

Once I Was A Navyman

I like the Navy. I like standing on deck during a long voyage with sea spray in my face and ocean winds whipping in from everywhere - The feel of the giant steel ship beneath me, it's engines driving against the sea is almost beyond understanding - It's immense power makes the Navyman feel so insignificant but yet proud to be a small part of this ship - A small part of Her mission.

I like the Navy. I like the sound of taps over the ships announcing system, the ringing of the ships bell, the foghorns and strong laughter of Navy men at work. I like the ships of the Navy - nervous darting destroyers, sleek proud cruisers, majestic battle ships, steady solid carriers and silent hidden submarines. I like the workhorse tugboats with their proud Indian names: Iroquois, Apache, Kiawah and Sioux - each stealthy powerful tug safely guiding the warships to safe deep waters from all harbors.

I like the historic names of other proud Navy Ships: Midway, Hornet, Princeton, Sea Wolf and Saratoga. The Ozark, Hunley, William R. Rush and Turner, the, Missouri, Wichita, Iowa, Arizona and Manchester, as well as The Sullivan's, Enterprise, Tecumseh, Cole and Nautilus too- all majestic ships of the line - Each ship commanding the respect of all Navy men that have known Her - or were privileged to be a part of Her crew.

I like the bounce of Navy music and the tempo of a Navy Band, "Liberty Whites", "13 Button Blues", the rare 72 hour liberty and the spice scent of a foreign port - I like shipmates I've sailed with, worked with, served with or have known: The Gunners Mate from the Iowa cornfields; a Sonarman from the Colorado mountain country; a pal from Cairo, Alabama; an Italian from near Boston; some boogie boarders of California; and of course, a drawling friendly Oklahoma lad that hailed from Muskogee; and a very congenial Engineman from the Tennessee hills.

From all parts of the land they came - farms of the Midwest, small towns of New England - the red clay area and small towns of the South - the mountain and high prairie towns of the West - the beachfront towns of the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Gulf - All are American; all are comrades in arms - All are men of the sea and all are men of honor.

I like the adventure in my heart when the ship puts out to sea, and I like the electric thrill of sailing home again, with the waving hands of welcome from family and friends, waiting on shore - The extended time at sea drags; the going is rough on occasion. But there's the companionship of robust Navy laughter, the devil-may-care philosophy of the sea. This helps the Navyman - The remembrances of past shipmates fill the mind and restore the memory with images of other ships, other ports, and other cruises long past. Some memories are good, some are not so good, but all are etched in the mind of the Navyman - and most will be there forever.

After a day of work, there is the serenity of the sea at dusk. As white caps dance on the ocean waves, the sunset creates flaming clouds that float in folds over the horizon - as if painted there by a master. The darkness follows soon and is mysterious. The ship's wake in darkness has a hypnotic effect, with foamy white froth and luminescence that forms never ending patterns in the turbulent waters - I like the lights of the ship in darkness - the masthead lights, the red and green sidelights and stern lights. They cut through the night and appear as a mirror of stars in darkness - There are rough stormy nights, and calm, quiet, still nights where the quiet of the mid-watch allows the ghosts of all the Sailors of the world to stand with you. They are abundant and unreachable, but ever apparent - And there is always the aroma of fresh coffee from the galley.

I like the legends of the Navy and the Navy men that created those legends. I like the proud names of Navy Heroes: Halsey, Nimitz, Beach, Farragut, John McCain, Rickover and John Paul Jones. A man can find much in the Navy - comrades in arms, pride in his country - A man can find himself and can revel in this experience.

In years to come, when the Sailor is home from the sea, he will still recall with fondness the ocean spray on his face when the sea is angry - There will come a faint aroma of fresh paint in his nostrils, the echo of hearty laughter of the seafaring men who once were close companions - Now landlocked, he will grow wistful of his Navy days, when the seas were the largest part of him and a new port of call was always just over the horizon.

Recalling those days and times, he will stand taller and say: "ONCE I WAS A NAVYMAN !"