

Topic: My Dad was aboard this ship at the time of the picture.

Abstract: After graduation, Dad wasn't sure what to do; so his friend suggested joining the navy. After dad joined and went through all the training, he got called into active duty and his days as a Navy Reserve came to an end. After Dad finished his training to become a Machinist's Mate, he boarded the USS FireDrake, AE-14 where he contributed in the transference of ammunition for a whole year. Dad finally came home, obviously grateful for his experience in the Navy.

My Dad in the Navy

My dad was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school, Class of 1951. He wasn't sure in what direction he wanted to go now that he was out of school. Dad had majored in English and Math, but he really wasn't sure if that was the direction he wanted to go. One afternoon when Dad was running about town he ran into a buddy he had gone to school with. As they were talking the friend had mentioned that he had signed up for the Navy Reserves a few months ago. He talked about how exciting it was going to be; to be able to go out to sea on such huge ships, the far off lands he was going to see, and that he could further his education. Well Dad thought that all sounded pretty good to him. Seeing how he wasn't sure where to go from here, he thought that that might be a good place to start. So in September of 1951, Dad signed up for the Navy Reserves. There was a monthly meeting that he had to attend. An officer would give lectures on naval procedures and what to expect if or when he would be called to active duty. Dad would soon find out.

In December of 1951, Dad got a phone call he was not expecting, well at least not this soon; he was being called to active duty. Dad was no longer in the reserves; he was now a member of the United States Navy. He had 10 days to get ready to ship out. Dad

spent the days tying up loose ends, (he wasn't sure how long he would be gone) saying his good-byes to family and friends. He was off to see the world! His first stop would be San Diego. Dad boarded the train in San Jose and headed south to the Navy Training Center, where he would spend the next 11 weeks in Basic Training. Basic training was very intense, they worked long and hard learning the necessary maneuvers and tactics to stay alive in case of a battle. The men only got a day here and there for rest. The first leave Dad went on, he went into San Diego and got his first tattoo. On the next leave, he again, went to town and got his second and last tattoo.

After basic training, Dad had a 30 day leave. He went home and rested up for the next journey. At the end of his thirty days he again says his good-byes and off to his next adventure. Dad road the train back to Chicago Illinois, from there he road the bus to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Waukegan, Illinois. He would spend the next 16 weeks studying to be a Machinist's Mate. (The machinist mate operates and maintains the steam turbines and reduction gears used for the ships propulsion and auxiliary machinery such as the turbo generators, pumps and oil purifiers). (About.com, pg 1).

Dad had applied for this possession when he had signed up for the reserves. He has always liked working with his hands, especially on engines. Though, there was no comparing the car engine to the size of the ship's engine; Dad knew he was up for the challenge.

In April of 1952 Dad had completed his 16 weeks of training and he was ready to get on the ship and hone his new skills. His next stop would be San Francisco, where he was introduced to the "USS FireDrake, AE-14. This would be Dad's home for the next

year. The USS FireDrake AE-14 was commissioned by the Navy in December of 1944. That would be the beginning of a long and proud mission for the Navy. Her first mission was to be part of the Pacific Fleet in World War II. She was at the invasion of Okinawa, 1945. She supplied ammunition to the combatant ships. October 1951, at the end of World War II the USS FireDrake was de-commissioned to Orange, Texas. Then in Feb 1952 she again would be commissioned by the Navy for the Korean War. In 1953 on her second and final deployment to Korea, the USS FireDrake set a new record rate for transferring ammunition. The average was 285 short tons of ammunition per hour at sea. (www.USSFireDrake.com, page 4.) My dad was on that ship!

The first stop the ship would make was to Honolulu, Hawaii. (Dad really liked it there.) Because the USS FireDrake had been of commission for so many years, she had to go through a de-gauzing range. (De-magnetization) She also had to be fit for carrying ammunition. The decks were made of metal so they had to be lined with wood planks. With the ship ready to carry ammunition, she headed back to San Francisco where she would be loaded with ammunition and would set sail to the Korea. The voyage took 21 days. The first stop would be to Sasebo, Japan. (Sasebo was an ammunitions station.)

Dad was glad when they finally reached port. Once in Sasebo, half of the cargo she carried was off-loaded, and the ammunitions waiting on the dock was loaded on. With the ship fully stocked, She heads to the Sea of Japan, just below the 38th Parallel that divides North Korea and South Korea. Dad said they had to stay below the line.

In South Korea, if they crossed the Parallel in to North Korea, there was a “damn good” chance they would be shot at. USS FireDrake’s mission was to cruise up and down the Sea of Japan, waiting for vessels that needed re-arming. The USS FireDrake

supplied the ammunition for the battleships, aircraft carriers, and destroyers.

My Dad would spend 30 to 40 days at a time out at sea. Sometimes he felt like were just going around in circles. Dad's job on the ship was in the engine room. He and two other soldiers were in charge of the evaporators. They turn the sea water into fresh water. They could not use the salt water because it would corrode the boilers. The boilers made the steam, and the steam fueled the turbines that propelled the ship. Dad spent a lot of long hot hours down in the steam engine room.

The engine room wasn't only job Dad had, he and the rest of the crew worked long hours up on deck, loading ammunition onto the vessels that anchored along side their ship. Dad said, "It was damn hard work and we were all ready for the end of our day to get here." The ship was equipped with a wench that could drop down 6-250 bombs at a time. She carried 250, 500, and 1,000 pound bombs. There was also projectiles; 200 pounds of explosives that are launched out of a cannon.

Dad remarked that he worked 80% of the time, and slept 20%. If there was any free time, dad and some of the other crew members like to hang out in the work shop. They would spend there time making what ever they could with what ever they found. When the ship would run low on ammunitions she would head back to Sasebo. After the crew had the ship reloaded, and there was some free time, dad and a couple of his buddies would head out to go touring around such places as, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. Dad enjoyed the tours and it was nice to get off the ship for a while. He also enjoyed the food; "it was a far cry from the stuff they serve on the ship." Dad said. I asked him if he drank Saki? He said no, he didn't really care for it. He and his buddies usually stuck to beer.

Dad recalls the day they had to go to Warsan, it was just below the 38th Parallel. A ticket radar plane (spy plane that tracks movement right below the Parallel) had been shot down and needed to get back to Sasebo so the readings could be taken from it. They delivered the plane onto a cargo ship, loaded up with ammunition and headed back to their post in the Sea of Japan.

My dad was out at sea for most of a year, by this time it was September of 1953 and the Korean War was declared “over.” The USS FireDrake leaves the Sea of Japan and heads to Guam. There, most of her cargo is unloaded, and some odds and ends from World War II were loaded up. Dad wasn’t exactly sure what it was. (He didn’t know he was going to have a nosey daughter that wanted to know, or he would have asked!) Dad was once again heading for Hawaii, and for him, his tour of duty was over.

Dad enjoyed his time in the Navy, though it was a lot of hard work, he gained a lot of knowledge and saw some great places he knew he would not otherwise have seen. Dad went into the Navy at 5’9” 140 pounds and came out 5’10 and a half, 172 pounds. “I was very happy to have grown and put on some weight,” Dad remarks.

I am very proud of my Dad for his part in the war effort. He worked very hard, visited a lot of places, gained knowledge and skills and he met some really great guys. Dad enjoyed his tour of duty. And if I know my dad, he was the best Machinist Mate and ammunitions crewmate that the Navy has ever had.

Love you Dad!