

I Was a Sailor Once *Author Unknown*

I liked standing on the bridge wing at sunrise with salt spray in my face and clean ocean winds whipping in from the four quarters of the globe. I liked the sounds of the Navy - the piercing trill of the boatswains pipe, the syncopated clangor of the ship's bell on the quarterdeck, harsh, and the strong language and laughter of sailors at work.

I liked Navy vessels -- plodding fleet auxiliaries and sleek submarines and steady solid aircraft carriers. I liked the proud names of Navy ships: Athabaskan, Fraser, Restigouche, Tribal class, Town class, Bird class city class.

I liked the tempo of a Navy band. I liked liberty call and the spicy scent of a foreign port.

I even liked the never ending paperwork and all hands working parties as my ship filled herself with the multitude of supplies, and to cut ties to the land and carry out her mission anywhere on the globe where there was water to float her.

I liked sailors, officers and enlisted men, from all parts of the land, farms of Upper Canada, small towns of Nova Scotia, from the big cities, the mountains and the prairies, from all walks of life. I trusted and depended on them as they trusted and depended on me -- for professional competence, for comradeship, for strength and courage. In a word, they were "shipmates"; then and forever.

I liked the surge of adventure in my heart, when the word was passed: "Do you hear there -- Hands to stations for leaving harbour." and I liked the infectious thrill of sighting home again, with the waving hands of welcome from family and friends waiting pier side.

The work was hard and dangerous; the going rough at times; the arting from loved ones painful, but the companionship of robust Navy laughter,

the "all for one and one for all" philosophy of the sea was ever present.

I liked the fierce and dangerous activity on the flight deck of aircraft carriers, Warrior, Magnificent, Bonaventure sadly scrapped.

I liked the names of the aircraft and helicopters; Sea King, Avenger, Sea Fury, Banshee, that bring to mind offensive and defensive orders of battle.

I liked the excitement of the almost daily at-sea replenishment as my ship slid in alongside an Oiler and the cry of "Standby to receive shot lines" prefaced the hard work of rigging span wires and fuel hoses echoed across the narrow gap of water between the ships and welcomed the mail and fresh milk, fruit and vegetables that sometimes accompanied the fuel.

I liked the serenity of the sea after a day of hard ship's work, as flying fish flitted across the wave tops and sunset gave way to night.

I liked the feel of the Navy in darkness - the masthead and range lights, the red and green navigation lights and stern light, the pulsating phosphorescence of radar repeaters - they cut through the dusk and joined with the mirror of stars overhead.

I liked drifting off to sleep lulled by the myriad noises large and small that told me that my ship was alive and well, and that my shipmates on watch would keep me safe.

I liked quiet mid-watches with the aroma of strong coffee -- the lifeblood of the Navy permeating everywhere. I liked hectic watches when the exacting minuet of haze-gray shapes racing at flank speed kept all hands on a razor edge of alertness.

I liked the sudden electricity of "Action Stations, hands to action stations," followed by the hurried clamor of running feet on ladders and the resounding thump of watertight doors as the ship transformed herself in a few brief seconds from a peaceful workplace to a weapon of war -- ready for anything.

I liked the sight of space-age equipment manned by bright young sailors clad in dungarees wearing sound-powered phones that their grandfathers would still recognize.

I liked the traditions of the Navy and those who made them. I liked the proud names of Navy heroes .officers Mainguy, DeWolfe, Budge, Landymore and the Lower Deck legends . Wolfpack MacLeod, Gunboat Smith, Moose Book, and so many others.

A sailor could find much in the Navy: comrades-in-arms, pride in self and country, mastery of the seaman's trade. An adolescent could find adulthood. In years to come, when sailors are home from the sea, we will still remember with fondness and respect the ocean in all its moods the impossible shimmering mirror calm and the storm-tossed green water surging over the bow. Then there will come again a faint whiff of stack gas, a faint echo of engine and rudder orders, a vision of the bright bunting of signal flags snapping at the yardarm, a refrain of hearty laughter in the wardroom and Chief and Petty Officers messes and mess decks.

Once ashore for good we grow humble about our Navy days, when the seas were a part of us and a new port of call was ever over the horizon.

Remembering this, WE stand taller and say, "I WAS A SAILOR ONCE."