

Lawrence Sea Stories

What is a Sea Story? It is usually a fine work of art, a true depiction of a actual event, or even a fictional version of an actual event, all which have taken place while on a ship or on liberty.

There are also many versions of the same story depending on who is telling it. Here is your chance to get your version of the hundreds of these stories and events out for all to read and enjoy. Stories should be sent via email using the Contact Us link on any of the pages. If possible, please send them as a Word Document attachment. Give your story a unique title and if you have photos please forward them as well. Once we read it over it will be placed here on this page.



The Last Cruise

This is about the final cruise that USS Lawrence DD-250 took from the West Coast to the East Coast for its decommissioning. The story is told by LTJG Norman Booth, Assistant Engineering Officer, DD-250 (1944-1945). Beware of the flying fish!

I can tell you for sure that the USS Lawrence (DD-250) was decommissioned in September of 1945 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard..... I was there. When WWII was over in 1945, the navy sent the USS Lawrence (DD-250) and USS King (DD-242) from our home port in San Francisco, California to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for decommissioning. Both ships were attached to Commander Western Sea Frontier, San Francisco, and when in port we berthed at South Pier, Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, the site of the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair.

At the time of the armistice with Japan in 1945, the USS King (DD-242) was in for repairs at Moore Dry Dock in Oakland, CA in the San Francisco east bay area. The two boilers in the forward fire room were torn down for repairs. The navy stopped the boiler work, which left one boiler in the aft fire room. A previous ship alt had removed #4 boiler as it also did on the USS Lawrence (DD-250) to install additional fuel tanks to increase the steaming range. So the King only had one operable boiler. The Lawrence had all three of its boilers in good operating condition. The late Chief Water Tender Joe Mogar was in charge of our boilers and boiler room

gang. Not only a very competent sailor, but as nice a man as I have ever met. We, the Lawrence, escorted the King all the way to Panama at 11 knots. It took about 17 days. The captain of the Lawrence at that time was Lieutenant Commander Douglas A Noonan. He had been executive officer when he relieved Lieutenant Raymond Hanford. Lt. Kenneth Weaver was the executive officer on this last trip for the Lawrence. The TBS radio call signature for the King was "Rivets" and that of the Lawrence was "Gallahad". We talked back and forth a lot since we were escorting the King. The weather on the trip to Panama was like a mill pond. Very hot and humid. Most of us slept somewhere on deck at night. I remember coming off the midwatch as a junior officer of the deck, and trying to find a place to put down my blanket and pillow. The only place I could find left was next to the anchor windlass up in the bow area. I no sooner got to sleep and I realized something was in bed with me---it was a flying fish that had soared up over the bow of the ship and landed in my blanket. When we arrived at Panama, at first we were anchored out at a buoy where we had to steam on auxiliary. It was terribly hot and humid. Since only a limited number of ships could pass through the Panama Canal per day, we had to wait our turn for about 5 or 6 days. We then continued up the east coast escorting the King at 11 knots. It was in September and we dodged hurricanes all the way. When we started up the Delaware River, we were at special sea detail. I was at my station in the forward engine room. The bridge rang up all ahead full, and we went up river for the final sprint to the Philadelphia Navy Yard at 20 knots. We moored to a dock and secured the main engines for the final time. In October 1945, I was ordered to the light cruiser USS Vicksburg (CL-86). I became the M division officer, in charge of the engine rooms. I was released from active duty and back to civilian life in September of 1946. In January of 1951, I was recalled to active service from the Naval Reserve. I made Lieutenant right away, and became M division officer on the heavy cruiser USS Los Angeles (CA-135). We were deployed to the Korea Area in April of 1951 and operated there until December 1951. We were ComCruDiv5, with Admiral Arleigh Burke aboard as the Flag. As for the whereabouts of the Lawrence commanding officers, I do not think any of them are still alive. I believe the only officers remaining on the USS Lawrence (DD-250) are I and Lt Ralph Starr in Cincinnati, Ohio. I could be wrong, but I am not aware of any others. We were in contact with LCDR Lyle Turner, former executive officer, up until a couple of years ago. I believe he has passed on. If alive, he would be about 90 years of age.

After WWII, about 1946 or 1947, I contacted former CO, Raymond Hanford, in the San Francisco area by phone. He really did not want to talk about our days on the Lawrence, or get together. He, to me, was kind of a loner. Doug Noonan, the last CO, was from Kentucky, and a very friendly man. Years later I tried and tried to locate him, but was never successful. As for LT Ralph Starr, our Sonar officer, I only found him about three or four years ago on the internet. I remembered he was a graduate of Duke University somewhere around 1942 to 1943. I contacted the Duke Alumni Association, and obtained his address, and found him. Ralph is a great guy, and we really had some great times together. At the present time, to me, shipmates Ralph Wegener, MM3, and Tiny Harp from the bridge gang are the shipmates that now hold our group together. They have always been very active in contacting shipmates and arranging for reunions. I hear from them often by email. This means a lot to me, and the rest of the USS Lawrence (DD-250) shipmates. As told by Norman Booth, Lt.(jg) Assistant Engineering Officer, USS Lawrence (DD-250), 1944 - 1945 in September of 2004.



Linebacker Strike

By Commander Robert C. Powers, U.S. Navy

Not everybody can play the linebacker position in football and not every Seventh Fleet warship could be part of the Linebacker Surface Strike Group. DEs and DEGs could not be assigned to Linebacker, but DDs, and DDGs like the Lawrence, had the speed, stamina, and strength to conduct strikes in North Vietnam and to interdict enemy logistics and lines of communication.

The ship plunged and vibrated at 25 knots as she dashed through the Gulf of Tonkin. Holding on in the Wardroom, I thumbed through a three month old Time Magazine while waiting for my grilled cheese sandwich, my fourth meal of the day.

This cool day in December, 1972 had been a tough one for all hands. The previous night had been spent at General Quarters, as would tonight. Three strikes had been made with snatches of sleep in between. Our two automatic five inch 54 caliber rapid fire guns worked beautifully and enemy fire throughout the night had been sporadic and inaccurate. At 0600 we met with a replenishment task force to refuel and rearm. Reveille at 0500 after a night at General Quarters was nothing new to who were Linebacker veterans. They plodded to their stations, all 320 men aboard, and we refueled and took on some 500 rounds and powder cartridges. Then it was time to clean up the ship, grab some chow and some sleep, check out all of the complex equipment of a guided missile destroyer, and get ready for tonight.

An air of apprehension was apparent to all. It was that way when we went into Brandon Bay. This would be no milk run. Brandon Bay was dotted with several small islands. The largest of these, Hon Me and Hon Mat, had large coastal defense guns protected by caves. In order to reach our targets we had to close the North Vietnam mainland inside these islands. In addition to the island guns, the entire coast was dotted with heavy gun emplacements, for it was this point along the coast that Highway One was most vulnerable to naval gunfire. A continuous flow of war material was being pushed southward along Highway One to the NVA troops that had penetrated to Quang Tri below the DMZ.

The task of the Linebacker Task Force was to shut off the flow of material. My ship was one of a three ship unit going into Brandon bay for that purpose. My sandwich arrived and I stirred some sugar into my iced tea. The ship heeled to port as she turned. Knowing our track, I knew I had about 15 minutes to eat.

The Easter Offensive of 1972 had started quickly as North Vietnamese troops overran areas of Quang Tri Province, crossed the Cua Viet River and took the South Vietnamese Naval Base at the mouth of the Cua Viet River. This was familiar territory to me, as I had been in there during a previous tour with US Naval Forces, Viet Nam. It was no surprise that the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) needed gunfire support and that cruisers and destroyers off the coast of the DMZ were the first to respond.

More than half of the area being contested was within range of naval gunfire. This was a war where the might of U.S. Naval power could be brought to bear. Operating schedules were accelerated and the Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Seventh Fleet was augmented, reaching over 35 ships at times. Ships of the Atlantic Fleet were sent westward through the Panama Canal. Such a ship was mine. For the first time in her 11 year history, my ship would operate in the Pacific and would fire a shot in anger.

As we began to get ready for deployment to combat, events were taking place that would lead us to Brandon Bay. The Surface Strike Group was activated in early April to conduct strikes in North Vietnam to interdict enemy logistics lines and lines of communications. The group was composed of a northern and a southern Task Unit, each consisting of three or four destroyers, occasionally augmented by a cruiser. As we were to discover, a ship would normally rotate between gunfire support at the "Gun Line" near the besieged Quang Tri area and surface strike duty in one of the Linebacker units.

Not everyone was assigned to Linebacker, as some demanding requirements were set forth. First, you had to have a ship with two guns and two screws. This eliminated the newer ships of the Fleet, the DE's and DEG's and left the task to the older better armed DDG's and DD's. Second, your ship could not have a mission degrading casualty; in other words, everything had to be working. This made it tough, and the ship that could stay on Linebacker was a good ship.

The schedule of night strikes and day replenishments was a back breaker, and the crew that could stay on Linebacker was a good crew. We had a good crew. As executive officer, I knew the bad ones and the good ones well and when the chips were down, they all performed magnificently. The tougher the job, the higher the morale. Since we were a ship that could stay on Linebacker, we got the tough jobs. Of the 85 days we spent in combat, 53 of them were on Linebacker. The 1MC announced "Reveille, Reveille. The ship will go to General Quarters in ten minutes."

On July 7, 1972 we sailed from Norfolk, Virginia to begin an adventure that would remain vivid in the minds of our crew. Following a long transit with intense training, we joined the Seventh Fleet on 7 August. After a brief stop at Subic Bay for voyage repairs, we joined the Gun Line near the DMZ early on the morning of 20 August. Steaming in through the mist with all hands at General Quarters, we were greeted by an awesome sight. Strung out along the coast were two heavy cruisers and ten destroyers periodically belching fire and smoke as their guns rained destruction on the enemy.

Eager to get into the fray, we were frustrated at being assigned a holding station outside the string of ships. Long hours passed and, finally at about 1000, we were assigned at station on the Gun Line and received a firing mission. A cheer rose from the crew as the roar from Mount 51 signaled the first of 9,500 rounds we were to fire in combat. In seven days on the Gun line we fired more than 900 rounds in some 40 missions.

On 27 August, we got the word: "Proceed to Dong Hoi Gulf and join the southern Linebacker unit." We had passed our first test and were being promoted to Linebacker. With a mixture of joy, fear, and anticipation, we turned our bow northward.

Dong Hoi Gulf was an unusual place. The coast was mountainous, and Highway One went through a pass near the Gulf of Tonkin. This was the point south of Brandon Bay where the highway was again vulnerable to naval forces. It was here on 19 April North Vietnamese MIG aircraft had attacked U.S. Navy destroyers in what was now known as the Battle of Dong Hoi Gulf. In that battle, one destroyer, the USS Higbee, suffered damage from a bomb hit and the USS Sterrett shot down a MIG with her Terrier missiles. Later on that day, the destroyers were attacked by high speed patrol craft and were successful in repelling the attack with enemy losses. The battle resulted in action to provide special armament and sensors for destroyers in combating low flying aircraft and anti-ship missiles. My ship had been a leader in evaluating such equipment and, in addition to her normal armament, mounted the infrared seeking Sea Chaparral and Red Eye missile systems. We also had additional radars, a special electronic warfare suit, and a chaff mortar capability. Additionally, we had .50 caliber machine guns installed for close in protection.

Dong Hoi Gulf had been chosen by the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists as an anchorage and off loading point for Chinese Communists merchant ships re-supplying the North Vietnamese. Our job was conduct surveillance of a Chinese ship, shoot up the supplies once ashore, and conduct strikes against targets of opportunity in the area. The next 22 days were to be interesting, tiring, and frustrating. Strikes were conducted day and night, but not once were we fired upon by the enemy. On several occasions other ships took light fire, but not us. The crew became somewhat complacent. They were very annoyed because there was no opposition.

Routine surveillance day after day can get very tedious, and it did. Finally edgy sailors were heard to say that they wished that the enemy would shoot back just to break the monotony. They were to have their wish fulfilled many fold, but not at Dong Hoi Gulf.

Even Subic Bay is a welcome sight after a week on the Gun Line and three weeks watching a Chinese Communist merchant ship. After some repairs to our ship and morale at Subic we again went to sea. Following a stint on the Gun Line, we found ourselves with Linebacker again, but this time with the northern unit. We had made the first team.

The northern Linebacker unit consisted of three destroyers, at least one of which was a 5 inch 54 caliber gunned ship. The older 5 inch 38 caliber guns didn't have the range for many targets, but were extremely reliable and efficient against medium range targets and coastal defense guns. The 5 inch 54 caliber guns were fully automatic, more complex, and though longer ranged, were less reliable. Through the herculean efforts our gunner's mates and a special Seventh Fleet gun repair team, we would complete our combat tour never having missed a commitment because of a gun casualty.

We were also a two screw ship and stayed that way. Our engineers kept the plant going under all conditions, never missing a commitment. I remember one main feed pump casualty that was repaired just in time to bring four boilers on the line and go up to speed for the dash in on the Coast of North Vietnam. And that's what the northern Linebacker force did, three or four times a night-high speed, twisting, zig-zagging runs close in to the enemy coast. And it was there that my ship drew her first enemy fire. Frightening as it was, it was nothing compared to what was to come, but the crew strutted. Now, finally, they were really combat veterans. After years of training and maintaining complex machinery and weapons, they were part of a warship doing what she was designed to do, and doing it well. Strange, that such a proud moment would result from being shot at.

The incoming enemy fire during those days in October and November was characterized by its inaccuracy and use of point detonating ammunition, resulting in surface bursts. The enemy would sweep the coastal waters with surface search radar and when the ships came into range, saturate the area. It appeared that they were firing at predetermined grid points. Very few ships were hit, though in the spring of 1972, the USS Buchanan took a hit.

Beginning in December, enemy fire became very accurate and very heavy, probably because of the introduction of radar controlled coastal defense guns. Also, more use of time fused air burst ammunition was apparent. I looked around the wardroom at several other officers there who were silently preparing themselves for a long night of operations. Young men, part of an effective team, they had the heady flow of adrenalin that comes in combat. The worst period was now, when there was time to contemplate pitting a thin hulled destroyer against fortified coastal guns, to think about mine fields, the rocks, the shoals, the high speed maneuvers at close quarters in the darkness with other destroyers. The 1MC gave its final warning. "The ship will go to General Quarters in five minutes." I pushed back and started for the bridge.

In November we made it to Hong Kong and, Kaohsiung for brief liberty ports. In Kaohsiung, the ship was alongside a destroyer tender for some much needed repairs. We re-gunned our mounts there, having used up the barrel life of both guns. Then, in late November it was back to the Gun Line. Many, many rounds were expended during this period in support of ARVN forces.

It was the monsoon season and the sea was an adversary. The winds howled and each day was a life of mist and spray. The Gulf was choppy on top of great rolling swells that came up in the shallow waters where our firing positions were located. Muscles were strained, bruised from holding on amid the endless rolling. Great seamanship was required to keep the ship in position for the guns to bear.

Between the shock gunfire and the working of the ship in the seas, cracks began to develop in the superstructure [sic. Aluminum]. Typhoons came and the ships would steam sea ward and dart north or south trying to outrun the movements of nature's monster winds. Despite this, in 12 days, the ship fired 2,300 rounds in support of troops ashore. The most memorable mission occurred in early December when, at about 2330, steaming south of Danang to a new station, an urgent call for help was received on the spotter circuit. Plotting the coordinates, we found that we were close to the spot and steamed into firing position. Firing over 140 rounds, our ship was credited with saving an ARVN outpost from attack by a company sized unit of Viet Cong. [sic: Mount 52 was down with a "hot gun" barrel. Mount 51 was out of Point Detonating ammo. So we used Anti-aircraft Proximity shells and set the altitude at 10 feet. The VC were caught out in the open and decimated.]

A repair period in Subic Bay was cut short in mid December when we received orders to proceed to northern Linebacker and relieve the USS Goldsborough which had taken a hit and suffered several killed and wounded. We steamed into the fray just before Christmas. It was at this time that we had several unique visitors. The Secretary of the Navy, while touring ships in the area, came aboard and spent the night, making a strike with us. We were proud to be the only ship to be SecNav's flagship for a Linebacker Strike. And, the Commander of our Task Force came aboard for a strike.

Christmas was a hurried affair of singing carols, thinking of home and family, and laughing at our shipmate Santa Claus. And then the fighting got rough. Someone had taught the enemy how to shoot. As I finished the climb to the bridge, the thrill of danger brought a hollow feeling to my stomach.

The bridge was very, very dark . As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I stepped out on the wing of the bridge and saw that the sky was overcast with no moon. Black rain squalls moved along the horizon and lightening crackled and flashed in the distance. When it did, I could see our two companion destroyers dashing along through the choppy seas at intervals to starboard. Men began to come to the bridge to man up for General Quarters, and the subdued talk added to the ghostly atmosphere of the soft red lights in the Pilothouse. Silently, I walked among the men, checking the various indicators and stations. Course 335. Speed 27,

As Exec., my assignment was to take the conn. The maneuvering of the ship was mine. The Captain took station in the Combat Information Center (CIC) where he could obtain the most information to fight the ship, supervise control of weapons, and supervise the maneuvering of the ship.

“General Quarters. General Quarters. All hands man your battle stations. BONG! BONG! BONG! BONG! BONG!” The General Quarters gong sounded loud and there was a final scurry as each man put on phones, adjusted binoculars, and arranged charts and plots into place. I relieved the conning officer and knew that 4,500 tons of warship would respond to my commands. A quiet efficiency settled over the bridge. I reported to the Captain via the squawk box that all stations were manned and ready.

The radio crackled with a tactical signal that altered course 60 degrees to port and slowed the formation to 22 knots. I gave the commands and the ship leaned, then steadied and slowed. We were on a course for the mouth of Brandon Bay, right between the islands of Hon Mat and Hon Me. The approach was a controlled zig zag at varying speeds, designed to confuse enemy gunners. I stepped out on the wing of the bridge to check my position on the guide. I could just see her outline in the gloom a mile away, but distinct and clear was the great white wave leaping at her bow. We had a “bone in our teeth” and were charging into battle.

On the horizon I could see darting, fiery tracer bullets leaping into the air after some unseen aircraft. Then more tracers. And then, the spectacular fireworks of a Surface to Air (SAM) missile launch. A great spitting ball of flame rose quickly into the air and turned in our direction. Instinctively I ducked and reached for the squawk box to warn the Captain that we had an incoming missile. It detonated before I could send the alert. A bright white flash, and seconds later, a distant KERWHUMP.

Another course and speed change. Now up to 25 knots and the wind whistled ferociously in the darkness. There was a blast of rain as we passed through a squall. We would dart like this into the firing point and turn on a course parallel to the coast to unmask all guns. After firing, we would disperse on divergent courses eastward at high speed. Normally, the coastal defense guns would not fire at us until we commenced our bombardment. That was good because it meant that most of their shells would fall behind us as we departed. Tonight would be different.

The target we were to hit was a railway storage yard. It was seven miles inland, which meant that even with the range of our guns, we had to go uncomfortably close to the beach. The Captain and the CIC team were busy pinpointing the target and inserting the track into the gunfire control equipment. They were also preparing to set up several known gun sites that were sure to fire on us.

Alter course 30 degrees to starboard. Speed 27. As the ship throbbed in response, I walked to the radar and looked into the eerie green scope. Blobs of rain squalls surrounded us, but CIC was reporting many small contacts ahead. It had to be the North Vietnamese fishing fleet. Our orders were not to molest

them unless fired upon, yet the maze of junks presented a considerable hazard to three destroyers trying to weave their way through them.

I saw them popping up on the scope now. Straining my eyes, I raised my binoculars and peered through the gloom and flying spray. A lookout sang out sighting a sail close on the port bow. Then I saw them in the darkness. A forest of ridged sails bobbing up and down.

Directly ahead, a series of small bright flashes stuttered. Ducking, I listened for the whine of machine gun bullets, but there were none. Raising my binoculars again, I could make out a small junk dead ahead and what appeared to be a lantern being waved frantically. I began to imagine what it must be like to be in a small boat on a dark sea and find a destroyer headed straight for you at high speed. Scary!

Several hundred yards short of the junk, I did a Right standard rudder-Shift your rudder-Rudder amidships maneuver that took him about 10 yards down the port side. As the junk bobbed by, I looked down at the men in it and shouted at them. I don't remember what I said but it relieved my tension a bit.

Alter course 45 degrees to port. Speed 24. This was the last approach leg. The next turn would be to firing course. We had passed through the fishing fleet without incident and were in shallow water now.

"Surface search radar bearing 320." The detection report confirmed that the enemy was plotting our movements. Another search radar was detected to the southeast.

"Fire control radar bearing 330." That was the clincher.

"Fire control radar is tracking." That meant that they were on us, and I didn't have long to wait for their reaction.

Across a sector of about 45 degrees, the horizon west of us lit up with the muzzle flashes of multiple heavy guns. It was spectacular!

The next 25-30 seconds are always interesting. You know that somewhere up there, tons of lead are headed in your direction. Statistically, it's best to keep right on your course until you can see a pattern to the fall of the shot. But the urge to do something, anything, in those few seconds is overpowering. The first salvo was a pattern of three air bursts that detonated directly ahead of the ship at a range of less than 100 yards. Everyone on the bridge ducked at the unmistakable "KERACK" of the high explosives close aboard followed by the hiss of shrapnel striking water.

The next five minutes were a blur of vivid events. Automatically, I took bearings on the muzzle flashes and passed them to the Weapons Officer. Reports flowed in to the bridge of muzzle flashes and rounds detonating close aboard. Sonar reported many close underwater detonations. Amidst this, the signal came to turn to port to the firing course and slow. With full rudder the ship swung to the new course., and as she did the two long range five inch guns swung out on the beam, tracking their target.

"KERBOOM! KERBOOM!"

The guns spoke and our bombardment went whistling on its way. Unfortunately whistles with a distinct whooshing up doppler continued, and the KERACK of incoming mingled with the KERBOOM of our outgoing. Powder fumes and cork were flying everywhere and enemy shells were exploding ahead aft port and starboard. Stations aft were reporting hearing shrapnel hit the superstructure.

Strangely, though you can hear it all, it's difficult to actually see an incoming detonation. You have to be looking right at it at the right split second. Tonight, though, anywhere you happen to be looking, there was a bright white and yellow flash. I was standing on the starboard bridge wing and saw one detonate abeam so close that I was looking down at it and heard the whine of shrapnel.

"KERBOOM! KERBOOM!"

Our guns kept firing. I thought to myself, will you please hurry up guns. It's time to haul out of this place. Then another spectacular sight. Deeply inland, we saw the glare of our rounds striking their target and the flare up of many secondary explosions. WE GOT 'EM!

The squawk box came alive and a voice from CIC asked "How many rounds are we taking out there? They sound awfully close."

"Too fast, too close, too many to count", was the reply.

The guns stopped firing and the radio crackled with the dispersal signal. I put the ship into a hard port turn and cranked on 27 knots. As soon as the water got deeper, I wanted more speed and told the engineers to stand by for 29 knots.

"I can give you 32 knots and wish you'd take it" came the answer from main control.

The engineers beneath the waterline, had been getting the full effect of the numerous close aboard underwater detonations. We hauled out of there with enemy rounds chasing us all the way.

Mount 52 set up on the coastal defense firing at us and returned the fire. As we sped by Hon Mat, their guns opened up on us. We were ready for that, and Mount 51 answered viciously, silencing the enemy gun. We pulled out of their gun range and escaped unscathed.

All was strangely silent as we steamed eastward, each man winding down from the tension of those few moments. It took quite a while to muster the usual wise cracks. The next morning the crew found chunks of jagged shrapnel topside, one piece as big as a fist. We knew we had been living right that night.

On 30 December, we left Linebacker and began our transit back to the east coast of the United States. We had conducted 154 gunfire support missions and 116 Linebacker strikes. It was estimated that more than 600 enemy rounds fell close aboard during those missions. We were credited with destroying many enemy targets and killing numerous enemy troops.

The question of whether or not these destroyer strikes were worth the risking of the ships is often asked. I would have to answer with the following observations. First, something was blowing up and burning as a result of our strikes. We saw it. Second, our effectiveness could be measured by the enemy steps taken to counter us. The increased volume and accuracy of their fire indicated that they went all

out with what they had. Third, despite enemy efforts, few ships were seriously damaged. Had control of the air or the seas been seriously contested, it would have been a bigger and longer fight.

On our way home, we heard news of the cease fire[sic: we were actually in Japan for R&R, scheduled to go back on the Gun Line, when the cease fire was announced] and were proud to know our ship had helped force the enemy to that position.

For her action in combat, the USS Lawrence (DDG 4) was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation [sic: unit version of the Bronze Star]. She and many brave ships that shared the dangers of those times will remember that unique destroyer operation-Linebacker Strike!

***The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the Meritorious Unit Commendation to
USS LAWRENCE (DDG-4)***

CITATION:

For meritorious service during operations against enemy forces in Southeast Asia from 7 August 1972 to 10 January 1973. Upon assignment to the US SEVENTH Fleet in support of United States objectives in Southeast Asia, USS LAWRENCE consistently displayed a high degree of professionalism and resourcefulness while carrying out arduous combat support missions along the coast of the Republic of Vietnam and 116 high speed strike missions against North Vietnam. During this period, USS LAWRENCE damaged or destroyed significant enemy fortifications and logistic support facilities. The sustained high level of personnel and material readiness achieved by LAWRENCE enabled her to respond instantly to every commitment ranging from pilot rescue to emergency naval gunfire support. By the exemplary performance of duty throughout this period, the officers and men of the USS LAWRENCE reflected great credit upon themselves and the United States Naval Service.

***John W. Warner
Secretary of the Navy***



Oh Sh\$t.....I'm in the Navy now!

I had just spent the better part (and it was a better part) of early 1972 in San Diego. Getting all trained up to be an Interior Communications Electrician. Having just Graduated from the famous Georgia Institute of Technology (and Jack Daniels Tasting Emporium), the workload was lightweight. For a few months, I attended class for 4 ½ days a week and had a US Navy paid for apartment out on Point Loma.

Shortly after my arrival, growing up buddy Ensign B shows up from good ol Raleigh. Weekdays working; weekends partying (when not having duty)....1972 US Open at Pebble Beach, Golf in Palm Springs, chasing ladies at MCRD, hanging out at Pacific Beach, playing Torrey Pines. Life was good as it could get, considering we were swabbies.

About that time, I was offered a position in the Technical Writing section Electrical Instruction Group at the Naval Training Station.....interpreting Old Salts' comments so as to put them in some reasonable form for Programmed Instruction...learn on your own stuff. Well hell yeah, I jumped on it!!! Was all set to spend my active service career in Naval Nirvana.

That was, till the NVA invaded Quan Tri. That changed everything. The Fleet's needs took precedence. I finished school and....Poof! I was given my two weeks leave and assigned to the USS Lawrence, DDG 4. OK, could be worse. Home ported in Norfolk, where another growing up good friend, H. H. was stationed. We could room together. Ok, Ok....looking pretty good if I had to go to the Fleet. Then Ol Hugh 'splains to me that the USS Lawrence had pulled out on a long cruise only days before....to Viet Nam...Gulf of Tonkin...Yankee Station.

Oh Sh\$t!

Well, in their infinite wisdom the Navy sent me back to Norfolk for an extra week, instead of letting me catch the Larry when she stopped in San Diego. Go Figure. So I wait around in Norfolk forever till finally they set me up to find my ship.

Board a Commercial flight at 1100 hrs one morning to San Francisco. Arrive 6 hrs later. Wait another 4 hrs for transport to Travis AFB. Catch a midnight flight to Japan with a refueling stop in Anchorage, AK at 0400 local time....God knows when it was on my clock. Arrive in Japan at sunrise. Wait a few hours for a military flight to Clark AFB in the Philippines. Arrive mid afternoon... into a raging Monsoon. No transport down the 150 miles to Subic Bay, where the DDG 4 was. Couldn't fly, roads washed out. Spend the next 18 hrs waiting...then finally released about midnight to find a place to sack out. Meantime lugging my 75 pound Sea Bag in one hand and my briefcase, which contained my Orders and Military Records, in the other. Hadn't had much sleep or even a shower and shave for 48 hours and 12 time zones.

Up and at 'em bright and early, 0600, the next morning. Flew in a Flying Box car down to Cubi Point, and motored over to Subic Bay.

"Going to the Lawrence are ya? Well she pulled out yesterday afternoon to get ahead of the storm."

Great!

I am assigned quarters for the next 3 days. Then I find out that once you land somewhere, it take 3 days to get you in and then back out. This will be a recurring theme.

So, I am in Subic for 3 days....doing nothing, really, because I could be catching a ride to the Larry at any moment. I didn't even go over the Sh\$t River to Olongapo.

True to form, 3 days later, I get assigned to an Oiler that is supposed to gas up the Lawrence. Unknown to me at the time, the Lawrence was required to be 75% ammo'd up and topped off at no less than 90% gas.

Just as I get settled in and ready to shove off.... "Sorry, Bud. We ain't going to the Lawrence this trip."

Transit quarters.....you guessed it....3 days.

An on the third day, I was ordered to report to the USS Oriskany...a WWII vintage Carrier. Seems the new modus operandi was to have me ride with Mail Helo's till I found my ship.

Flew a lot in Helo's for the next couple of weeks. Mostly from Carrier to Carrier. Turns out Larry was off doing stuff every time we flew near. On one occasion, we held off at about 4,000 feet ASL, while she ran a joint mission with an F4 Phantom on a target just in shore off S. Viet Nam. 4,000 feet, Larry's guns blazing. The Phantom firing its missiles. Like the movies, 'cept real!!!

Oh Sh\$t!

We eventually had to fly on off....low on fuel.

On one occasion, we were headed to her, inbound ... about ten minutes away. Finally!

Then a red light starts flickering in the rotor hub at the top of the cabin. For those who have never flown in a Military Helo....they don't spend any money or weight on noise abatement. Even when you are wearing the ear muffs, you can't even hear yourself think. Much less anyone else.

So, here comes the Flight Engineer. He starts fiddling and reaching up into that hub. All the while chatting up the Pilot and Co Pilot.

By now it just me and the Crew. I shrug and mouth

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

CHIPS IN THE TRANSMISSION

IS THAT BAD?

The guy starts rotating his index fingers in circles, then stops them....very abruptly...then backs them up just a bit.

Then he points straight down and mouths **BOOM!**

Well, that's not good!!

The next thing I know, we are hauling boogie at about a 45 degree pitch back to different Carrier.

We disembark and are walking towards the Island. They are waiting for the props to stop before they fold them up. Doesn't take long.....

SCREECH!!!! They stop alright...abruptly. About 30 seconds after we touch down.

Oh Sh\$t!

Every time we missed the Lawrence, seems like they took me to a different Carrier.....for 3 days, of course.

Oriskany, Ranger, Midway, Hancock....others.

Not much to do except watch two a days of Launch and Recovery from the Observation Deck.

I kept a pretty good count....thank God they all appeared to come back each time.

Then in a totally inexplicable event, we actually find the USS Lawrence (DDG 4) when she's not doing any Ops.

I get lowered down to her.

I kiss the deck.

It has been 28 days and 13 time zones since I got on the plane back in Norfolk.

Well, that Fall we get really busy supplying gunfire support below the DMZ, keeping a ChiCom freighter embargoed in Dong Hoi Harbor in North Viet Nam, and sneaking in over 110 strike night time missions against targets farther up the coast in North Viet Nam...including Haiphong Harbor.

My General Quarters (GQ) station was After Gyro(compass). I was connected by sound powered phone to the Bridge, Main Engine Room, Main Boiler Room, Main IC (Gyro) Room., Damage Control Central (DCC), Sick Bay/Emergency Operating Room, and After Steering.

Just me and the spare/redundant Gyro. All alone. On the keel, right near the props. Only one further back than me was the guy in After Steering. He was there in case the Bridge was shot out. I was there for....OK....for...now really; why was I there? The Main Gyro was in one of the most secure places on board. Amidships, two deck down. Right next to and a deck below Gun Plot and DCC.

I repeat.....I was there for what?

But there I was. On the keel, next to the TARTAR Missile Magazine...Yep, 2 feet, one hatch, and ¼" of steel away from (24) AA Missiles. And, to top it off, I knew more than most.....there were about 30

bottles of CO2 that would be triggered at them and me with the slightest hint of a spark. If the secondary explosion didn't get me, I'd suffocate.

Oh Sh\$t!

As we got deeper and deeper into the Fall, Operation Linebacker II, the North Vietnamese became very inhospitable towards our incursions into their "rice bowl."

Per accounts from Deck Logs:

USS Lawrence DDG-4 reported as an element of TU 77.1.1 on 21 December 1972, [in effect relieving the Goldsborough who was hit by shore batteries the night before].

During this period through 30 December, Lawrence was flagship for COMDESRON 11. Eighteen (18) Linebacker strikes were conducted, expending 1,089 rounds against primary targets and 296 rounds of counter-battery fire against enemy coastal defense gun sites. During this period enemy fire was heavy and accurate.

Lawrence was under enemy fire for a total of 123 minutes with 388 rounds of enemy fire falling in the immediate vicinity with some air bursts and surface bursts as close as 10 yards.

It was a bit disconcerting to After Steering and After Gyro as the shells detonated. Being under the waterline, we could feel as well as hear the concussive blasts. The shells always seemed to be just behind or just besides the ship.

Once I started singing "Who's that knocking at my door, who's that knocking at my door" from the Barnacle Bill limerick to ease the tension.

NOT FUNNY....from After Steering. I desisted.

Many a morning the sun rose to see Boatswain Mates sweeping shrapnel off the deck. Thank goodness for the CHAFF we used as an attempt to blind the Shore Battery Artillery.

So here we were in the midst of another 4 or 5 mission night....shells keeping me and After Steering quite alert; when from Sick Bay/Emergency Operating Room comes....

"Oh Sh\$t!!!!!"

Chatter everywhere on the 1JV.....OMG! Are we hit. What's going on?

"Silence on the Line! Silence on the Line" from the Bridge.

"No, No it's OK. We're not hit or anything" comes back Sick Bay/Emergency Operating Room.

“What’s going on?” from the Bridge.

“You remember Seaman Jones that just came on board last week?” Sick Bay/Emergency Operating replies.

A resounding **“NO”** from all of us.

Well it turns out Seaman Jones has literally been scared sh\$tle\$ since he got on board. Hadn’t crapped in a week. He finally cramps up so bad he has to go to Sick Bay. After a few insightful questions, Doc prescribes a laxative. It works in only a few seconds.

OH SH\$T!!!! Everywhere!!!!



