

GURKE NEWSLETTER

Volume 1 Issue 4

February 2008

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE USS GURKE (DD-783)



Special Points of Interest

- *We get a final look at Byron Lott's story that has been featured in the last several issues.*
- *See who the five new names are for Welcome Mat on page three.*
- *In Mail Call on page four, William Beslow has identified two of the unknown men in the pictures in the last issue.*
- *A letter from William Womack's widow is also in Mail Call. She would like to hear from anyone who remembers her husband.*
- *Read about some of the most frustrating times in the Navy on page four.*

A TALE OF THE SEA (CONT.)

By Byron Lott, FT3 (1960-61)

My crewmates, the "old salts," had advised me about the finer points of standing a lookout watch. They had carefully, clearly, and repeatedly pointed out that there was a curved piece of metal on the outside of the bridge bulwark called a spray shield. This shield, they instructed me, in the tone of those who knew what they were talking about, served the purpose of turning spray and water away from the lookout.

"A good lookout simply times the spray as it comes off the bow and at the right moment ducks down behind the bulwark. The spray, being rolled up toward the sky by the spray shield, will then be blown over your head by the wind. Nothing to it, five minutes and you'll get the hang of it," they had said and nodded with all of the seriousness of a math teacher explaining a theorem to an apt student. I had not seen

the smirks that immediately crossed the faces of my "instructors" nor the guffaws of laughter as I ran up the ladder and out onto the main deck and toward the bridge now ready to take my place as a lookout.

Whoosh, smack, smack, smack, damn, bad timing—I had just looked up over the bulwark as a mountain of spray had come flying back hitting me full face. Spitting salt and sea water, I noticed that the ship was no longer slicing through the swells, but was now driving through them. "Not to fear," I say to myself, forgetting about my lack of relief for the moment, "this is the life. I think I've got this spray shield thing worked out."

"Steady on course 360, Sir."

"Very good."

"Engine room reports turns for 2—7 knots, Sir."

"Very good," responds the conning officer.

Whoosh, smack, "S***, what the hell?" I declare. "I'm being beaten. This spray shield is worthless!" I peek under my arm and behind me and notice a signalman hoisting flags in response to those being flown on the carrier. Turning back toward the bow, I am greeted with an incredible sight. The Gurke had two twin 5" gun mounts forward, one on the main deck and the other on the next deck up. What I stare at through the wind-driven spray is the disappearance of the first gun mount as the sea closes over it! I watch in glorious amazement as the ship slowly rises, shedding tons of water as she does so. Looking up, I realize that we are never going to clear the sea's surface before the next swell crashes onto the ship. The sound is now deafening as wind, water, and ship combine to

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produce a howling din. The ship shudders like a dog shaking a rat as the screws come out of the water and, having no resistance, start to over speed. Suddenly they bite into the sea and for a moment the vibration is lessened. The onrushing swell plummets down upon the number two gun mount. I am spellbound, frozen in place by this spectacle of green water rushing toward me. I duck as a wall of water engulfs me, pounds me to the deck. Choking and spitting, I get to my feet and look over the bulwark. Oh, my God! There is no longer a ship in front of me, only a wall of water. For a moment I consider the advantages of the spray shield, but instantly discard it as a worthless idea as I am now staring upward into the ocean! "This wave is not going to go over me, it's going to drown me." I bolt for the pilot house door and rush through like a speeding train only to run into the bosun of the watch, a young third-class petty officer who could have played line-backer for the Bears. He probably thought I was leaving my post without having been properly relieved and so lifts me off the deck with the intent of shoving me back out on the bridge wing. No way! I spread-eagle myself across the door just as that mountain of green water cascaded down onto the ship. The bosun's eyes grew as large as tea cups, the sound was thunderous, the ship was shuddering once again, then I realize that high pitched scream I was hearing was coming from me. N-o-o-o-o-o, I screamed as I stared straight ahead at the bosun. He dropped me into a pile, blocking the doorway. Remembering the signalman who had been hoisting flags with his back to the sea, I rolled over onto all fours and stuck my head out the door and looked aft. The sight was unbelievable. There was the signalman about six feet off the deck completely ensnared, twisting, jerking in the flag hoist lines—the only things that had prevented him from being swept over the side. We helped his limp form to the deck and watched as his sunburnt face turned ashen at the realization of what had just happened to

him. Ring, ring, ring a desperate cry from the bridge telephones.

"What? Say again, slower." Ring, ring, ring, ring, "Bridge!" "My God! Bosun, get the captain!"

Thoroughly drenched and scared, I cowered beside the pilot house door. I watched as another wave slammed into the ship, but because she had risen a bit it was not as awesome as its predecessor.

"Captain's on the bridge!"

I glanced through the doorway at my savior as he slides into his throne. He is Caesar speaking to the senators. "What now is amiss, that Caesar must put aright?" All will be well now, the captain is on the bridge. The bridge officers are shouting information at him, the telephones are ringing incessantly, other officers are now appearing on the bridge asking questions or trying to make reports. And here comes another wave! "Oh, God, if you get me out of this, I promise I will write home every day!" The wave looms larger and larger. The OD is yelling above the din. "Sir, we are sinking. What do you want me to do?" I await the words from my Captain that will equal those of the immortal John Paul Jones's words to let me know that Casey has not struck out and there is joy in Mudville tonight!

"DIVE, DIVE, DIVE!"

I collapse on the deck.

The OD, after a moment's hesitation, screams, "Sir, this is not a submarine, this is not a submarine!"

I am swirled around and around by Neptune's pummeling fist. I hear myself repeating, "God damn it, I was supposed to be relieved!"

Down below on the mess deck a tired and weary crew was looking forward to a hot meal of peas, mashed potatoes and gravy, pork chops, salad and peach cobbler with ice cream, and cold milk. Laughing and joking they had taken their metal trays heaped with food and found a seat at a table with other mates. Suddenly, the door leading to the forward part of the ship burst open and through it came first, several brown-clothed chief petty officers running with the grace of African gazelles followed by an equally ungra-

cious bundle of leaping, twisting, slipping, shouting bodies of the remaining chiefs. Sailors watch in awe as the brown uniforms disappeared through the other two doorways leading from the mess deck. Turning their attention back to the forward hatchway, they were greeted by both the sound and sight of the "beastie" that, uninvited, had entered their ship—water. Water gushed through the opening as if a hundred fire hoses had suddenly been turned on. First there was dismay, then realization followed by universal shouts of "MFS!" Finally, came panic. Metal trays flew upward, throwing peas, mashed potatoes, pork chops and peach cobbler into the air, landing on the deck making it slick and slippery. Men floundered over each other as they scrambled to follow their fast disappearing chiefs through the doorway, up the ladder, and out onto the relative safety of the main deck. First had come the brown suits followed quickly by a bursting of blue as members of the crew, some wet, some soaked, streamed out of the innards of the ship like blood from a broken vein.

"What the F___ was that?"

"What the hell happened?"

"I dunno."

"Did you see those chiefs busting their asses to get out?" followed by a titter of laughter.

"Screw the chiefs. Did you see me busting my ass to get out?" met with outright laughter from those standing near enough to hear.

"Why are we slowing?"

Orders had finally been given to reduce speed and others to change course in order to reduce the battering the ship had been enduring. I regained my composure and was eventually relieved by a quite shaken mate. The rest is a blur of bailing, pumping, anything to get the beastie out of the ship and back into the ocean where it belonged. Remembering that at times we had actually steamed stern first toward Subic Bay the Philippines, where we headed for repairs. Several days later I watched from one of the quad 40MM gun tubs while holding a hot cup of coffee,

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tired, and weary as the Gurke slid next to a pier and finally stopped. For a moment all was quiet, we had made it to safety. A moment in which we could fully come to grips with the danger we had just come through. Abruptly, our reverie was broken by the sound of a clanging bell of a giant yard crane moving down the pier toward us, by the shouts of a hoard of shipyard workers rushing across the gangway and up toward the bow of the ship hauling hoses, cutting torches, tools, acetylene tanks—all the paraphernalia of a repair crew. I had watched in utter astonishment as the crane lifted the twisted front face plate of 5" thick armor plate from the gun mount. Father Neptune had taken the strongest steel made, capable of withstanding a direct hit from a 5" shell, and had torn and twisted it as a child plays with a toy. Standing there in that gun tub, I gained a new, life-long respect for the ocean and its power, along with a good dose of reality about the worthlessness of spray shields.

Editor's Note: This concludes "A Tale of the Sea" by Byron T Lott, FT3, 1960-61. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us and hope that others will be inspired to do the same.

PUNS INTENDED MY APOLOGIES IN ADVANCE!

- Two antennas met on a roof, fell in love and got married. The ceremony wasn't much, but the reception was excellent.
- A dyslexic man walks into a bra...
- Two cannibals are eating a clown. One says to the other, "Does this taste funny to you?"
- I went to buy camouflage trousers the other day, but I couldn't find any.
- Two fish swim into a concrete wall. The one turns to the other and says, "Dam!"



WELCOME MAT

The USS GURKE takes great pleasure in announcing that the following shipmates have been located since the last newsletter. Welcome Aboard! We hope to see you at the next reunion and that you will become active in the association.

Roger Bowman
(1965-67) RM3 OC Div
5900 Irvine Blvd, Spc 307
Irvine, CA 92620
714-368-3345

James Metz
(1948-50) ET3 Engineering
2327 Minaret Dr
Martinez, CA 94553
925-994-5299

Ralph Jakwerth
(1947-48) PhMSN Med
403 Devonshire Dr
Brea, CA 92821
714-529-5350

Arthur Grigor
(1971-72) RDC OI Div
2102 Bollinger Ave NE
Canton, OH 44705
330-452-2172

Carl Nerz
(1947-48) RN E Div
6175 Avernorra Dr
La Mesa, CA 91942
619-464-7022

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Our Reunions Work So You Don't Have To.



TAPS

The Gurke Newsletter was informed of the deaths of the following former crewmembers since the last newsletter. The entire crew extends our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the deceased.

Russell Hammerand
(1951-55) FT3
Date of death not reported

Abe Erdman
(1951-54) TMSN G Div
Date of death not reported

William Womack
(1959-64) FTC G Div
Date of death not reported

Ralph Mattison
Died January 23, 2008

Clifford "Doc" Haskin
(1945-46) CPhM Medical
Date of death not reported

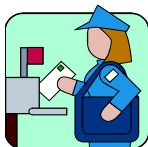
Anyone learning of the death of a former crewmember please notify the newsletter so their passing can be acknowledged in TAPS and on the Honor Roll at the reunion memorial service.

2008 USS GURKE REUNION

APRIL 3—6

SAN DIEGO, CA

HANDLERY HOTEL



MAIL CALL

Dina,

On page 8 (November 2007 issue), you had a picture of FN Perry and two unknowns. The far left person is MR3 Smith and I think the center person is HM3 McHose. Thank you for a good newsletter.

YN3 William Beslow

Dear Frank Hickam,

Enclosed are dues for William D. Womack, FTC via his widow Dorothy Womack in the amount of \$50.00.

I hear via e-mail from Mr.

Bundarin who was aboard the Gurke and a friend of my husband known as: William Dalton Womack FTC; aka "Wild Bill" or just Womack. LT Sam W. Reusser mentioned my husband and his good friend BMC Shipp who is also now deceased. We called Womack "Dalton" in the family. It was one of his delights to be able to help someone along the way. He would tell me of some now and then but he was not a person to toot his own horn, so there was no bragging ways about him. I knew him well enough to know he would help anyone he could. He was NAVY through and through. He sat and cried when news showed the attack on the USS Cole. He remembered being in that same spot many times. He was in his last days. The Treasury Dept. sent us a letter telling him his several cancers were due to his being on the Gurke at Christmas Island during the

atomic testing there. The last cancer he suffered was blood and bone. He had 9 years of various illnesses. We would think we had it beat and then another one would arise. Was a difficult time for us.

Dalton was a good husband, father, grandfather and above all a great man. We do miss him, but I bet if the Supreme Commander is looking for him, He will find him trying to assist someone or hunkered down in a dark corner trying to figure out the wiring. We miss him greatly. I would love to hear from anyone who remembers him.

Sincerely,
Dottie Womack
5838 Dianne St
Shreveport, LA 71119-5310
ddwomack@bellsouth.net

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST FRUSTRATING OR IRRITATING TIME IN THE NAVY?

Editor's Note: Here is another question that was suggested by one of our readers. If you did not have a chance to respond and would like to do so, please send in your response for the next issue. Thank you to the men who wrote in with a great story.

Warren Lutey:

We went to Pusan, Korea for their Naval Graduation Exercise. It was spring, so it wasn't very warm out. We had to dress up in our Dress Blues and man the rails. We must have been anchored out at least 1/4 to 1/2 a mile from the Graduation. We could not see the people, we could not even make out the buildings. However, we had to stand at parade rest the whole ceremony which must have lasted over an hour or even two. I started moving around just to shake out the stiffness I was feeling in my legs and arms. I was directed by our Lt to stop moving and stay at parade rest. I kinda got upset and said, "You are kidding. They can't even see us, let alone care if we are standing at parade rest." I

wrote this incident down in my journal that I was keeping, and this is one of the classic reasons that I knew there was no way I could stay past my enlistment in the Navy.

Ray Johnson:

One of my most frustrating incidents on the USS Gurke was trying to pass the test for 2nd Class Petty Officer. I was taking my typing test while we were taking on fuel at Midway. The roll of the ship would cause the carriage to move, which caused typing errors. When I got my test results and found that I had failed because of the typing test, I was furious. I decided to write a letter to the Secretary of the Navy and let him know why I had failed. Before mailing the letter, I let my XO read it. He said that I should change a few "choice" words and have my division officer give me a timed typing test to send in with the letter. Eventually, my efforts were rewarded with my new rate.

Ted Roche':

When I got extended for 4 months.

Financial Report: The cost of this issue is \$141.75, mailed to 75 members without e-mail addresses.

NOTE EXPIRATION DATE ON ADDRESS LABEL

Please check the address label on your envelope or the top of your e-mail for your dues expiration date. If it is past, this is the last issue of the newsletter you will receive until dues are paid again. **Send dues to Frank Hickam, 25 Harlech Dr, Wilmington, DE 19807. Make checks to USS Gurke DD-783 Reunion Assoc., Inc. Dues are \$10 for 1 yr or \$50 lifetime.**
