

## **My Most Embarrassing Moment (That I Can Reveal)**

After I graduated from The Ohio State University, was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy, married my high school sweetheart, Ruth, and we completed our honeymoon (all during a ten-day period in June 1957), I reported to the USS Hermitage (LSD-34) in Little Creek, Virginia. The Hermitage was a brand new ship, the only air-conditioned ship in the amphibious force, and I was assigned to her for temporary duty before reporting for flight training in Pensacola, Florida later in the year. This new type of ship reminded the casual observer of a large dump truck...with a large gate at the stern (back end), which could be opened after the ship was lowered (by filling large ballast tanks) to fill the interior bay with water, permitting smaller craft to enter.

The smaller craft were not actually small, as each of the three or four LCU's (Landing Craft Utility) so embarked were capable of hauling several large tracked tanks or a half dozen smaller vehicles. After the ballast tanks were pumped dry raising the ship higher in the water, the stern gates were closed, the water removed, the smaller craft secured and made ready for transporting across larger bodies of water, often unfriendly to small craft. At an invasion site or port, the process was reversed and the smaller craft were free to debark in safer waters.

As was the custom for a new officer reporting on board, I needed to make an appointment with the Executive Officer

(the second in command) and present him my orders and my service jacket. This would be the opportunity for the Executive Officer to get to know me and for me to learn what duties I was to be assigned. It was expected that I would make this appointment within twenty-four hours of reporting for duty. I reported one evening so I needed to get this done the following day. Doing this would be somewhat complicated, in that the ship was to depart for a training cruise in the morning and everyone would be very busy while the ship was underway.

The next morning, the announcement was made for all hands to prepare to get underway and I had received instructions from the Officer of the Deck to report to the Bridge (The area where the Captain commanded the ship) to observe the procedures for getting underway. En route to the Bridge I had a chance meeting with the Executive Officer, whom I will call Commander Smith (not for anonymity purposes, but because I can't remember his name). As I rounded a section of deck filled with eight large exhaust blowers, Commander Smith emerged from a hatch (a door to land lubbers) and there we stood face to face.

This ten-day old Ensign was overwhelmed by this chance meeting with a twenty year veteran three striper, but I rose to the occasion. "Commander Smith" I said, " I am Ensign Saltzman. I reported aboard last evening and I would to make an appointment with you to present my orders." He held out his hand and said, " Welcome aboard the Hermitage." I said, " When might I be able to have an appointment with you to present my orders?" and he said, "

See me sometime.” I said, “How about after lunch?” and he repeated, more emphatically, “See me some time.” Being my assertive self, I said, “ How about tomorrow morning after breakfast?” Amidst the loud whirring of the blowers, he nearly shouted, “Dam it Ensign, how many times do I have to tell you, THIS EVENING SOMETIME!” Ruth insists that this was the origin of the hearing problems which plague me to this day, but I insist that it was the noisy blowers that caused me to hear THIS EVENING SOMETIME as SEE ME SOMETIME.

In any event, I was very embarrassed; turning several shades of red (probably matching my hair color) and wondering if my fledgling naval career was in jeopardy so soon. I said, “Yes Sir!” and Commander Smith stalked away...I am almost sure he had a smile on his face.

That evening, I had my appointment with Commander Smith and he never mentioned our chance meeting by the blowers. My two months aboard the Hermitage were great and CDR Smith even submitted my name to be included as a plank owner of the Hermitage...a real honor as it depicts the original crew of a ship...even though I had reported several months after the ship had been commissioned.

Each plank owner is honored by receiving a Cruise Box (A travel chest, hand made by the carpentry department) when leaving a ship or retiring, and I still have mine...and my memories of my first embarrassing day on the USS Hermitage (LSD-34). During my thirty-two year career on active duty and in the Naval Reserve, I probably had more

embarrassing moments, but this is the one I remember the best.

October 2008 (The event described occurred in June 1957...over fifty-one years ago.)