

GURKE NEWSLETTER

Volume 1 Issue 2

August 2007

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE USS GURKE (DD-873)



Special Points of Interest

- *Do you remember your first cruise? Byron Lott does. Read his account in the cover story.*
- *Be sure to read Ed Ellis' column on page two. There is some important information for you.*
- *Please welcome the five newly located shipmates under Welcome Mat on page three.*
- *Memorable Events and Characters begin on page three. Some highlights are: trips to Tijuana, Gurke sailors who commanded a Japanese train, the great food on the Gurke, George Dewey Nelson, Capt. Radel, Capt Edgerton, and an E-3 who had many medals.*

A TALE OF THE SEA

By Byron Lott, FT3 (1960-61)

What's it like to be a young seaman aboard a US destroyer partaking in his first cruise to WestPac? Well, for this young 19 year old having just come aboard two weeks ago, fresh from FT "A" school, and right off the farm before that, it was to be an adventure. The year was 1960 and the USS Gurke, DD783, was at sea refueling from a tanker named the Hauseompa (sic). I had been assigned to the bridge as a port lookout during refueling. It was one of those beautiful days for which the Pacific is noted; no clouds, azure blue sky, and temperature in the 80's. I faced the wind and occasionally was greeted by a spray of sea water flung up by the bow. What a sight — where was my camera? What a life! Since we were refueling on the port side I had a bird's eye view of all that was taking place below me, and I was somewhat

mesmerized by the ballet of men shouting orders, others hauling hoses, shot lines being fired, men scurrying to and fro, and finally the connection of the hose to the ship's fuel intake. Equally captivating was the action of a large wave as it snaked between the two ships buffeting first one and then the other. On the destroyer, having a lower deck than the tanker, the wave would come rushing aboard and wipe the men hauling on the line off their feet, and for a few moments I smiled as they resembled a stringer of fish madly sloshing this way and that. But this ballet was fraught with danger as the men below fought to regain their balance and control of the line to which they so desperately clung. This particular line ran from one ship to the other and the rolling of the ships would cause them to be dragged, cursing, wriggling, stumbling, unrelentingly toward a deck block.

Should they hold on to that line from fear, from just having something to hang on to, or whatever, their hands and arms would ultimately be dragged through the block with catastrophic consequences.. Lose your grip and be swept down the deck and possibly over the side, or hang on for dear life and risk major injury. For me, the scene was hypnotic in its ability to command my complete attention. The moment passed and all were safe - until the next wave came aboard. Then came the order to disconnect, and a new scenario emerged that I was to witness far too many times. After numerous transfers of messages over the head sets, numerous gestures back and forth by crewmen, there came the signals from both ships to stop pumping, to blow out the hose with air, and to prepare to dis-

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connect. Then came the order to disconnect. At once a member of the black gang released the connecting ring that held the hose to the inlet pipe and away the hose flew like a black viper spewing its black venom, gooey fuel oil, all along our side and down the main deck into the sea. The main deck, now covered with licorice colored oil, had become impossible to stand on and men let go of their line and with sometimes grotesque and sometimes gymnastic contortions they tried to grab anything – a stanchion, a fire hose, a buddy- anything, before they would be swept overboard by that relentless wave. It was pandemonium as the men on the deck struggled for their lives, the black gang members yelling obscenities and shaking their fists, gesturing with their hands to the men on the tanker, our officers showing their frustration as they shouted to their counterparts across the short distance between the ships. Slowly order was restored and wet, battered, and weary men retired to their quarters to clean themselves and or put on clean clothing. A vain attempt was made to wash as much of the fuel oil stain off the ship as possible, but the oil had become almost a living thing as it congealed into a mass and dared the bosons to wash it over the side with their hoses. The bosons attacked with a fury. This was their ship and the oil was an uninvited intruder that would eat through paint, leave a stain, make them appear, for all to see, to be slackers. High pressure water slammed into the congealed mass of oil which promptly shattered into a million rainbow colored bubbles and recombine somewhere else. The slippery residue would take up residence along the deck waiting for an unwary sailor who would tread along its glistening deck. Unwary until he saw his feet go flying skyward, and slamming onto the deck on his back he suddenly became a pinball bouncing off stanchions, deck hatches, and bulkheads twirling round and round with arms flailing against the sky in an attempt to stop his mad rush toward the fantail and possibly over the side

into the churning blades of two high-speed propellers. I had witnessed it all! I had had the best seat in the house – front row center. Oh glorious day, oh the joy! If this was to be my life in the Navy where I was to claim a kinship with those mates of yore who hauled yardarms aloft, climbed rigging to loosen sails, stood on the fore mast top yardarm and waved their arms to the sky with the wind whistling in their face, then let me sign now my shipping-over papers to stay for life in this wondrous thing called the Navy.

2008 USS GURKE REUNION APRIL 3—6 SAN DIEGO, CA

RESPOND TO STORIES

After you read the “**Most Memorable Events and Characters**” on pages three thru six, please send us any recollections that they may trigger for you. Do you remember any of the people or events mentioned in the stories? If so, please send your stories to the e-mail address KARENMLRS@charterinternet.com or to the mailing address below.

Keep those stories coming!

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Our Reunions Work So You Don't Have To.

COORDINATOR'S COLUMN

BY ED ELLIS, PRESIDENT

Greetings from hot, steamy Nebraska,

I hope everyone enjoyed the first edition of “The Gurke Pepco” and will want to continue receiving it. My last sentence contains one problem and one solicitation. First, there seems to be a dispute among various crewmembers about using the name “Pepco”, so until a vote on the official name is taken at the 2008 business meeting in San Diego, we are simply going to call it “The Gurke Newsletter.” Secondly, **this will be the last issue sent to all Gurke crewmembers.** This is due to rising costs of publication and distribution fees. **If you wish to continue receiving the Newsletter and have not paid your dues yet, you need to get those dues sent in.** The dues are \$10 a year or \$50 for lifetime. Send you checks to:

Frank Hickam, 25 Harleck Dr, Wilmington, DE 19807-2507 and PLEASE make your checks out to USS Gurke DD-783 Reunion Assoc., Inc.

We should give Frank Hickam a round of applause for finally getting the Reunion Association incorporated as a nonprofit organization. We now have official by-laws and are the real deal. Now no one can steal or misrepresent our name.

I hope you all have responded to Karen Hoyle's request for memorable characters or events and any special items you wish to share. Will make for very interesting reading and memories. Please fill out the questionnaire about the tours you are interested in taking at San Diego and send them in. This will help MLRS get the upcoming reunion in order so we can have as much fun as we did in Colorado Springs.

Looking forward to seeing everyone in San Diego and hope you like our changes and we get many new subscribers to our Newsletter and attendees at the 2008 reunion.



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.

Marshal Wraders

(1970-71)
757-461-2155

Anado Parian

(DK1, Supply)
619-690-1872

George Kresin

(1955) Ops Ofcr
604 Kings Way
Naples, FL 34104
239-435-0923

George Kaspar

(1958-60) GMSN 1st Div
15807 210th St
Milack, MN 56353
320-983-6121

Jim Gordon

Lt(jg) Sup Ofcr
14243 180th Ave NE
Woodinville, WA 98072
425-451-3327



TAPS

The Gurke Newsletter was informed of the deaths of the following former crewmembers since the beginning of 2007. Although not all deaths are recent, they were just learned of. The entire crew extends our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the deceased.

James (Jack) Niernberger

(1959-61) QM3 (E-4) OPS
Died May 10, 2007

Gerald Deer

Died June 19, 2007

Gene Wiegman

(1946-48) F1EM E Div
Died February 19, 2007

Robert Krause

(1952-56) 2nd Div
Date of death not reported

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

our other buddy for our beach time was Aaron Work, radioman or rather signalman, from Rapid City, SD. We always went skating together, unless Aaron got on the restricted list, which was often. Meat was still rationed in the states, and because I had a good friend who ran a "wildcat" taxi service to LA etc, I usually has access to a 1941 Chevy to use on the beach. We often went to Tijuana for the evening and could get a nice steak meal for less than two dollars apiece. We had steady girl friends--in fact Dale married his and they would have celebrated 60 years together this past June. Our typical liberty consisted of picking up the girls in Pacific Beach and going to Mission Beach for Roller Skating, then catching a bus back to the foot of Broadway and catch a water taxi back to buoy 21 and some rack time. We often (once a week) would go out for birddog duty--chasing flat tops around to pick up pilot trainees who missed their landings or takeoffs and went for a swim!!!!!! We went out one day to some firing at a towed target raft--the purpose was for a training film on near misses, but the word didn't get to us properly, and our first slavo eliminated the target raft, and we had to run around in circles till they brought out another one. We also did some refueling under way from flat tops--had some awful close calls on that one too. The McKean, a sister ship, wasn't so lucky, got too close and came up under the overhanging structure on the flat top, smashed the 40mm gun mount up on the bridge, and snuck back into port with a tarp covering the damages, then went to Long Beach for repairs, and was still there when I left in July. I never heard much in the way of complaints about the chow on the Gurke. In about May, I was offered 3rd class if I would reenlist, but I said no thank you--I'm heading for Vermont.

MOST MEMORABLE EVENTS AND CHARACTERS

Editor's Note: Thank you to all who responded to the request for stories for this issue. I hope others will respond in the future, as we will always need material for the newsletter.

By: Norm Gassett F1c

My term on the Gurke was short, I was one of the first, if not the first new addition to the crew after the original "plank" crew. I came

aboard on the 12th of Jan in '46, (in Okinawa--I had served in the Sea-Bees, and had gone in on the fifth wave of the invasion) and served under Mr. White, Chief Engineer until Jul 2, 1946. I believe I had a unique duty session--never stood a watch in 6 months aboard--I took over as Logroom Yeoman. Dale Strine SK2c was a very close friend (he passed away in the past year in San Diego)--he was a plankowner--

Financial Report: The cost of this issue is \$539.39, mailed to 439 members without e-mail addresses.

By: Ed Ellis

One incident always comes to mind when I think back about my days on the Gurke and makes me laugh. There was a group of Gurke sailors who commandeered a Japanese train in Yokosuka, relieving the engineer of his duties, and going from station to station, pausing a little way from the normal boarding area so passengers in their clogs would clatter after it and then they'd back up and watch them clatter back. Then they would move on to the next station. They did this all the way to Sasebo where around 200 SP's and Captain Rydal were waiting for them. Thanks to Captain Rydal's informing the SP's, he would take custody of this group, see that they paid for all damages and make sure that got what they deserved when they returned to the ship. He gave them a lecture and can't remember much else happening.

By: Clark Wright, 1957-60 Supply Officer

When I was sailing on Badoeng Strait in 1955 as a 3rd Class Aviation Storekeeper, the food was as close to being inedible as you could imagine. I skipped several meals going from San Diego to Pearl Harbor because they were so bad. When we arrived at Pearl, the Commissary Officer was relieved and returned to the States. I don't recall the name of his replacement, but starting with the very first meal the food looked and tasted like it had come from the Waldorf Astoria. This was the same food that was inedible before he boarded, but suddenly became delicious. I vowed then that if I ever was in charge of a General Mess, I would make it work like this new man did. Through the years this man, a Commissioned Warrant Officer, won more awards than you can believe. I believe he won "Best Mess," a Navy contest, three years in a row while at Miramar Air Station a few years later. Now, back to the Gurke...

There is only one Supply Corps Officer on a destroyer, and he does

all the disbursing work, the General Mess, all the supplies, the Ship's Store, the laundry and other duties, including being the Cryptographic Officer.

To tell you the truth, the General Mess on Gurke when I arrived was not too good. I remembered Badoeng Strait and what the Warrant Officer had done with the same food and the same cooks, and I set out to bring ours up to perfection. Our Mess was "led" by an aging Chief Petty Officer who had a big stash of booze hidden somewhere, and he was worthless. I told him to stay away from the Mess unless he shaped up, and, in general, he did stay away. I enlisted the help of a First Class Cook, whose name was Saegert. I told him of my experiences on the "Bing Ding," as we called it, and how it was changed over night. Saegert agreed to a plan to bring our mess up to the same condition, and off we went. First thing, I went to the Captain (Norton) and told him I wanted to spend about \$600 (a lot of money in 1957) to buy the Naval Menu Service. I had eaten a meal based on that service which was unbeatable. It came in a couple of really thick books, but the saving feature was that each menu had its own plasticized cards with the recipes for everything, so the cooks could read the cards as they prepared the meal. There were several hundred meals in the Service Manuals, all from excellent restaurants and hotels around the country plus some foreign ones.

I am writing this background because I am praising Saegert as the person who was responsible for our success. He worked extremely hard and long hours. We added a meal for the watch change at 2400 hours and it was much appreciated. On Sundays we had a menu that went something like this:

Choice of orange; grapefruit or apple juice; eggs to order: fried, scrambled with or without ham squares, soft and hard-boiled eggs; beef steaks cooked to order: rare, medium or well-done; hot bacon; sliced ham; hash-brown and/or French fried potatoes; blueberry pancakes, apple pancakes, fresh white

or wheat bread and soft and hard rolls; fresh white milk (most general messes used powdered milk—we used canned whole milk and had it stuffed in every locker on the ship that wasn't full. We never ran out.); hot coffee; assorted desserts.

These Sunday meals ran from 0600 until 1300 and any man could go back through the line anytime during those hours to get refills.

We still had a Sunday evening meal which was lighter, but with several choices of good food.

We had a good Wardroom crew that prepared the Officer's meals, but I would invite one or two of the officers at a time to eat in the General Mess. Invariably they asked me when I would invite them again. The Captain was invited several times and praised the Cooks to the skies. I had put a sign up at the place where the crew dumped their trays. The sign read: "Take All You Want, But **EAT** What You Take." We only had so much food and couldn't afford to waste it, so the fish were feeding better off the other three destroyers and the carrier we were escorting.

I know Saegert had more food than we were allotted, but I never questioned him and we never got a reprimand from the Fleet Offices in San Diego when we sent in our reports.

On one cruise we were out for 43 days, a long time to be at sea. The other three destroyers ran out of nearly all their food and we fed them for three days until the Supply Ship and Reefer showed up to replenish us.

I cannot say enough for Saegert, how well he did his job and how he got the other cooks to join in and embrace the program.

In closing, I will admit a major mistake that I made and I must say Saegert warned me about it. It went like this: Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day have a standard meal of turkey and ham and all the fixings. I told Saegert that I wanted him to go through the meat cases and come up with 160 of the finest steaks on board. He told me

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the crew wouldn't like that, but I thought they would, just after Christmas and Thanksgiving's Ham and Turkey. Well, when the chow line opened, lots of sailors were already in line. We had cooks on the serving line to fix the steaks "to order." We had a fine meal topped off with ice cream. I was appalled. All I heard from the chow line were remarks which made it clear that the crew thought they had been cheated out of their turkey and ham. Saegert's only comment was, "What did I tell you?"

In 1960 I left Gurke and convinced my relief to continue the work Saegert and I had started. I don't know if they did or not.

I had a great division on that ship. Two Shipservicemen made Chief while I was aboard and we overhauled the Ship's Store so that it contained more of what the men wanted. One of these men, Walter Libby, just died. I found that out from the last newsletter. He was a really good guy, as was Trent, the other Shipserviceman.

I think we had a good wardroom except for one man, and the crew was exceptionally talented. We had some good cruises and thoroughly enjoyed our "recreational" stops in Japan and when we were assigned "Station Ship" in Hong Kong over the Christmas Holidays. These station ships transacted all the Navy's business in Hong Kong inasmuch as there was no U.S. naval presence there. It was a very good port of call at the time.

Have a happy reunion. I don't travel much any more—can't get around very well, but wish I could be there.

By: Jim Frisbie— 1952-54, LTJG, SC, USNR

My most memorable character was George Dewey Nelson, CS1. He filled the slot of Chief Commissaryman (although he was a chief) for much of my tour. No one could have a more nautical name than George, or nautical background. George served in the Navy in World War I,

and was at Goat Island in the San Francisco harbor before it was named Treasure Island. He came back into the Navy for WWII and I think served in Astoria, WA. Not satisfied, he managed to get back onto active duty for the Korean War. He loved the Navy that much. He looked old because he was old, and quite a contrast to the youthful crew of that era. He had a wonderful attitude, a devotion to duty, but he didn't smell too good. With a shaggy moustache, an ash-laden cigarette always dangling from his lips, needing a shave, he was a friend to all. The "S" division quarters were in the most forward of compartment of the ship, but some of the crew had a problem with the "B.O." and told me about it. I can't remember if I told George to shower more often, but I am sure some of the crew did. But he was so likeable, it was hard for anyone to be mad at him.

By: Carroll Briggs

You want a story about the most memorable character? Hell, they were all unforgettable, starting right at the top with Capt. Radel. I swear, he must have been at least in part the model for Captain DeVries, Willie Keith's first Captain aboard the Caine. I will never forget being called to his in port cabin late one evening in San Diego. He sat on the edge of his bunk in his underwear glistening with sweat. "Mr. Garland has left the ship. Move your things to his cabin. The combination to the safe is on his desk."

Then, almost at the bottom, there was Abie, fresh aboard from boot camp. They sent him up to the bow to watch for the Mail Buoy off the coast at Songjin. Within five minutes he spotted it. Captain Foote gave him five bucks on the spot for reporting a floating mine.

And, what about Casimir Mesh RM2? He was just about the only guy aboard who could copy George Fox at 70 wpm. His hands broke out in big sores when the ship returned from WESTPAC. Claimed he was allergic to the ink on the US money, "Never had a problem with scrip."

And the next supply officer, Winfrey—sold the ship several (hundred?) cases of a drink concentrate. On a bet, Radarman Don Schultz drank a bottle of it undiluted—damn near killed him. It was awful stuff—finally used it for cleaning the decks. It was a great paint remover. What about Travis Turbeville or Ensign McFee—all con men to be sure.

And there was Radioman Landrum who would freeze every time a message came in addressed to NTSY—Gurke's call sign. He was working a radio messenger when he lost the Classified Message board. When we found it in the after fire room, he explained that they had the best coffee on the ship. He is the guy who went over to the El Dorado and got a work crew to bring several cases of Teletype paper back to the Gurke when we were copying on anything that we could get through the machine.

Speaking of Radiomen, there was J. W. Chambliss who single-handed took first place for Gurke in a frequency drill in San Diego. It was a lazy Saturday afternoon and most of the crew were off on leave or at schools. "I can handle it," he told us in his soft Georgia accent and very casually, he did as I watched in amazement.

What about Chief Signalman Walter Scott? He would sit up all night in the Radio Shack or Crypto. He refused to go down to the Chief's quarters in the bow after dark because there were so many floating mines.

There were ROK observers, most often sour, unfriendly guys, but not Ensign Ro. He laughed a lot and was as good a friend as you could ask for.

There are just a few that came immediately to mind. There are many more, each a memorable character with his own unique aura. John Hern, Chief Boe, Matheson and Battenberg, the CIC Con men, Marlen Keinbaum...I called him "George" one day and after that so did everyone. Gerber,

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a banty rooster RM1 who wanted to go to Crypto repair but Mr. Diehl wouldn't let him—then Mr. Diehl went on leave and Gerber went to school. We had the only guy in the division who was a qualified teletype repairman.

Oh, and I wanted to mention Pershing Wilson, the Exec—who kept a chunk of Plastic explosive on his desk to intimidate visitors.

Remember the ET's repairing the burned out SG1b console on the deck in CIC? They had it up and running again in 36 hours. Two of them with the book with the littlest guy in the gang sitting inside the console soldering where they told him to.

I could go on and really don't want to leave out a whole bunch more, but that is enough to get you started.

By: Jon Fox, 1959-62 Gun Boss

Assume all have heard stories of Capt Stuart Edgerton (1959-61). He was quite a guy! First, he was a coin collector, so that when we would weave back to the ship in the wee hours with a little too much fruit of the vine, we would be advised at the quarter deck that our presence was requested in the ward room. Upon entering we would find a balance of ship's officers sorting thru rolls of coins looking for rare dates. Then they would proceed to check thru rolls till we passed out.

Secondly, he loved snakes. We flew the Revolutionary War flag with the snake "Don't Tread on Me." When arriving at islands in the Pacific the local commander often made a gift to him of a bag of snakes. They would crawl around the pilot house and all over the bridge. Signalmen made a cage for them with holes in the sides and a clear plastic top. Every so often I would see a foot push the cage into the sun. After a few minutes—baked snake—replaced in the next port of call. Having my messenger stick a snake in my face halfway into a slow hot midwatch was not my idea of fun.

Thirdly, he was a great ship handler. He really was, but once he got his priorities screwed up. We were the night plane guard with a carrier during

flight ops when the carrier changes course. We had to go flank speed into heavy seas to get on the correct station. The ship is going thru very heavy green water over the bow and the XO is screaming, "Must change course!". The Captain is screaming, "Must get on station!" The ship is shaking like crazy, then, "FLOODING MT 1, FLOODING CHIEF'S QUARTERS," etc. The front of Mt 1 had collapsed under the water and had come off its roller path. That fiasco was worth a few weeks in Subic.

Fourthly, the Admiral's inspection in Subic: we all were there in dress whites, and the Admiral starts walking. He stops a few minutes later and says, "All Officers to the wardroom." The Admiral tells the Capt in front of us that if the ship isn't A-1 in 24 hours he will replace the Captain. The Admiral leaves and all hell breaks loose. We didn't paint, but rather dumped paint buckets and used swabs. Who cared about cigarette butts, just paint. Next day all was fine, but it took us months to undo the damage caused by that crash program.

Cute story: When approaching a port we would send out logistical requests. A. Water, B. Fuel, C. ammo, etc. On the way into Brisbane, Australia we requested 500 lbs of charcoal for Sunday cook outs and also 50 gallons of ice cream. Upon arrival, the truck pulls up with 50 lbs of charcoal and 500 lbs of ice cream. We tell the truck driver the order is backwards, but he could care less, so all comes aboard. Finding storage for charcoal is a no brainer, but ice cream poses a problem. Then school kids come aboard for tours and you guessed it—down to the mess decks where the kids were eating quarts and quarts and quarts. I assume those kids are now in their 50s and are still talking about the generous Gurke.

I don't know what happened to the Gurke, but somehow I know she's still at sea with a great crew on board in a typhoon laughing all the time.

By: John Logie, LT, USNR-R 1962-64

As a new Ensign in Gurke in 1962, I met an E-3 black Steward who had joined the Navy in 1944 and, when he go up in his dress Seaman First Class uniform, had an impressive array of medals and 4 gold stripes on his left sleeve. None of us could understand why he was not some kind of Petty Officer. Shortly after I arrived and went into the Operations Department (Ass't CIC Officer and Ship's Secretary), we got a new Supply Officer. He and I reviewed this man's personnel record, which had nothing but stellar reports. It was obvious he knew his rating very well. But the Supply Officer didn't stop there. By carefully watching him, the officer finally came and told me that he thought the sailor couldn't read. He had taken the 3rd Class PO exam again and again, and flunked every time.

We went to the Captain, to get permission to READ the exam to him and allow him to answer orally. BuPers was slow to agree, but finally did. Because the Supply Officer was his Department Head, I got the job of reading him his exam, and my 1st Class Personnelman (who knew shorthand) took down his answers. When the exam results were finally published in the ALNAV, the Steward not only passed, he got the highest score ever recorded. We had an in-port ceremony in San Diego to award him is 3rd Class PO patches. His family, and most of the crew, were in attendance. He said it was the proudest day of his life. In the dark days of 1944, the Navy was not strictly following its admission standards and he not only got in, but hid his disability for all the years that followed. Because he was good at what he did (including at his combat duty station), and increasingly embarrassed about his lack of reading ability, he was always ashamed, and didn't want his kids to know. But it was still a fine day to be a crew member in Gurke. I'm sorry to have to say, the names of both the Steward and the Supply Officer, the true heroes of this story, have slipped my 45 years' older memory.