BERKELEY **(7,320)**

"Unlike fairy tales, which begin 'Once upon a time'; or Air Force fairy tales ('*THERE* I WAS!'); or even Army fairy tales ("Duuu-uuh..."); traditional U.S. Navy sea stories are always prefaced by, 'Now, this *ain't* no shit!'" -- the Charles Ulysses Farley Compendium of Nauticology, Rev. 8, 1972 (Windbag Press)

"Now, this *really* ain't no..."

After spending two years losing sleep, weight and my sense of humor trying to get a new ship out of the endless Mardi Gras that is Avondale Shipyards in "N' Awlins," I'd finally had enough. I convinced my command that moving me was preferable to mutiny, and so finessed myself off USS COMSTOCK (LSD-45).

I eagerly fled back to my destroyer-navy roots and reported aboard USS BERKELEY (DDG-15) as Electronics Material Officer, or EMO (pronounced "Ē-Moe") in early January, 1990. She was based in San Diego, California.

BERKELEY was completing a Restrictive Availability, a long period at a San Diego Naval Station pier, completely shut down so major engineering systems could be torn apart and worked on. RAs are also an ideal time for the electronics technicians, or "twidgets"--the guys who worked for me--to overhaul things like communications antennas, tuners, and couplers that are normally off-limits because they're in constant use.

After reporting aboard, I made the traditional first call upon my new captain, Commander Ron Peterman. In the Old Navy that would've included a call at his home, to leave my card on a tray on the hall table near the front door, kept there for that purpose. Commanding officers' wives early learned, however, the danger of allowing chief warrant officers anywhere near booze, food or virginal daughters, and so the practice died. *I never had any calling cards, anyway....*

I first met Captain Peterman in his stateroom in BERKELEY on a workday Monday morning. I anticipated the usual Welcome Aboard, hearty handshake, brief, informal chat, reminder to join the Wardroom Mess, and boot out the door to get to work. But that didn't happen. This intro to a new commanding officer was unlike any in my experience.

I made it far enough inside his cabin to shut the door, and then stood at semi-Attention while I was subjected to an ascending-volume blast about all the things wrong with the electronics in BERKELEY, and specifically with the satellite communications, or SatCom, suite of equipment.

My new CO was short, stocky, dark-haired, dark-eyed, bouncing on the balls of his feet, red-in-face, veins popping out on his neck, forefinger punching skyward for emphasis, as he held forth at length and in detail on his utter inability to reliably talk to anyone, anywhere, anytime, by any electronic means. He reminded me of Jimmy Cagney in one of his better on-screen tirades (á la "Mister Roberts").

Captain Peterman recited a litany of radio woes going back his entire time aboard; his dissatisfaction with the electronics technicians; his disgust with the shore establishment's "help," whose efforts to date had only made things worse; and he ended by extolling me to get below and get his comms up even if it meant staying aboard till the sun burned out and killing all the ETs to do it.

***Dismissed*.**

I stood in the passageway outside his cabin for a moment, digesting what'd just taken place. I didn't know my new CO well enough yet, of course, to be able to tell how much of that was just venting back-pressure and how much was genuine anger. So, I implemented fallback plan Able: assume the captain meant every word, and Turn To.

I rounded up my two senior communications twidgets, ET2 Jeff Stoudt and ET2 Bob Kiser, and got their version of the comms flail. Predictably, they seemed to have worked

as hard as they could and had no answers. They'd even taken all the antennas over to the shipyard antenna shop during the avail and "fixed" them, but performance was now worse than before. Experts summoned from Mobile Technical Unit Five had thoroughly gone over everything, yet SatCom was still snafu'd. Comms stank, confusion reigned, morale was in the crapper.

I'll spare you the details of the resurrection of BERKELEY's radio communications, since it is twidget trivia of a nature so profound as to exceed OSHA boredom guidelines. Most of the trouble turned out to have been caused by my two well-intentioned young technicians, doing their best in a technical-leadership vacuum because their Leading Petty Officer was an idiot. Fat, yes; lazy, certainly; but with most of the bulbs on his tree burned out. I quickly discovered my new outfit's senior enlisted electronics "expert" had just enough technical acumen to screw up changing a fuse, so I made him my SLJ petty officer (Shitty Little Jobs), and the rest of us went to work.

We had most of BERKELEY's comms squared-away a week after I reported aboard. I'd like to say it was mainly due to my encyclopedic knowledge and professional brilliance--which is true--but I won't, because self-aggrandizement is something navy chief warrant officers simply don't do. The payoff was nonchalantly handing Captain Peterman a red handset for the SatCom system out on the Bridge one bright morning, and inviting him to talk to anyone he liked.

Glaring at me suspiciously, he stuck the handset next to his head, pushed the "transmit" button, called for an "Any station this net" radio check, and lit up with glee as he heard responses from units all over the Eastern Pacific. My acceptance into BERKELEY was assured.

Now all I had to do was learn how to drive a steam plant...

An Ancient Mariner

BERKELEY was the second-oldest, second-most run-down ship of my career. (TWINING led in that category: if she fired more than one of her five guns at once, large bits of

structure fell off.) BERKELEY had been rode hard 'n put away wet for so long there almost wasn't anything left to wear out. And after 29 years of active service, including serious combat tours of S.E. Asia, she was in poor shape; very, very poor.

How poor, you ask?

My stateroom was on the port side of the Main Deck in the aft superstructure, four doors down from the XO's cabin. There was an officer's head just across the passageway from my door. Just prior to my reporting aboard, a junior officer had gone in there one day to avail himself of an after-chow dump. Space being cramped, he did what all of us learned to do aboard ship: backed in, closed the stall door, dropped trou and sat down. He either landed a mite hard, or, more likely, he was "Custumah Numbah Ten T'ousan'! *Win Big Plize*!"

Atop the porcelain bus, he went right through the deck and entered #2 Engine Room the hard way. The steel in the deck had corroded away, leaving only a half-inch of terrazzo and memories of metal supporting the crapper. He was saved from serious injury by getting hung up in some piping a few feet down, from whence the amazed young man was rescued by the engine room crew...following which he decided the navy was not his avocation after all, so he left us to join a monastic order of Sybarites who ran a winery and bordello in Fallbrook. But that's another story.

Truth was, BERKELEY needed so much that, literally, no matter where I looked there was something that needed doing; and the chances were that whatever I did would be an improvement. Many things I fixed were simply awaiting someone to take an interest. I had an absolute ball, and BERKELEY became my single most-favorite tour as an officer.

Captain Ron

I was welcomed enthusiastically to Bridge watches by Captain Peterman and the executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Andy Diefenbach, after letting them know I loved driving--an emotion not shared, it turned out, by all in BERKELEY's Wardroom.

Ron Peterman was a fine officer, and what I like to call an Old-Navy "character." He was a solid proponent of "smart, destroyer-like maneuvering," but he also recognized the requirement to treat the old gal with the respect her aged bones deserved. So, he had put out guidelines to the underway watch officers as to how much rudder to use at given speeds, how quickly to ring up speed changes, etc.; all with an eye to not ripping her stern off during a course change or melting a boiler into the bilges unnecessarily.

Captain Ron was intense, animated, had a mercurial temper, and moved everywhere at max speed. He'd explode over something, get it off his chest, and forget about it minutes later. Most of his Wardroom hadn't spotted that; nor did they see that Ron deeply loved his ship, and couldn't abide not having her treated properly.

(To illustrate: BERKELEY was one of the last 5" gun ships in the navy to still have a working optical rangefinder in her gun director. I was present at a meeting when Captain Peterman learned that, because of the rumor circulating that we would be decommissioning, the Fire Control people had allowed routine maintenance and calibration of that instrument to lapse. In the best blast of his I ever personally observed, the CO "advised" the Fire Control Officer that the optical gunsight would be top-line before he or his techs left the ship again. And his prescience proved on-the-money, when we later turned BERKELEY over to the Greeks instead of mothballing her.)

As a consequence, some of the junior officers walked in abject fear of their captain. This made them prone to mistakes, which led to butt-chews, which they took personally, which led to bad attitudes, leading to more mistakes, ad nauseum.

In my navy, warrant officers frequently acted as junior officer mentors. We lived among them at sea, and it was natural for them to show up at our cabin doors, looking for an idea or sounding board. BERKELEY's Wardroom was no different; more so, perhaps. I tried hard to get those who sought me out to see the fruitlessness of the circular track they were on, but a few of them never changed. Self-pity was more fun.

When Cap'n Ron was really flamed, he'd point his right index finger towards Heaven and yell, "*NEVER*, in the *HISTORY* OF THE *WORLD*, _____!" (Fill-in-the-blank, topic optional.) I found this hilarious...privately, of course. And, since I never had it focused upon my good self (cough, cough), I could forgive me some levity over it. Privately,

as I said. Anyway, after getting on the Skipper's good side by fixing his comms, he seemed convinced I was a gift from God.

That, as some of you may have discovered, has "up" and "down" sides. For example: when you finally, really, do totally *goon* something, it seems far worse than it might otherwise have been because *you* did it. Juniors and contemporaries gloat over your fall from Grace. "Where's that god-like shine NOW, Superstar?"

Another drawback to having Big Kahuna think you can do anything is that...well, he thinks you CAN do anything, so he blithely piles on tasking until your next day off will probably come after you've been retired six months. The U.S. Armed Forces' buzz-phrase for this condition is, "additional opportunities to excel."

As for standing Bridge watches: despite the fact that I'd been a Fleet OOD in previous ships, I had to start from scratch in BERKELEY as an Officer of the Deck under-instruction. When I entered the Pilot House for my first underway watch, I found the Junior Officer of the Deck giving helm orders like "Right twelve degrees rudder," or "Left fourteen degrees rudder," which is pretty much unheard of. I asked him why, and he said the Skipper forbade him use Standard rudder (fifteen degrees) ever again, because he did that once during the noon meal with the ship at twenty-five knots, and damn-near rolled her over.

I was in for a Chinese "interesting" time.

Got Steam?

BERKELEY was the first ship I'd driven propelled by steam power--the others were all gas turbine, with engines like in a jet airliner. I found her to be tremendous fun: very complex, lots to memorize, a hundred ways to screw the pooch...an anal-retentive's dream. And the secret to successfully maneuvering with a steam propulsion plant is simply this: P L A N A H E A D.

Dig it.

"Lessee...one boiler, one shaft, one forced-draft blower...whatever-in-hell *that* is; somethin' critical, anyway...we need eleven knots' made good...is that above or below the dreaded Scoop Injection Speed, or what? Lord help me if I gotta tell Cheng to get his circ pump put back together or light off the other firehouse!"

And: "SHIT! I forgot to tell the EOOW he can roll the other shaft as necessary! The damn thing's gonna sag between the bearings!"

Or: (click) "Bridge, EOOW, we gotta high-water casualty boiler Two Alpha, takin' Two Alpha off-line, linin' up One Bravo, CCS takin' throttle control, max speed twelve knots!" (click). Huh? I mean, I just got done studying all the bad things that happen with *low* boiler water, and he's bitching about too *MUCH*?

Serious fun, steam plants. 'Way more fun than with them gas turbine girls--"quiche-eating Snipes"--and their TITs, TOTs, and never-ending "High Tee Five Four, Gee Tee Em One Alpha" crap. I learned many, many things about steam plants. Things like "The Automatic Combustion Control System *ain't;*" and, "They were gonna replace some saturated lagging on Two Bravo, just got it isolated and got the CO's permission to shut it down and leave One Bravo on line, I ring up twenty knots to avoid this supertanker, and guess which boiler the nerds pulled fires on--just guess!" (Red eyeballs blazing in the dark, and Charley Oscar's voice yelling, "*Chief Engineer*, dial 221!")

And: "Hey, whaddaya think? Is that smell the Aux Officer smokin' feedwater chemicals again? Or is it just that hydroponics farm under number one condenser?"

Ghosts

From the Main Deck down BERKELEY was a near-mirror-image of SOMERS, the first destroyer I'd served aboard in Viet Nam twenty years earlier. I had a terrific "out-of-body" experience one of my first nights underway in her as a result.

I came down off the Bridge after a Mid watch, about 4:00 A.M., descended to the main deck and walked aft into

the crew's mess through the forward door, heading for my stateroom using internal passageways.

Most of the lights were out, with the passageways nearest the Bridge and Combat lit by red adaptive night-lighting. When I entered the white, normal lighting of the Crew's Mess, I saw an Engineering Department sailor sitting at one of the mess tables in the middle of a small sea of red "Danger" tags, filling out the ream of paper necessary to gain permission to tag-out some major engineering system. He and I were the only ones present.

He was sitting with his back to me. He had on greasy blue coveralls, and had a set of earmuff hearing protectors propped up on his head. He looked familiar...and suddenly, like throwing a switch, I was back aboard SOMERS on the gun line in Viet Nam, looking at the back of my best Snipe friend, BT2 Denny Hurt. The smells and sounds were the same, the setting was the same, the feel of the place was identical...and I was twenty-one years old again.

I stopped and reached out a hand towards his shoulder, and he must have sensed me there. He turned in his seat, said, "Hey, Mister Dill! What's up?" and I fell back into reality. With a crash.

I was genuinely spooked for the next hour or so. Amazing, what your own mind can do to you.

"Remember The Airbus!"

In early 1992, while the rest of the navy massed in the Persian Gulf to help bring Peace and a kinder, gentler Enlightenment to Saaaaaaad-um, BERKELEY was dispatched to another gulf on quite a different mission. We went south to interdict drug traffic in the Gulf of Panama.

Our normal underway OOD watch was four sections, but that included the chief engineer, or "Cheng." Having him free to stand topside watches presupposed his engineering plant still had the Bondo, epoxy, safety wire and 300-knot-tape keeping all that 1200-psi super-heated steam properly confined.

That easy set of circumstances came to a screeching halt one night while we were headed south, when Cheng had to dive into the main spaces to help the Snipes keep the

plant from killing us all - causing a good case of whiplash in the officers' watch bill and presenting me with yet another chance to excel.

Neither our location nor mission required any extraordinary expertise on the Bridge, where I stood watch; but it did need an elevated mental awareness in the Combat Information Center, or "CIC." We were carrying a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment, or LEDET, including a CG officer who would carry out the actual boardings and inspections of target vessels as needed.

Posse Comitatus says the US armed forces have no legal powers outside martial law, but the USCG specifically does. To stop and board American-flagged vessels on the high seas, we would hoist the Coast Guard flag and temporarily place ourselves under the jurisdiction of the LEDET lieutenant, who would exercise his police authority to stop, inspect, and, if required, arrest.

That mandated a close coordination with the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intell Center (EPIC); the Fleet commander in Norfolk, Virginia, for whom we were temporarily working; and the U.S. State Department; all of which required a bit more brain power in CIC than usual. (Not that there aren't any brains in Combat. I never said that. I have the greatest respect for CIC weenies. Why, some of my best friends are Scope Dopes.) In response, Cap'n Ron stood up our TAO watches for the duration of the cruise.

The navy created the Tactical Action Officer after anti-ship cruise missiles came into vogue. Those puppies arrive so quickly and with so little fanfare that they're show-stoppers. Literally. Such pre-"*BOOM!*" tipper info as you might receive when being attacked by them ranges from none (INS EILAT), to your port lookout yelling some crap about seeing "fire" on the horizon (USS STARK). They, you know, like, ruin the Wardroom movie, man. *Totally*. It's a bummer.

So, the navy sends mid-grade officers to one long-assed, brain-burning, alcoholic-divorce-causing school to learn enough about the other side's equipment, tactics and order-of-battle to enable them to act as a substitute for the commanding officer during those critical few minutes--or seconds--when the strike's inbound and the CO's perched on his thunder box. Officers standing TAO are authorized, in writing, to fight the ship in the absence of the commanding officer.

In three daily watch sections, the TAO sits in a darkened CIC and a paranoid funk for at least eight mind-

numbing hours per day, chain-biting fingernails, scanning mountains of diarrhea-based message traffic, keeping an ear tuned towards a dozen or more susurrating radio speakers, eating Nicorette gum by the case, being fed high-octane navy coffee intravenously, and praying he never has to actually do anything.

In BERKELEY we had just three TAO's, with the chief engineer, Lieutenant Commander John Field, prominent among them. So, when John had to take up residence in the Main Holes, the CO had a decision to make: of the remaining studied, tough-minded, qualified, professional, senior lieutenants with their hair on fire available to him, which to slot into the TAO Watchbill? Ever decisive, Captain Ron drug me off the Bridge instead.

I resisted. I did.

I tried reason. I tried history. I tried Navy Regs. I tried utter lack of qualification. I tried tears. I pointed out that most of the Lower Deck and all of the Wardroom were convinced I was bug-shit crazy, and what if they were right? A Viet Nam bow-gunner philosophy ("Kill 'em *ALL*, let God sort 'em out!") might not be quite what he was looking for in someone to whom he'd entrust five-inch guns, over-the-side torpedos, chaff mortars, and SM-1 guided missiles.

All to no avail. Nothing would deter him from his terrible purpose and so I became, possibly, the only officer in U.S. Navy history to qualify TAO by OJT.

Of course, Skipper Ron helped. First: he ordered me to do it, fixing the "incentive" problem. Next: he gave me the combo to the TAO safe, fixing the "access" problem. Last: he saw to it I got up-to-speed quickly.

He'd poke his head in CIC--where I slumped, vainly poring over hundred-year-old NATO intell estimates on the strike capabilities of the Fiji Islanders; or trying to absorb the latest SWEDGE memo on the best way to defeat massed formations of kamikaze Zeroes while dodging multiple Long Lance torpedo attacks--and he'd shriek, "SURFACE ACTION PORT! *TAKE WITH GUNS*!" or some such, and go to lunch, leaving me to get ten rounds out of two gun mounts on the correct line-of-bearing, or fall on my sword trying--thus fixing the "experience" problem.

I had a lot of assistance from the White Hats on watch with me in CIC, which helped enormously. I think they were tickled at having a TAO not too proud to admit he was so utterly fucking lost he didn't know port from re-port any more, and they pitched in with a will. In short order, I was back-briefed and ready to take on those damned Fijians-

-spears, dugouts, voodoo and all. Being dropped in the deep end like that's a pretty good way to learn how to swim. Or die trying. "SHOOT--SHOOT--*LOOK*--SHOOT," as they say.

Anyway, that was Ron Peterman, one of the best. I loved the guy.

Our second CO in BERKELEY was Commander Fred Mallgrave, who came to us with significant experience as a prior CO of another ADAMS-Class DDG, the LYNDE McCORMICK.

Captain Fred made two great COs in a row in BERKELEY. He and his wife, Coleen, were outstanding people who succeeded in bringing the Wardroom along to the point where, unlike the norm, officers actually fought not to have duty when we had a social function. "Mandatory Fun," as such, didn't exist. We also got a change of executive officer (XO), when LCDR Reid Senter relieved Andy Diefenbach.

Reid was so quiet that people tended to ignore him at first, which proved to be a major mistake. Where the old XO had been outgoing, verbal and moved everywhere at Flank 3, the new one proved to be steady, quiet, and utterly thorough. Unlike the "New Action Navy" norm, he didn't change things just to put his name on them, but spent a maximum effort on getting the most out of his people and the best for the ship. His protective tenacity was awe-inspiring, and went a long way in foiling the shore establishment's continual attempts to short-change a 30-year-old ship in favor of the newer, prettier ones at the pier.

In all, I joined seven Wardrooms in fifteen years as an officer and BERKELEY's, under those two CO-XO combinations, was the hands-down best.

Conflict

Captain Mallgrave also loved BERKELEY, but he was fated to end her U.S. Navy career. While we did have some good trips--the Rose Festival and the Pearl Harbor 50th Anniversary celebrations in Portland, Oregon, notably among them--we were ordered to begin preps to turn BERKELEY over to the Hellenic (Greek) Navy. As adventures go, if I set

half the goofball things that happened during that period down on paper this'd grow into volumes and nobody'd believe a word of it anyway.

In addition to turning over BERKELEY, we were also tasked with turning over the ex-USS JOSEPH STRAUSS (DDG-16) to the Greeks. She had been mothballed and left quietly rotting at her moorings in Pearl Harbor's West Loch while the Pineapple Navy spent years illegally raping her for parts--in some cases, quite serious parts. STRAUSS was towed to San Diego and parked ahead of BERKELEY at Pier 13, so we were thus tasked with not one 24/7/365 job, but two. And we had to complete it even though we constantly lost crewmen without replacement, a normal situation for a ship being decommissioned.

The crowning blow was learning that the destroyer squadron who owned BERKELEY during her transition to the Greeks--the staff to whom we directly reported--was the collectively worst I've ever known. It didn't matter what the problem, large or small, the reaction of the DesRon staff was as negative as if we'd deliberately caused it. They stood solidly in our way, in the same blatant manner as the supervisor I once had who would literally stand on my tools and yell at me to work faster. I personally believe the DesRon so damaged Captain Mallgrave's career, that it explains why he subsequently retired as a commander (an O-5) instead of, as he certainly merited, at least as a full-bird captain (O-6). The Staff's pettiness even extended to refusing to approve personal awards he submitted for his officers and crew.

So the hard truth was that, for nearly a year, we fought both foreigners and "friends" to accomplish our mission.

Beware Friends Bearing Greeks

People, when thinking of Greece, think of Athens, the Acropolis; idle, sunlight-scepter'd isles in the Aegean; beautiful busty women with full-frontal armpit hair, Boston Blackie moustaches and one eyebrow; men dancing with each other in public; ouzo, Aristotle, Anthony Quinn.

Well, pardner, there's a whole heap o' Greece whut lives *way* back in 'em hills yonder, whur they ain't no runnin' water, ner indoor crappers, ner telly vizion, ner phones, ner much a nuthin' 'cept maybe sheeps. Baa. Baaa. *Baa-aaa-aa*.

When the Greeks needed four hundred men to crew BERKELEY, they hung color posters of beautiful Southern California beaches (awash in beautiful, semi-nude SoCal blondes) in every tiny mountain village in the country. They trumpeted a signup bounty, top pay and bennies, no experience necessary, and proclaimed, "Hey, Stávros! Free Babes! *BETTER'N SHEEP*!"

Eager young Greek lads flocked to the call, descending upon us by planeload to Pier 13, Naval Station San Diego. Some had no shoes, some had never worn any. Most spoke no English--at least not beyond the "suckee-fuckee-Coca Cola" kind that got get them firmly incarcerated by National City policewomen posing as hookers. (National City: "Nasty City" in Navyspeak - just outside the naval station fence, and renowned as the home of the Mile of Cars, the Westerner, George's Roundup, and the F Street Book Store. From alcohol to attitude, Nasty City mirrored the toilets found outside military and naval installations world-wide.)

Some of our Greeks spent weeks awaiting Hellenic Navy uniforms; all went weeks without bathing. And that last is an old and time-honored Mediterranean custom which must be olfactoried personally in order to enjoy that perfect *ambience...*the full, fruity "bouquet" of ripe, lush, Greek manhood. (Gawd.)

Fortunately, we still owned BERKELEY and were given a berthing barge--like a floating barracks--in which to house the Greeks. They only managed to flood it once, too, which has to be some kind of record.

The Greek kids were a hoot: there they were in El Dorado, surrounded by wealth beyond imagining. They were single and being paid enough each month to buy, outright, every bovine in the crapholes from which they sprang. So they went nuts.

Like the group of teenagers who pooled their Yankee dollars, bought a used Japanese sedan off the Mile of Cars, and gave driving lessons to others of their ilk in the parking lot at the head of our pier. The proud new owners spent the maximum time collecting money for car rides and the minimum describing the car's controls. Hank Ford would've approved.

"And now, Andréas, your attention! You sit here, you hold to this, and you will steer this auto as you will steer the ship! Is this not worth five hundred drachma?"

"Kataláva, Cóstas! Efháristō!"

"Pára kalō!"

And all was well, until one neophyte Joey Chitwood--doubtless related to Di's chauffeur--apparently confused the brake and accelerator pedals and drove over the seawall and into the harbor. We fished three of the four kids out right away, and divers found the driver a couple hours later. The Greeks insisted the car's brakes were faulty (natch) so they wanted to get their money back and press charges for manslaughter. A forensic exam of the car found nothing wrong with it.

Another budding entrepreneur spent an entire paycheck on cheap digital watches, which he then tried hawking to his shipmates at a profit. A buddy finally told him that anyone could find them cheaper out in town, which was why fellow Greeks weren't buying them, and that he might do better mailing them home to be sold. Which is how he came to meet our Customs and Excise folks...

My favorite randy young shepherd enjoyed America less than twelve hours before being jailed. He dropped his bags on his bunk in the barge, walked out Naval Station Gate 9, up 8th Street, and approached a slinky gal at the corner of 8th and National City Boulevard. When he inquired as to services and fees, a prowl car hissed to a stop at the curb and Nasty City fuzz boiled out. Slinky was a cop, he was busted. The arrest report stated they might have let him go, he being a foreigner; but as he was being cuffed, he said to the lady cop, "Is this meaning I don't get blow job?"

Then there was stealing. That's a *very* Mediterranean thing, stealing. Everyone in the village admires the biggest thief, until he gets caught . . . which those buffoons did, in droves. Nothing in their upbringing in Drossópigi or Zévgostássi (Baa! *Baa-aaaa*!) prepared them for security guards, video cameras, or the occasional citizen who'd yell "Fuck YOU!" and stick a *gun* in their face when they tried to rob him.

The Nasty City P.D. might have been irked at the trebling of their crime rate, were it not for the 99.9% case-closure stats that accrued to the Greeks, who invariably did the one thing most guaranteed to get 'em caught. Like keep the loot under their mattress, or flee the crime scene into the bodega next door to spend the money.

The American victims--I called 'em nosewitnesses--helped, too.

"'Distinguishing characteristics', Officer? You kiddin' me? That sucker STUNK!"

Shoplifting at the 32nd Street Navy Exchange joined the Greek sports Pantheon, up until one of my duty nights when a Greek junior officer was apprehended by NEX Security filching a bottle of men's cologne (street value under fifteen bucks, and he had over a hundred dollars on him). That spun-up the Greek command cadre, and we had no more shoplifting reports. The young man was sent back to Greece the next day, to face court martial and expulsion from the service he'd joined at age thirteen as a cadet.

Then there was smoking. In 1991-92, both the People's Demokratik Republik of Kalifornia and the navy were outlawing smoking. Nobody briefed the Greeks. They'd light up right next to a guy pumping propane, and stand nonchalantly puffing as he ran screaming into the hills. We found ciggy butts stubbed out all over BERKELEY, ground down into that beautiful wax job some American sailor labored over on the Mid Watch.

I had an idea. I was one of the Command Duty Officers in BERKELEY, in charge of the ship for the commanding officer in one of the in-port duty sections. I began enforcing U.S. Navy uniform regulations on the Greeks trying to leave or board the ship, including haircuts. Did I mention haircuts? None of them got those, not even the officers.

After I had an easy fifty of them standing either on the ship or on the pier one morning, going nowhere, their executive officer came out to "reason" with me.

He tried pulling rank. He tried threats. When he finally ran down and asked what it'd take to let his people get about their business, I told him my crew put in long hours the night before, making the ship look good so they could get off duty that day, but couldn't because the ship was now covered with Greek cigarette butts and trash. I said I'd let any Greek sailor off who showed up with his hands or pockets filled with butts and took them out to the cans on the pier. I also refused to allow any Greek aboard carrying cigarettes, lighters or matches.

The XO caved and I won. Just that once.

US'Ns 'n the Argonauts

Actually going to sea with the Greeks ranked right up there with javelin-catching.

We were allocated fuel for underway training, and we'd written an ambitious training schedule aimed at getting them up-to-speed and qualified to operate BERKELEY safely. But the Greeks had their own agenda, and at sea they danced to different music.

Their idea of training was to see it on a schedule and call that good enough. Never mind that three out of thirty actually showed up, or that those present sat smoking and chatting in their pagan lingo instead of paying attention to the American trainers. They were present, ergo: They must have been trained--Q.E.D.

And as for procedures of which we were fond, like giving and carrying out orders: oh, *boy*.

The Greek conning officer, for example, would shout out a helm order and then walk out on the bridge wing on the side opposite the turn and have a cigarette. He paid no attention to what his enlisted guys actually turning the wheel and setting the Engine Order Telegraph were doing, or what danger might lurk on the side towards which he was turning. (That was how the Greeks approached every order they gave an enlisted subordinate--seeming indifference as to how it was carried out.) And since we were responsible for the ship until the formal turnover, we had some serious huddles to assign trustworthy US Navy people to keep a wary eye on things.

The junior Greeks had the attention span of a gnat: they'd break off whatever official task they were given and go on Walkabout as the fancy took them. This was most noticeable during our first transit down the channel out of San Diego harbor, with its usual swarm of pleasure craft vying for room with the navy. After watching the helmsman leave the wheel to go outside and ogle bikinis on foredecks for the second time, I pointed him out to the Greek Conning Officer...who merely looked at him for a moment, and then went back to staring vacantly out over the bow. I grabbed one of our guys and had him stand by the wheel to take over if the Greek "sailor" wandered off-station again.

Similar tales arose from weapons, engineering and deck departments, which was equally frightening. That "que sera, sera" attitude gets people killed.

Then came the morning I heard Cap'n Fred's voice raised in genuine anger for the only time in my acquaintance with that very good man.

Working for Captain Fred Mallgrave was a privilege: he had the patience of a saint, he was even-tempered, he had reasonable expectations of his officers and men, he was a superb instructor, and he was damn smart to boot--an ideal skipper. Yet there he was, in a towering rage.

Something had been said to the Greek XO about trying to get his sailors to help spruce up the ship, so the XO had two of his deck apes go up to the Bridge to polish the brass.

In what we found to be typical Greek fashion, nobody spent a second instructing or supervising them. My CO entered his Bridge to find Greek deck hands vigorously "polishing" our decorative brass with steel wire brushes and eighty-grit sandpaper. In seconds, they destroyed the gleaming patina achieved by years of loving attention from generations of American sailors.

Shootin' the Breeze

One day we went out to let the Greeks shoot the guns. My department head, Lt. Kirk Johnson, asked if I'd play Check Sight Observer for Mount 51, since I'd done that for some months when I first reported aboard. I didn't mind, I enjoyed the job--any time a mere electronics "twidget" gets to play with really big guns is spiffy--so I climbed into the tractor seat of Mount 51's left-hand observation dome, donned a sound-powered headset, and reported "manned and ready" for the shoot.

Mount 51, our forward five-inch gun, was on the foc'sle, the open-air deck at the bow, in front of the Pilot House windows. The Check Sight Observer's job during a shoot is to act as a safety latch for the evolution. He sits with his head up in the Plexiglas bubble, peering through binoculars down the line of bearing of the gun barrel to ensure the range is clear of things we'd rather

not shoot. Sort of a sanity check on the Cannon Cockers and Fire Confusion Technicians, make sure they're not about to shoot the stacks or the admiral or that America's Cup boat over there or something. And if they are, he can throw a switch that won't let 'em.

I sat with the sun baking me through the dome long enough to compose the Gettysburg Address, while nothing whatever happened. Then, without warning, a shriek of compressed air blew the breech block open, a round cycled into the gun's breech, the breech block slammed back into place, the train-warning alarm bell rang, and I went on a carnival ride.

With the barrel wagging up and down like a dog's tail, the mount spun rapidly left to the stops, back to the right to the stops, back to the center and stopped...and then did it again, and again, and again, until motion sickness became a distinct possibility. Efforts to obtain "the plan" over my phones met only with hoarse Greek replies.

Break-dancing in a seventy-ton steel box moving at forty degrees-per-second introduced my head and shoulders to a whole passel of heretofore-undiscovered sharp points and knife edges. The final spasm slewed the mount violently all the way to the right, the gun barrel flew from near-vertical to near-horizontal, we came to a crashing stop, and my optics suddenly filled with the amazed faces of the Greek captain, and my captain, and a cluster of others out on the starboard bridge wing.

I grabbed the "Check Fire" control and hung on, proudly watching as Cap'n Fred decamped back into the Pilot House, while the Greek CO waved his arms and berated nearby underlings. A spate of angry Greek vomited out of my earphones, to which I repeatedly replied, "*No habla*!"

Eventually, an even angrier Greek officer threw open my door and demanded I return the mount to "Ready Air" (pointed straight ahead, over the bow), since I'd ruined the shoot for them. I told him there was a live round in the breech and I wasn't releasing the mount until I had an American on the phones from CIC and in the Gun Director. We parted sorrowfully.

Between the mechanical and electrical stops on the mount there was no real danger of our shooting ourselves, but the muzzle blast from firing a 70-pound projectile at 2,600 feet-per-second past their ear lobes would have wreaked havoc among the soft-bodied targets on that bridge wing. I accepted the ass-chewing from the Greek CO, the quiet "thanks" from my CO, and was not surprised to find myself never invited back as Check Sight Observer.

"Now Launch the Over-Reaction Team!"

Of even greater import to those of us in the cutting-edge, EPA-dominated Fleet of the People's Demokratik Republik of Kalifornia, was the Greeks' casual approach to:

E N V I R O N M E N T A L I M P A C T C O N C E R N S.

Then--as now--all any aspiring naval officer had to do to suffer the slings and arrows of outraged bureaucracy; to have his career yanked from under him, the buttons stripped from his tunic, his sword sundered; to be declared Persona Non Grata; to be exiled and denied fire, water, salt or shelter for a distance of 1,000 leagues from the Empire; was to make the tiniest mistake in the area of (now, speak this in the whiniest, Left-most liberal voice of which you are capable): "the e*n-VIE*-run-*ment*!" (Cut to scenes of teeming throngs chanting "Sieg, HEIL!" or "Fee-*DELL*!")

Don't know what "the environment" is like in Greece but I know it ain't Kansas, Dorothy. And as for the rules and regulations levied upon us by that most cruel, evil, relentless, cunning, untiring and implacable enemy of all--the United States Government--the Greeks cared not a farthing. Less, perhaps. I shall illustrate.

As the senior officer present, the commanding officer, USS BERKELEY, was in charge of the pier to which we were moored and upon which we labored, we and our Greeks. We were responsible for its upkeep to Naval Station San Diego. As with all the other piers, ours held a number of devices whose environmental impact potential was high, like Dempsey Dumpsters (large industrial trash containers); wet garbage and scrap metal containers; and about a dozen of those fiberglass conveniences so beloved of construction sites the world over (except in Greece): Porta Potties.

I won't try describing the zany things our child-like Greek shepherds did within the privacy of pier Porta Potties; "disgusting" pretty much covers it. Let's just say they were treated with some...disrespect.

Such was the case one of my duty days, when I was summoned out to the pier to find my counterpart, the Naval

Station Command Duty Officer, in company with a Kalifornia State EPA inspector who was so enraged he was about to Chernobyl on us.

Seems the EPA guy accompanied the NavSta CDO on his rounds that morning, and came down our pier in time to watch a Greek sailor cheerfully dump a five-gallon can of zinc chromate paint primer down the throat of a Porta Potty. (I don't know where *you* were at 10:17:09 A.M. PDT Monday, 29 June 1992, but the sound you heard was neither Krakatoa nor the San Andreas finally ousting Kalifornia. Though it came mighty close...)

We gathered the gibbering remnants of the EPA inspector and poured them back into his truck. I was then privileged to initiate the laundry list of Top Secret messages and highest-priority phone calls to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NORAD Cheyenne Mountain, the TACAMO aircraft over Omaha, the White House Situation Room, the International Courts in the Hague, and CNN mandated by heinous acts of this nature. Even the Greek Consul in Los Angeles got involved: he had to post the cash bond required to guarantee that the Greek government was now legal owner of, and responsible for, approximately twenty gallons of hydrocarbonaly-contaminated human excreta, which guarantee included permanent and verifiable removal from America's shores and contiguous seas at the earliest possible date.

See: we have companies legally authorized to dispose of crap; likewise, there are those so authorized to deal with paint. But companies licensed to minister to the two when mixed as one are few, and only work in New Jersey.

The Porta Potty tank was pumped into a steel fifty-five-gallon drum which was then sealed with the holy Seven Seals of Perdition, gaily festooned with EPA bio-hazard labels, and craned over to sit on BERKELEY's stern until Perpetuity. Or, until such time as the Greeks took her out past the Three-Mile Limit and dumped it overboard.

Months later, I stood on the heights of Point Loma and watched ex-BERKELEY--now Hellenic Navy Ship THEMISTÓCLES--sail away, homeward bound on a voyage worthy of Odysseus, bearing all of her Old World sheep herders and with that fifty-five-gallon drum standing proud upon her after deck.

"Sigma Tau Epsilon Ca Ca," as they say 'round the ol' agora.