

September 25, 2000

Dear Don:

I really haven't dropped dead yet, just slowed down so much that it is hard to tell the difference. I spent most of June getting ready for and working at my son's fantasy baseball camp. About twenty retired major leaguers work with middle aged to elderly doctors, dentists, and lawyers who are trying to convince themselves that they could have made it as pros if they hadn't gone to graduate school instead. My son is a local doctor and baseball fan and has been running a camp every year for the past sixteen years. His sister and I are the cheap (free) labor he used to keep his prices down. When we finished this year we had had enough and retired for good. In July I took my daughters on a cruise to recuperate and didn't get home again until early August. That is when I started looking for answers to your questions. Boy, you can sure forget a lot in fifty years.

I want to thank you for all the information you sent me. The listing of all the reefers was particularly interesting and a reminder of how long I've been in the Navy. I remember seeing the old Bridge, AF 1. It was probably just a year or so before the war and could have been in San Diego, Pearl, or Manila. I remember unloading to Graffias in Sasebo, but not Karin or Merapi. They sound like the 3 holds, engines and superstructure aft, about 5,000 tons, that used to run from Pearl to Johnson, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and Samoa in the late 40s. Wouldn't bet much on that though.

To answer some of your questions: Pictor got into the Korean War Zone several times in 1951 and 1952 but only to conduct AA practice of our main (and only) battery, the 20 mm guns. The firing area was northwest of Sasebo and inside the War Zone. We did the firing the day we left Sasebo on the way back to Oakland; The hatch covers were steel pontoons, 5 or 6 to a hatch. They were covered by heavy canvas tarpaulins which were secured by wedges and a steel cable running around the hatch. The only time we opened a hatch at sea that I recall was when we had a load of avocados in hold #1 catch fire on the way to Guam. Luckily the sea was very calm at the time; All of our living spaces, engineery plant, and administrative offices were located in the island section but I'm not too sure of the exact layout. The CO's cabin was just below the bridge, the next deck down was the wardroom, and I'm sure the cre's mess was just under that which would put it on the main deck. We had about 15 chiefs on board and I'm sure they had their own mess but I don't have any idea where it was located. I think there was a dumbwaiter that was used to bring food up to the wardroom from the galley, and went on up to the captains quarters. It was not very large, maybe 3 feet by 4 feet.

We had two identical refrigeration plants, aft of #3 holdone port and the other starboard and I don't think there was any bulkhead between them. Practically every trip one or both plants would break down and it was fairly simple to move parts back and forth between plants to keep one in operation. We also had access to #3 and #4 holds through a W.T. door but I'm not sure which deck levels they were on. They were at least a couple below the main deck.

Considering I must have made 30 or 40 inspections of the crew quarters, I have no idea where they were located or what they looked like. I think the island had a thwartship passage just aft of the mess areas and also one aft. Also one on each side running fore and aft on the O-2 and O-3 decks. The officer and chief rooms were on these two levels plus many of the administrative offices. I believe the galley was just aft of the crew's mess on the main deck. It is all kind of fuzzy now, but it was all very spacious compared to the DE's and DD's I was most familiar with.

The most exciting part of the island trips was unloading at Wake Island. We had to lie off the entrance to the lagoon and lower pallets into small landing craft that were bouncing around in four to eight foot swells. It was something our crew had no experience doing and the results ranged from bad to catastrophic. Any time our boatwain was off a bit on the timing of the swells we would end up with broken bags of flour, sugar, and rice, with assorted loose cans filling the bottom of the boats. To top it off, the civilian airlines flying through Wake (they paid the Navy for our delivery service) insisted their beer had to be in glass bottles to satisfy their passengers. I think at least half the bottles broke and the boat bottoms looked like thick soup. On the first trip we sent a message apologizing for the loss of so much cargo but they replied that they had lost less than half the cargo and that was the best they had ever done. It seems they would order two or three times what they actually needed.

On a trip to Japan which I think was in late '51 or early '52 a lookout spotted a mine ahead of us. We laid to about 200 yards off and took shots at it with a rifle but had no hits. After fifteen or twenty minutes we had drifted quite a bit closer and it was getting dark so we used a 20 mm on it with the results seen in the picture. It was probably a WW II relic because we could see that it had a rather heavy coating of seaweed on it. It was the only time we had to use our armament on my tour.

The picture of the Pictor is a copy of one that my kids gave me about 30 or 35 years ago. My guess is that it was probably taken in 1953 or 1954. It still has the same configuration as when we went into commission, and from the rust stripes probably is coming back to S.F. from Japan. It looks to me like 40 mm guns have been added on each side near the forward and after kingposts. I don't know when they were added, but it had to be after I left and before she underwent the major conversion to an underway capability.

Just found a copy of the ship's paper on the Pictor's first birthday. The original is printed on both sides but is in pretty bad shape so made a copy of it. It contains a few facts and figures that may be of interest to you. Hopefully this information will be of some help in your history project. If you think of any more questions I'll be glad to try and answer them. Health permitting I'll see you in Biloxi come October.

Best Regards,

John V. Cameron

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