



“LEAKY T” News

The Newsletter of the U. S. S. Tolovana AO-64 “WE CARRY THE LOAD”

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SPRING Edition No. 17 Dedicated to the deceased and living members of the best Fleet Oiler in the U. S. Navy.

the "Local" control switch to "Director" and we were ready for action. We were told to "Standby".

As we nervously scanned the pitch dark sea for something to shoot at we waited for direction but nothing came. After some time, the ship began to accelerate (I use the term rather loosely) and we continued to wait for further direction. As we moved away we began to hear explosions as our Destroyer Escort began to drop depth charges. Finally we were told to "Secure from General Quarters" with no further explanation. There was scuttlebutt that we had been followed by a submarine, but there was no official word given to us. A couple of months later I happened upon an article in Time magazine that stated that a submarine of unknown origin had reportedly stalked a tanker in the straits of Formosa and, after the Captain of the Destroyer had been in direct contact with Washington for direction, he had been advised to sink the submarine. After dropping depth charges, the Destroyer stayed in the area overnight and in the morning found oil slick coming from the area that had been depth charged. The magazine article stated that the Pentagon advised them that it was determined to be coming from the US Submarine Tang that had been lost in that area in WWII. The PO1 Sonarman that had been on duty at that time insisted that he knew the difference between a wrecked submarine and an active one, and that the contact he monitored was without a doubt an active target. Because of the Cold War and the secret activities of both the Soviet Union and US military, neither country would acknowledge having any submarines in the area at that time.

A SEA STORY

It was the 1951-52, and was cruising Formosa (now Straits enroute to Kaoshiung our R&R break duties off Suddenly in the night came announcement



Winter of the Tolovana South in the Taiwan) from Keelung to continue from refueling North Korea. the middle of the

"General Quarters, General Quarters, All Hands Man Your Battle Stations" and then the ominous "This is not a drill!", accompanied by the intermittent buzzing of the alarm. We all moved quickly to dress and race to our Battle Stations, which in my case was as Director Operator of the Starboard Twin 40mm mount. I raced across the Cargo Deck and up the ladders to my Gun Director, threw off the canvas cover, turned the switch from Standby to Power, unlocked the director in Train and Elevation, plugged my Sound Powered Phone into the jack, put on my life jacket and helmet and called in that my director was "Manned and Ready". At the same time, the gun crew had uncovered the gun mount and had loaded clips of 40mm shells and announced that they also were "Manned and Ready". They shifted

The above story is courtesy of John Sater, FT2c, picture from Biloxi reunion attached.

Your editor can attest to this as he was JOOD when this incident happened.

USS Tolovana reunion

Cecil Hensley, the host for the reunion, has developed a website. Go to <http://www.network54.com/Forum/680723/> to get the reunion information and give him your input/feedback. Cecil welcomes your input.

This is a short synopsis of the reunion plans as of this date.

What: 2012 Tolovana reunion.

When: October, 16, 17, & 18; Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday. Tell Cecil your opinion on the number of days on the website. You can come earlier and stay later for the same low price, \$33-49 per night.

Where: Landmark Resort Hotel, www.landmarkresort.com 1501 S. Ocean Blvd, Myrtle Beach SC 29577. Call 800-845-0658 for reservations. Be sure to ask for the Tolovana rate!!

How: Drive your car or Fly into the Myrtle Beach airport for free shuttle to/from the hotel. See www.visitmyrtlebeach.com/map/travel_by_air.html for flights.

Reunion Activities:

Welcome and sign in Tuesday morning anytime you like.

A business meeting will be held at 10 AM Wednesday morning in the meeting room to decide where the 2013 reunion will be held.

A banquet dinner will be held at 6:30 PM Thursday in the Landmark hotel.

The numerous sight seeing sites and shows can be done on your own or by hotel services.

Area Attractions include:

Brookgreen Gardens

Ripleys Aquarium

Murrells Inlet Fishing Village

Half day & Full day fishing trips

Salt Water Marsh Explorer Cruise

Historic Georgetown

Hopsewee Plantation

Rice Plantation Tours

La Belle Amie Vineyard Tour

Alabama Theatre, Carolina Opry

Dixie Stampede, Good Vibrations

Legends in Concert

Medieval Times - Palace Theatre

Day trips to historic Charleston,

Patriots Point, Plantations

Casino Cruises

Hard Rock Café

Planet Hollywood

Jimmy Buffetts Margaritaville

Hundreds of restaurants

100 golf courses

Hope to see you there.

Rest and Relaxation (R&R) in a war zone

At the 2011 reunion in Long Beach CA we were reminiscing about our time on the Tolovana when Darrell Fowler mentioned his R&R liberty to Haiphong, French Indochina. I was on that R&R liberty over 57 years ago. Darrell and I had a good time telling each other what we remembered about the "R&R liberty we had "won". This is my version of our liberty of all liberties. But first some background information.

French Indochina, now Vietnam, had been a French Colony since 1887. Germany conquered France in WWII, and "Vichy" France now a part of the axis, ceded French Indochina to their axis ally, the Japanese. During World War II, the United States supported the Viet Minh, Northern Vietnamese communist, to fight the Japanese.

After WWII France tried to reoccupy Indochina but the US wouldn't allow it and helped the Vietnamese fight the French. A long war between France and the communist North Vietnam was fought until the North won the last big battle (Dien Ben Phu) in May 1954, promptly declared independence, and was recognized by China & Russia. The French didn't give up however and fought the Vietnamese.

The Geneva Convention in 1954 recognized the North and South Vietnamese sections of the country and it was to be divided at the 17th parallel. The Geneva Convention also stated the people of the North were to be given the choice of leaving the communist North and going to the "free" South. They gathered at the Northern Haiphong sea port on the Cam River to leave by US & French Navy ships, the only practical and "safe" way to the South. Many, too many, more than 1 million, decided to leave. In addition to ships, the US sent military "advisors", doctors and supplies to help them escape. The communist tried to stop those leaving the North by taking their possessions and killing them as they fled. They also harassed and killed their families who were left behind. I remember a talk was given to the Tolovana crew on the cargo deck one night by a famous Dr., Tom Dooley, who painted a bad picture of the atrocities and of his experiences in the evacuation.

The USS Tolovana was sent to the Henrietta Pass, about 25 miles from Haiphong, in November 1954 to assist the Navy in "operation freedom", the evacuation of the Vietnamese that didn't want to live under Communism to the South. The Tolovana was anchored in an isolated pass which had only small rock Islands, a few having small sandy beaches. The Island had wild monkeys which we were told not to feed or touch as they had diseases. This "forbidden fruit" order was soon disobeyed by one of the crew who managed to capture a wild monkey and set it free on the Tolovana creating his intended mayhem.

The only recreation the crew had at the pass was beer & swimming parties on the small beaches. Or we could watch an old movie for the umpteenth time or play in a pinochle tournament where everyone cheated; "when I pull my right ear 3 times that means I have spades pardner".

We had been there for 2-3 weeks when one morning at muster I was told that I had "won" an R&R liberty in Haiphong, only one from each Division had got the liberty. I didn't know what I had done to get it but was glad to get off the ship for 2-3 days.

We left at 0500 in a heavily loaded LCM with a tarp covered cargo that almost filled the boat and weighed her low and heavy in the water. After leaving the Islands that we knew so well around the Tolovana the coxswain asked the Warrant Officer for a heading. The Warrant Officer said "give him the heading to Haiphong Hensley". I didn't have a clue how to get there as our ground search radar couldn't pick up the shoreline. I suggested we return to the ship, get a chart and plot a course. The Warrant Officer gave the coxswain a heading and on we went.

We stood around the stack of cargo because if we sat on it the coxswain couldn't see ahead. Later we were told to get on top of the cargo and look for land, thus blocking the view of the coxswain. It got hotter and hotter. We didn't have any water! We looked under the tarp and found our cargo consisted of beer and 3 cases of whiskey. We broke into the beer.

Someone suggested we ask one of the numerous sampans's the way to Haiphong. We would chase a boat, grab it, terrifying the poor fisherman out of his wits by shouting "Haiphong? Haiphong?" No luck. Then sailors started pointing out where they thought we should go. Darrell told me in Long Beach he was the one that told us to go in the wrong direction. Pretty soon, wham! we ran aground, in the middle of the ocean, no land in sight, in a flat bottom boat we ran aground.

Luckily the coxswain was good, very good, and after some 20-30 times working the boat side to side he got us off. It was getting dark, we all got on top of the cargo looking for the huge mouth of the Cam River. When it was almost too dark to see we saw a French aircraft carrier on the horizon moving fast towards us when she suddenly turned to her port and disappeared. We headed for where we thought she had turned, then turned to our Starboard but still couldn't see land. Just before it got too dark to see we saw a red light on a bouy, what a relief, we had guessed right and we were in the channel. In a short time we arrived at an LST anchored in the middle of the wide river.

Early the next morning I went up to the bridge to look at their Radar and I saw the Warrant Officer talking to the ship officers with a map under his arm. Good. A PA announcement said for the liberty party to lay up at the helicopter pad at 0900. I was first in line, jumped in the helicopter and the pilot took off, he suddenly dropped to about 3 feet above the water, nose down and full speed ahead. I shouted to him "what are you doing?" He said "they won't shoot at us as much this way". This was my first clue this wasn't going to be a normal liberty, or was he just kidding me? I thought surely the US Navy wouldn't send one of it's finest on Liberty in a dangerous area but when I asked him how I was to get to Haiphong. He said I wouldn't go to Haiphong but pointed the direction I could walk to Haiphong.

The pilot told me to get off as soon as he touched down on the river bank. It was in the middle of no where. I sure was glad to see the next guy arrive at the site. Once we were all together we walked toward where the pilot had pointed the direction to Haiphong. The road was deserted. We came to a French Foreign Legion compound which was surrounded by high thick white walls. Two Guards outside asked where we were going, one of them could speak pretty good English. When we told him we were going on liberty in Haiphong he said "I wouldn't do that, the city is under siege and it's too dangerous. He suggested we spend our time in the compound. They had a few shops ringing the compound walls. We looked around and swapped stories with the legionnaires. The Legionnaires were very interested in us and we were in them. Most of us bought souvenirs. Darrell and some of the guys bought Legionnaire hats. But I still wanted to go to Haiphong.

After talking to the Legionaries and visiting their shops some of us took off towards the direction of the city. The only people we saw on the road were a few old women with blackened teeth from chewing betel nut sitting on the roadside begging.

When we got to the inner city it was deserted, no one could be seen, not even a stray dog, all the shop's were closed. Finally we came to a bar that had open doors and we went in and asked the bartender where everyone was. He said the French authorities had ordered everyone out of the city but he wasn't going to do that. His family had been in Indochina for generations and he wasn't giving up his families' property. We had been there awhile when two jeeps, one with a machine gun mounted in the back drove up fast and 4-5 French Foreign Legionnaires burst through the door with weapons drawn. They were as surprised to see us as we were to see them. They told us in no uncertain terms to get the hell out of town; no one is allowed to be in the city. Those that stayed wouldn't be protected. We walked back faster than we had walked coming into town.

I remember how glad I was to get back to the LST. I don't remember much about our return to the Tolovana; it was an uneventful trip since we knew where to go. Darrell reminded me that when we got back to the ship they had to bring us aboard in cargo nets, we couldn't climb the ladder. Don't know why that would be??

I have often wondered the fate of the bartender and the Legionnaires. The long, terrible Vietnam war for the United States officially started in 1959 and lasted until 1975. It was the longest war in American history and the most unpopular American war.

Years after leaving the Navy I won a \$1 bet from my boss at Douglas Aircraft. The bet was that we had been involved in Vietnam way before the official start of the war by showing him the letter Captain Crowley sent my Mother about our being in the Henrietta Pass and why we were there. We got the Presidential Citation Ribbon from this service.

Howard Hensley, RD1, 1952-56

Skip Moore, F Div, 1951- 1953
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