

## THE STORM

By John F. Hall

During The Cold War between Russia and the United States, Fort Campbell was the number 7th target to be hit by Russian missiles. This was not entirely due to the post being the home of the famous 101st Airborne Division. It was also due to a Navy base adjacent to the post. This facility, called Clarksville Base, was surrounded by more than one fence. It had a paved road inside the fence manned by roving Marine patrols and attack dogs. Its NO-Fly zone was violated one time by a Post General and his helicopter received a few bullets from a Marine to prove the point that its air space was not to be violated. The Fort Campbell Security Platoon's primary mission was to provide escort security for classified weapons produced by the Navy. This is a true story of one such mission.

Orders came down for a security mission. In stead of meeting the Marines at the Fort Campbell Air Field, the order called for the security team to travel to Milan, Tennessee. The squad signed out Thompson submachine guns and 38caliper pistols from the arms room. Extra drivers were instructed to sign out two station wagons from the Transportation Motor Pool. These drivers were instructed to transport the security squad to the Navy facility at Milan, TN and to return to Fort Campbell. The Navy had loaded several railroad box cars to be escorted to their Naval Base in San Francisco, California. Attached to the last box car was a caboose. The security squad would live in the caboose during the trip to California.

One day, I was cooking some bake beans on the small stove in the caboose, when the train coupled another box car. It hit so hard that I was knocked off my feet. The baked beans went flying all over the place. Every time the train would stop, the security squad would grab their Thompson submachine guns, exit the caboose and form a perimeter around the Navy's box cars. This went on, day and night for over a week until we reached the Navy base. The Marines assumed security duty, and I thought our mission was over. We were instructed to stay in the Navy barracks and eat in their dinning facility until we received orders and plane tickets to fly us back to Nashville, TN. From there, our extra drivers would meet us at the air port and drive us back to Fort Campbell.

We were eating at the Navy's dinning facility when the Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) in charge of our security squad came in with our orders. He did not appear to be happy. He said that things had changed and we now had new orders to escort the Navy's classified cargo to Korea. Vietnam was heating up and I was concerned, since we had to pass that country, that our ship could be a target. The change caught me by surprise since I did not have sufficient money to last several weeks.

Thankfully, staying in the Navy barracks and eating in their dinning facility, allowed me to conserve my funds. The WWII Merchant Marine ship required about a week to load. In addition to the classified Navy cargo, the ship was fully loaded with 500 pound bombs. Once the loading was complete, we went on board and relieved the Marine guards. The Captain of the ship greeted us. He wanted to know if any member of our squad was

qualified to operate a movie projector. I showed him my Army Projectionist License. He said, "Great!" He told me that I would be showing movies to his crew and to my squad every night. Our ship got on the way. It was a sight to behold to go under the Golden Gate Bridge. This was my first trip on a ship. The Pacific Ocean was fairly calm as we traveled from California to the Hawaiian Islands. The ship laid anchor off Pearl Harbor.

The ship's Captain, if my memory serves me well, had a white beard and he appeared to be in his fifties. He called the security squad together for a meeting. He told us that we had three days of shore leave. He would put us ashore by a small boat on Waikiki Beach. After three days, he would send the small boat back to pick us up. If we were not at the pick up point on the third day, he would leave without us.

I had very little money, so I decided that I would sleep on the beach at the pick-up point. This was before the military hotel, the Hale Koa Hotel, was built on this government beach property called Fort Durosey. There was a restroom and showers on this property. The Army's Military Police (MP) patrolled this beach. One night the MPs woke me up. I showed them my military ID card and travel orders. I explained my situation. They told me to be careful. The local-Hawaiians told me where to eat, away from the high priced tourist areas. A fellow squad member rented a Honda motor scooter and he invited me to ride on the back as he drove around the city and up to Diamond Head Mountain.

On the third day, the Captain sent the small boat to pick up the squad. That evening, the ship raised its anchor and we proceeded on to Korea. I cannot recall if the ship had radar. This WWII era ship was a rust bucket. The shower pipes were rusty. I felt the ship was better suited for the scrape yard. Our security squad stayed in one section of the ship that apparently was over the engine room. It was always very hot. It had fold down bunks mounted on a steel poles. I was asleep one morning when I was forcefully thrown out of my bunk. I hit the metal floor. I looked around and did not see any other members of the security squad. I put on my jeans and black leather jacket and went out the side door.

To my horror, I looked up and saw waves 50 to 60 feet high battering the ship. Somehow



I managed to make it to the bridge. The Captain was calmly steering the ship. I guess I was as white as a ghost. He knew I was scared. He smiled and said, "I've been through worst than this." I sat down, expecting the ship to break apart. I tried to stay in one spot. After a while I drifted off to sleep.

(Pictured: John F. Hall, East China Sea steering a Merchant Marine Ship). The Typhoon passed and the sea became calm. I woke up. The Captained yawned He told me to stand up and take over the wheel. He told me to look at the ship's compass and keep her on course. He was going down to the galley for coffee. I was amazed that he felt I could keep the ship on course. It was easy. You just had to keep the arrow on the compass pointed to

the necessary degree heading. The steering of the rudder was really very simple. The Captain took his sweet time drinking his coffee. When he got back, he told me to go down to the galley for some chow. The ship had superior cooks and the food was excellent.

In 1748, hymn writer John Newton wrote the song, "Amazing Grace" during a violent storm at sea. He wrote the words' 'Tis Grace that brought me safe this far, and Grace Will lead me home." Mr. Newton and I shared a similar experience separated in time by hundreds of years. How hopeless I felt being at the mercy of a Typhoon that could have easily ripped the ship apart. I will forever be grateful to Christ for sparing my life and giving more days to spread joy, to share laughter, to give comfort, to write true stories and to take pictures of events that will pass away. For one short moment in time, I was a sailor steering a ship in the East China Sea. I was, however briefly, a sailor once and young.

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\*Read more stories written by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>