Island. The accident received little or no publicity. The Cuban Missile Crisis was underway. I would be sent to Travis AFB, California on October 27, 1962 to provide MATS support for supplying any invasion of Cuba.

Of the five successful launches in Operation Fishbowl, three of the explosions were seen 800 miles away in Hawaii. The most spectacular was Starfish Prime described above. The other two were 400 kiloton blasts named Bluegill Triple Prime on October 26 and Kingfish on November 1.

I was deployed to Johnston Island on October 24, 1963 for one month of temporary duty. I returned to Hickam on Saturday, November 23, 1963, leaving JON at 1:30 p.m. on a C-118 and arriving at 4:30 p. m. I was sent again January 4, 1964 for another 30 days. Neither time was I offered a dosimeter or checked for radiation exposure. As a matter of fact, I was never checked during my entire Air Force career. It was safe and I was not to worry, the brass said. Decades later the U. S. Government spend millions of dollars decontaminating Johnston Island so that it could be converted into a wildlife refuge!

My first temporary duty to Johnston Island was

a result of a captain deciding I had a bad attitude because I didn't smile enough, as he told me. He was right; I did have a bad attitude.

Anyway, his solution to my attitude problem was to ship me off to Johnston Island for 30 days. I flew down on a C-118 on Thursday, October 24, 1963 at 7 a.m. We got down there three hours later at 10 a.m. I spent the day familiarizing myself with the island - all one square mile of it. That night I started my first 12 hour shift of a schedule that had no days off. It was just as well as there was hardly anything to do.

Shortly before my second tour of duty at JON, a Hill AFB based C-124 disappeared on Thursday, January 2, 1964 while enroute from Wake Island to Hickam. Search aircraft were immediately sent to search a huge area of the Pacific Ocean west of Hawaii. Next day, Friday, the 3rd, I volunteered to go out on one of the search aircraft, a C-124 with about 30 people on it - all looking out the windows and jump doors for signs of the aircraft. We flew quadrants for hours but saw nothing. The other search aircraft saw nothing either. The following day, Saturday, January 4th, at 10 a.m., I flew to JON on a C-118 for my month of temporary duty. My first shift of work, Sunday morning, I had a radio call from a search aircraft alerting me that they had spotted wreckage and possibly a raft north of JON and to alert search HQs at Hickam. The aircraft added they would hold in the area as long as their fuel allowed. I immediately radioed Hickam and they scrambled search aircraft using the coordinates I relayed from the search aircraft. Later, the search aircraft who spotted the wreckage radioed their fuel was low and they had to leave the area. 30 minutes later the Hickam aircraft arrived in the area but were never able to find the wreckage. Some days later the search was called off and the 8 or 9 member crew were presumed dead. One of them was a master sergeant named Herbert O'Malley. It was his last flight before retirement.

Vodka was \$.85 in the post exchange. Jessie was there once while I was there. He was a friend and passenger service specialist at Hickam. Jessie was from Oklahoma and would fight at the drop of a hat if someone called him Shit Hook. He got so drunk one night that when he climbed into his upper bunk to sleep, he peed during the night and got the sergeant sleeping under him very wet. Lots of hell raised over that. This sergeant had made a big fuss about having the bottom bunk. He was a big gruff tech sergeant

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Johnston Island

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and a real blowhard. "By god, I'm not climbing up there to get in my bunk." Happily, I was on duty and missed the fireworks. There were two double-decker bunks in our room - the so-called MATS room since we were the only MATS personnel on JON. I don't recall there even being an officer in charge. I had the 8 pm to 8 am shift and the other two had the 8 am to 8 pm shift.

I left JON for the last time on Thursday, February 6, 1964 at 5:45 p. m., again on a C-118 which made for a three hour flight to HIK, good ol' Hickam AFB.

In March 3, 2010 I found out from an Internet search that I was considered an "atomic veteran" due to my exposure and I became a member of the National Association of Atomic Veterans. Three years later I became a lifetime member. I was appointed Arkansas State Commander on November 20, 2013.

-- Submitted by Jake Lamkins

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Operation Hardtack

We were in route to Japan, Hawaii, China, Philippines, "Okinawa, Nakagusuku, Formosa, and Australia when we were ordered to proceed to the Marshal Islands of Bikini and Eniwetok in the South Pacific for "Operation Hardtack," where we participated in 28 detonations of the Atomic Bomb. Testing consisting of surface, sub-surface, and air detonations. The Soviet Union also fired 34 atomic weapons above ground in 1958. The British exploded 5 atomic weapons at Christmas Island. The Cold War was in full swing.

Our mission consisted of various duties, being the ship was fitted with the latest technical radar, we directed the maintenance of air operations, for control of participating aircraft. My gun crews job was to load 5 in. dia. missiles about 30in. long into the breech of our five inch 38 caliber gun mount and fire the missile into the Atomic Bomb mushroom cloud to register various readings for scientific use. The Ships high tech radar kept all commercial ships and planes out of the test area and challenged any unauthorized craft.

Prior to firing, we gunners were to roll down our shirt sleeves and button them and then sit on deck with our heads tilted down into our arms. We did not have any eye protection of any type. The imminent countdown

till the atomic bombs were detonated usually came in 0600 with the beautiful sunrise over the Pacific. You were able to see the remnants of World War II, partially sunk landing crafts and vehicles submerged in the coral waters.

Being our guns only had an accurate range of 5 miles, it was necessary to be within half that range. Target Decoy ships were anchored within ground zero of the blast, these ships carried various animals and mannequins to encounter the full blast and radiation exposure. As a surface detonation occurred, I sat on the deck behind my gun mount. My knees up, arms crossed over my knees, my head tilted downward into my arms. The countdown was loud over the ships speakers, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, "FIRE" I first felt the extreme detonation of intense heat which overcome the ship and us sailors on deck.

As I opened my eyes still buried in my arms, I was able to see through my fore arms and clearly see every bone in my arms as clear as an x-ray. The blazing white light from the detonation was blinding, as if the Sun came down from the sky. After the initial blast we entered the gun mount to fire the missile into the plume cloud which rose to over 60,000 feet in the air. The plume was a bright variety of colors, reds, blues, yellows, orange. The unbelievable size of the

Operations UpShot-Knothole

I enlisted in the Army in Sept 1952 after three years of mechanical engineering at Cornell University. I took basic training at the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center (FARTC) at Fort Sill, Oklahoma where I was the only enlistee in the training battalion. Everyone else was a draftee and I really took a ribbing over that. After basic training, I was assigned to the 59th Field Artillery battalion (280mm Gun) where I was part of the survey team. The job of the survey team was to establish the coordinates of the target(s) and feed the information to the Fire Direction Center (FDC). While at Fort Sill, we practiced with High Explosive (HE) shells and lobbed them from one side of the base to the other. Part of my training was learning how to assemble the atomic shells to be used in the 280mm gun on which we were training. This gun was later to be known as "Atomic Annie" but we (at least in the enlisted ranks) never called it that in 1952.

In late April of 1953 we boarded a train with the 280mm gun and associated equipment for the trip from Fort Sill to Camp Desert Rock in Nevada. The train went through El Paso where we had an overnight stop. That evening, many of those on board paid a visit to Juarez, Mexico. The impact of that side trip to Juarez probably had a greater negative impact on the health of the soldiers than any subsequent exposure to radiation. The next day the train headed for Las Vegas via Yuma, AZ and Barstow, CA. Having recently been promoted to Cpl., my job on the train was to guard the kitchen car. It was a converted box car that had stoves, grills and ovens added to it. The guards could eat anything we wanted all day long and we did!

After arriving in the Las Vegas area, we debarked and were bused to Camp Desert Rock and were assigned to a tent. Every night, the army ran buses into Las Vegas and many of us took advantage of it. I entered the Golden Nugget and promptly lost all my money. I called my father and asked for some money and he replied immediately by sending the money through Western Union. Unfortunately, the money went to Las Vegas NM instead of Las Vegas NV but after a few hours, the money finally arrived. I then promptly lost a big chunk of it and at this point was convinced that I was a poor gambler. I used some of the money left to buy a carton of Kent cigarettes and a gallon of Gallo wine which lasted me the rest of the time I was there. I never went back to the gambling tables.

Fortunately, the Las Vegas casinos sent performers to Camp Desert Rock so I didn't miss out on any of

the entertainment. One night we were visited by Jan Murray (comedian) and Toni Arden (singer) with a bevy of show girls. They put on a great show for us and it was very much appreciated. After the show, we returned to our tents except for a couple of us who went to the latrine. The latrine had showers and toilets sitting on a concrete slab but the tent siding and roof and not yet been constructed so it was an open air operation sitting right next to the main road. Unbeknown to us, all of the show girls had taken a bus tour of the camp and the bus came right by the latrine. One of the guys was taking a shower and I was sitting on the toilet facing the bus not 20 yards away. What could we do but wave and smile to the girls on the bus? They returned our waves with a big round of applause. It was the highlight of the trip and there was no radiation exposure!

The event itself was called Grable conducted on May 25 and was a part of Operation UPSHOT-KNOTHOLE. Prior to the shot, we were briefed several times on what to expect. We were given a dosimeter badge to measure the radiation. Based on the results of the test, it appeared that very few of us from the 59th battalion exceeded the limits of 3.9 rem. For the vast majority, most were exposed to less than 3.0 rem.

Our unit was assigned to the trenches about 2 miles from ground zero. J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, was several trenches ahead of us so we weren't worried as long as the main man was in front of us. We were part of a team that would move forward to ground zero after the blast. The weather was hot and clear that day and we were in trenches about 5 to 7 feet deep. When the blast came, we were all hunched down at the bottom of the trench. I remember a bright light but don't remember any sound. After the wind passed over head, we were allowed to get out of the trench. One guy was so scared that he didn't know anything had happened. He was still rolled up in a ball at the bottom of the trench and we had to lift him out.

When we came out of the trench, we could see the mushroom cloud. We then moved forward to near ground zero where we could observe the destruction of houses and a railroad bridge that had been built for the test plus some animals that had been tied up at ground zero. They had a railroad locomotive and a freight car on the bridge which had been tossed several hundred yards by the blast. None of the animals appeared to have survived. Chemical

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UpShot-Knothole

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Biological Radiological (CBR) teams preceded us on our movement to ground zero and marked every site that had been contaminated with radiation. Most of those contaminated sites appeared to have contained some kind of metal and it seemed as if the metal absorbed the radiation more than other materials. Obviously we stayed clear of these sites.

Our pre-test briefing discussed the impact of the Nagasaki and Hiroshima on the Japanese population. The army's estimates were that Japanese casualties were: indirect effects of the blast e.g. flying toilet seats - 50%, direct effects of the blast, e.g. blown ear drums - 35% and radiation - 15%. Based on what I saw at ground zero, that estimate appears to be reasonable. What I took away from this experience was that if I were ever to be involved in a nuclear attack and had any kind of warning, I would get down as low as I could, take a shower after the attack as soon as possible and stay from anything metal that could have been contaminated by radiation.

In January 1989, I received correspondence from the Defense Nuclear Agency outlining the "Radiation Exposure and the Nuclear Test Personnel Review Program". The purpose of the Program "is committed to provide each test participant the recorded radiation exposure or to assess the most probable exposure". According to the document they sent, 200,000 test participants had an average dose of .625 rem well below the Federal Guidelines (1989) which permitted up to 5 rem per year. There was a questionnaire as a part of the package they sent. I filled it out and sent it in but did not keep a copy. Based on the apparent low dosage I received, I have never concerned myself with that issue.

--Submitted by Arnie Goetchius

LOOKING FOR...



•To all State of Virginia ATOMIC VETERANS & WIDOW'S who are attending "REMEMBRANCE DAY at the VA WAR MEMORIAL and the Complementary Lunch at the RED LOBSTER, you will be receiving an ATOMIC VETERAN T-SHIRT with this logo on the back - VA'S position on Atomic Veterans "**DELAY, DENY UNTIL THEY ALL DIE!**" I have a list of attendees. I need everybody attending remembrance day to please send your NAME, PHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL & SHIRT SIZE by May 15-2016. Thanks in advance from your State Commander & Friend Gillie Jenkins Home 804-379-5673 Cell 804-334-8585.

Operation Hardtack

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ball of fire rolled outward and upward, getting larger and larger, spreading into a mass umbrella spreading radiation fallout across the sky.

After we fired our Five" Missile into the center of the plume, the ship changed course to avoid the radiation fallout. The ship then proceeded at full speed to try and out run the extremely high title wave. First came the shock-wave rolling across the water like a mammoth ray of heat waves and then the explosive nose would thunder over the ship. The target ships were lifted above the wall of water. When an underwater detonation occurred, our ship tried to escape this title wave, the title wave engulfed the fantail of the ship and would push us like an arrow through the title wave. On one occasion causing the rivets in the seam to rupture in the ships hull. The height of the detonated plume would climb 60 to 80 thousand feet in the air. As the ship steamed at full speed, 33 knots, it shook severely, rolled and took waves over the tops of the gun mounts and the bridge. The engines were at max speed to keep from being flipped or submerged from the force of the title wave. The large prop screws would raise the ship's fantail out of the water with a loud shrill sounding noise. It was life threatening to out run the radioactive fallout which spread for miles, contaminating everything in its path.

The ship was strung with PVC plastic piping all along the superstructure to provide a sprinkler system to wash the ship of radiation fallout. The entire Ship was monitored and hot spots of 5 million-Roentgens per hour were found. The ships crew commenced a scrub down of the entire Ship with salt water. The sea water was found to have an intensity reading of 10 million-Roentgens per. hour. The Captain immediately shut down the wash down system as we were washing down the ship with contaminated water. All swabs, mops, were then disposed of overboard. All of us topside on deck were told to shower after each detonation, the shower water was reclaimed contaminated sea water. We were not issued any Radiation Badge monitors until the last few weeks of the 3 months of operation Hardtack.

Each day in the Marshal Islands was long and extremely hot, 110 - 115 degrees, there was no escape from the blazing sun, the hot steel of the ship was too hot to sit on, the only relief from the sun was to put my blanket under the overhang of my gun mount and lay calmly to try and avoid the blazing heat. Not a breeze of air could be felt anywhere. 3 months of

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Operation Hardtack

intense heat. Below deck, sleeping quarters were unbearable, no air circulation, just the strong smell of human sweat and body odor. The hot nights I would climb into my gun mount and try to sleep between the two guns on the steel deck. All our mail was censored, I wrote my letters inside my gun mount, this was the only privacy I could find, I was not permitted to mention the Atomic detonations or our location. Cameras were not permitted. The blast impact on the island was unbelievable, tremendous deep craters were created, beautiful palm trees leveled and disintegrated. The islands were left contaminated with radiation.

The days when no detonations were scheduled we were permitted to go ashore to the barren islands where we would play horse shoes, baseball, or just lay in the shallow water to keep cool. We were provided with plenty of beer, we swam in the beautiful island waters unknown to us of the dangers of radioactivity. We would take the captain's boat out to deeper waters and troll behind it, holding onto a rope until our eyes caught the sight of a glimmering star shell or a large killer clam, we then dove down deep over and over, our fingertips feeling the gorgeous shells, but yet out of reach. I continued to dive until my nose started to bleed, I was able to get several star shells which I brought back to the ship and heated with a flame to force the living crab like animal to come out of the shell enough to tie a string to it, and then hang it up in the sun to dry out and die, then scrape out any remains. I then wire brushed and varnished the shells to a nice sheen. I still have them today displayed in my living room. On one occasion we spotted a large killer clam, we carefully lowered a gaff hook into the jaws of the clam, the jaws closed slowly until they were shut, we lifted the clam by a rope tied to the boat. We came along side our ship and hoisted the clam aboard. The jaws of the clam, about 3 ft. dia. were pried open with a crowbar, enough to get a knife into it and slice the muscle of the clam until it died. The shell halves were wire brushed and cleaned. Our Gunnery officer took the clam shells and latter shipped them home for bird baths. Another shipmate rigged a large hook attached to marlin rope and put the clam muscle on the hook and hung it over the side of the ship and immediately caught a 65 lb. fish, the mouth was big enough to put a basketball inside of it.

The heat, the loneliness, the isolation, took its toll on all of us... we became very on edge, sometimes angry and hard to get along with. Isolated fighting erupted, tempers flared in close quarters. We were in these

islands for three months, with money in our pockets and no where to go.

Operation Hardtack 1958 finally came to an end. We then proceeded to Yokosuko Japan, for a well earned liberty. Japan was a fascinating country, visited the temples and much sight seeing. I purchased two sets of Noritake china in large wooden crates and by rickshaw transported them back to my ship and stored them in my ammunition magazine in the bottom of the ship. When we returned to the states I shipped them home for Ann and my Mother. Each set contained 144 pieces of china. We then sailed to our objective of patrolling the Formosa "Taiwan" straits in defense of the Republic of China. Escorting Chinese nationalist convoys and landing crafts from Formosa "Taiwan" into the war zone bombardment of Quemoy and Matsu and Tachen Islands. Six of us Gunners-mates trained to form a ship boarding party in case we had to board other ships or submarines if needed. Armed with a carbine rifle and a 45 caliber pistol we were on call as needed.

In 1949 the mainland of Communist China had a revolution for democracy, The Red Chinese overwhelmed the democratic people in a war and drove the Republic Freedom Fighters off the mainland to the Island of Formosa where they took refuge from the communist. The Red Chinese now want the islands back under communist rule. Aug 23, 1958 the communist, began a blockade of Quemoy. In the largest military build up since the Korean War, 9,000 airman, sailors and marines were dispatched to Formosa. More than 125 U.S. War Ships were positioned in Formosan waters. This has been the largest naval force ever assembled in peacetime history. Ships crews stood ready at battle stations and ammunition was placed in the gun breeches. Our sister ship was hit with several hundred rounds of machine gun fire. The bombardment of Quemoy Islands lasted 44 days, continuous thru day and night. The free Chinese fought in seven sea encounters, 26 communist torpedo boats were sunk and the 12 air battles shot down 32 MIG 17s Red Chinese planes. 585 Nationalist troops were killed and 80 civilians lost their lives, 3 U.S. marine airmen were shot down and unaccounted for, possible MIA or POWs. The 7th fleet remained on alert in the Formosa straits for several more years. The US 7th fleet was sent in to defend the freedom fighters from communist aggression. Rough riding seas, at battle stations, standing watches and patrolling day and night.

--Continued on Page 9--

Operation Hardtack

The U.S. came to the Taiwan Nationalists aid and we still support their right to a free society. The body of water between the mainland of china and Formosa is called the Formosa straits, which is about 130 miles wide, this was the mission of our patrols, keeping the communist from crossing these straits and overtaking the islanders. I remember escorting a Taiwan troop carrier across the straits, a couple hundred Chinese soldiers were leaning over the rails and waving and yelling victory signs. We escorted them to Quemoy "Kinmen" island at dusk to defend their island. As our ship approached the island we could see the skies flash with explosions and hear the bombing of Quemoy in the black night, tremendous explosions on the Islands, red, orange, yellow fire balls filling the skies. The next morning we have seen (have or had seen ?) this troop carrier badly listing in danger of sinking. I did not know the fate of these solders until Aug. 2008 when we were invited to Taiwan for their 50 year celebration of their freedom, (long sentence author might consider making a break at the comma) at this time I found out that the landing craft we were escorting was badly hit and numerous nationalist soldiers were killed or injured. That night the islands were bombarded heavily, the skies were a blaze of detonations, at general quarters we watched the bombardments. The top of our gun mount was draped with an American flag to identify ourselves with the US Marine pilots and Navy pilots who protected the skies.

The USS Benner would patrol the Formosa Straight for 30 day periods, then proceed to anchorage in Kaoshling harbor for five days liberty. (I would consider rewriting the past sentence) My routine guard duty while in port was on the fantail or the forecastle of the ship. Armed with a carbine rifle, security was necessary to keep the islanders off the ship. The Chinese junk boats would come out of the fog and try to come along the fantail of our ship and try to buy brass projectiles, Navy "P" coats, blankets, and American currency. While on patrol duty we ran right into a large typhoon storm. A storm at sea can be terrifying. You are totally helpless out there bobbing around like a cork, swaying to and fro with large waves sweeping over the forecastle with each downward dip of the bow. There was no getting away from it. No place to hide! After dealing with this for 3 days, the storm finally let up and within 24 hours Mother Nature slammed us again. This time the typhoon hit a bit harder.

--Submitted by Frank J. Dujanovic--
-To be Continued next issue-



TAPS

Those that have passed away since our last newsletter.

James Brettell • Tyler, TX
Don J. Brouillard • Leonard, ND
DiCoio Dominic • San Jose, CA
Rudy Florentine • Ventnor City, NJ
Rodney Guidry • Pineville, LA
William D. Hiatt • Bonita, CA
Jurken R. Onken • Menomonee Falls, WI
Marvin L. Peters, Sr. • Topeka, KS
Lorin Mring • Bend, OR
Lee Meadows • Matthews, WV
William (Bill) Pistner • Greencastle, PA
Gerald Steward • Elk River, MN
William (Bill) Confer • Medina, OH
Jurgen R. Onken • Menomonee Falls, WI
Charles Edmond Peterson • Cainbridge, MN
Floyd Goracke • Harrisburg, OR
John Thatcher • Belvidere, NJ

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All NAAV members – here is a list of all State Commanders as of 9 August 2014. Your Director of State Commanders Gillie Jenkins wishes for all members to be able to contact their State Commander for questions. Hopefully this will “keep us together.” If your state does not have a State Commander or to volunteer to be a State Commander in your state, call or write to Gillie.

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Wyoming: **POSITION AVAILABLE**