

ROYAL REEF RUNNERS – LUNCH BREAK AND THE BLAST– Bob Harp EM3, Jon Osborne CSSN

When number 4 was in standby, the ship would use the emergency diesel to provide electricity. The decision meant running the emergency diesel well beyond reason. Bob Harp EM3 and one other electricians' mate were assigned duties to keep the diesel running many long hours daily. He dozed, on the mess deck, just above the running diesel. There were breaks for food brought in by helicopter, a brief saltwater shower, His favorite food were sandwiches at noon meals. One warm clear day Harp took his sandwich and sat up near the ship's bow, port side, feet thru the lifelines and gazing at the water. Suddenly, "I heard a gunshot and felt the bullet go past my head! I stood up and yelled at the ass****. 'What the f*** are you doing?' At that point I realized it was Captain Grkovic shooting at sharks! I then made a quick dash for the nearest door into the ship, hoping I wasn't recognized."

About this time the captain was persuaded to give up shark shooting and surrender his rifle he kept on the bridge. Another reason for the change was shooting sharks attracted other sharks. The opportunities for a swim call off the fantail of the ship would be too dangerous if the practice continued. Swim call continued, always with an armed shark watch posted.

August 9th Harp was manning the Emergency Diesel when he was told to leave his station and move aft. A 50-pound hose charge was being laid outside the hull of the ship to blast coral. Harp was reluctant to leave but a sharp NOW from supervisors got him moving aft, leaving his diesel running. A few minutes later Harp heard a sharp explosion on the port side and saw the deck forward rise. A sharp crack followed. Last, Harp felt the forward part of the ship slam down on the reef. Everyone was stunned. An inspection inside the ship showed the port side forward caved in three feet and an ammunition hoist and decking driven up one deck. The explosion opened a hole allowing ocean water to flow freely into the ship.

Quick thinking crew started using the hole to catch fish. The fish were prepped then cooked using a metal plate and blowtorch. For the lucky few the cooked fish was a welcome relief from prepared food sent to their ship by boat or helicopter. One sailor's recollection of food supplied to the grounded ship was "cold mashed potatoes!" Not everyone received cold

food, but food imported is not the same as food right from the steam table of your own ship.

On two occasions Harp was afforded a "holiday" sending him in a rotation to one of the larger ships for two nights off rest on fresh sheets, in air conditioning and several hot meals, or real Navy chow. Harp twice received a "holiday" for food and freshwater showers only to find "water hours" were in force allowing him the bare minimum of fresh hot water. The two "water hours" remains grossly unfair in his mind 57 years later. There was another morale item that required quick action to solve.

Jon Osborne was evacuated on July 21 with 155 others. He was aboard USS MIDWAY sleeping and waiting for reassignment. His job was to run the small ship's store supplying cigarettes, nuts, candy stationary, small jewelry items etc. Osborne locked the store when he was evacuated and took the keys with him to MIDWAY. A chief awakened him starting "Get your gear. You are going back to the KNOX to run the ship's store!" He returned and immediately opened for business remaining open until the ship was freed from the reef. He was told he wasn't needed before they found out how important he was.