

Memories from Duty Aboard the USS Bairoko CVE-15

After graduating from a U.S. Navy Class “A” Teleman School in the summer of 1951, I was assigned to the USS Bairoko and put in charge of the post office. At that time the Bairoko had completed one tour of duty around Korea and was beginning to prepare for her second cruise. The day we departed on this new tour of duty we were visited by well known entertainer, Eddy Cantor. His visit was most appreciated and sent on our way to an uncertain future - while still laughing at his jokes.

During my time aboard Bairoko, we had either the Air Group 312, a Marine Fighter Squadron on an anti-submarine Squadron #25 aboard. When the Marines came aboard they brought with them a female dog as their mascot. She soon gave birth to some pups. A photo was taken of our Commanding Officer, Captain Hogle, walking between a line of Sailors and a line of Marines, during an inspection, when called upon “Checkers” was taking a nap in the center of the aisle. The news release article stated that Checkers did not draw any “sack detail” , just a friendly pat - the lucky dog.

The Marine pilots flew the F4U Corsair planes with a brightly distinguished checkerboard pattern painted on the engine cowling. They would wear a scarf of the same pattern around their neck during their missions. One day while on a mission over Korea, Marine Captain W.D. Smart had his plane hit by ground fire. He pulled up to gain altitude and then bailed out; landed on the top of a hill; saw a curving trench which he went to; other pilots flying cover for him called in for a rescue helicopter. Captain Smart had only a side arm for his defense. Two Chinese soldiers came around the curve in the trench and up to him. Each of them had a rifle and one had a bayonet attached. He motioned for Captain Smart to disarm and pointed to the scarf indicating to hand it over. Smart did so and both soldiers left and a little while later the rescue chopper arrived and took him back to the ship.

On the way back from Korea to San Diego after the second deployment, we were directed to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. At this time John Wayne, the actor, was filming a movie about a detective that was trying to break up a plan to cause damage by a Communist group and to do harm to the city and the Naval Base. The movie was named “Big Jim McLain”. This was not how most of us knew John Wayne. He was wearing a suit and tie. Anyway, they needed a navy ship for the final scene, something like a troop ship and nothing was available. They decided that the Bairoko would work so the Navy gave their permission.

John Wayne came aboard the Bairoko during the final filming and was very friendly. He would pose for the asking, thus I have a photo of myself and “The Duke”. The final filming for the scene of Marines boarding some ship for the trip to Korea lasted maybe one minute, but to this day when I see this old movie, I cannot see a thing that would convince me that a CVE was used in place of a troop ship.

The Bairoko together with the Badoeng Straits, the Rendova and the Bataan along with other CVE carriers served their country well.

Article sent by Robert (Bob) Martin, TE-2