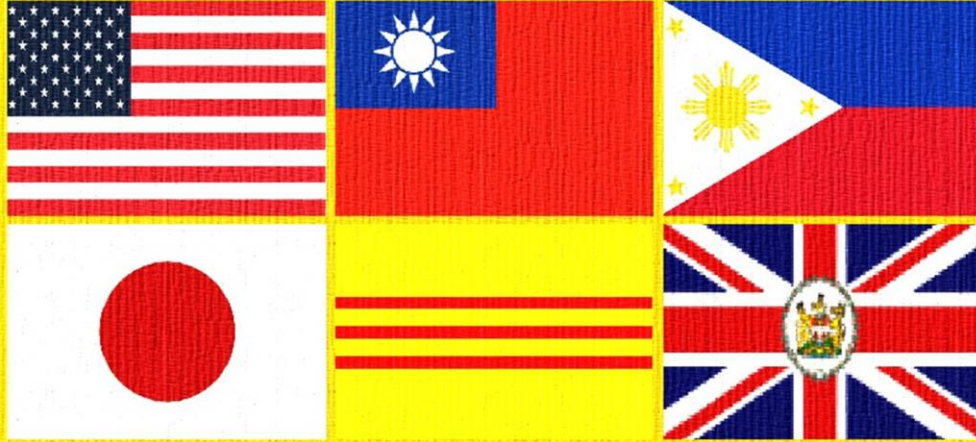


## USS PRINCETON LPH-5 WESTPAC



## FAR EAST CRUISE 1963

### *THE GUN BOSS and the 'SEA BAT'*

I was newly assigned to Third Division, Watch Section Four with my Cleaning Station the Fantail.

The Princeton was a Squared Away and proud ship with a well seasoned crew. There was Good Order and Discipline and a rigid Chain-of-Command, which is to say me reporting on board as a Seaman Recruit my chain-of-command was pretty much limited to my immediate Leading Seaman. Meaning, mind my own business and do exactly as instructed. If I didn't know what to do look to the other seamen who had been on board awhile longer and follow their lead and I'd probably stay off the Extra Duty Muster List.

The Fantail area was Third Division's responsibility to maintain and my immediate responsibility was to sweep, swab the deck, chip, wire brush and Red Lead rust to keep up the material condition and appearance of the Fantail. The Fantail as I came to learn was Third Division's "Show Piece," so to speak. When painted out it "shined like a diamond."

While performing my duties of chipping and hand wire brushing rusted areas on the Fantail deck the Divisional Leading Petty Officer, a Boatswain's Mate First Class came out of the Third Division Office and instructed the Leading Seaman to go to the division's gear locker and get a new corn broom. The First Class then instructed another seaman to go do to the Galley Break-Out Petty Officer and get a cardboard box which was in "good condition."



**I'm listening to all of this wondering to myself what's going on, but minding my own business and keeping busy "bustin' rust."**

**As thing would have it, the Gun Boss entered the Fantail area and we all came to attention and the First Class saluted and presented the space and the Gun Boss replied, "carry on," and we all went back to work. The Gun Boss went over to the outboard side of the Fantail.**



**Some time passed and the Leading Seaman reported back to the First Class with a new corn broom and shortly the other Seaman returned with a fairly new looking S-2 cardboard box. I learned later that #10 cans of food come in that particular type of box and #10 cans are about gallon size and make great paint cans.**

**The First Class had the Seaman take the box and set it upside down on the starboard side of the four centerline bitts. Then the First Class told both Seamen that when the new Ensign started to enter the Fantail area they were to shake the box and act excited "about something" inside the box.**



One of the Seamen placed himself by the double doors at the entrance to the Fantail so he'd be in a position to watch for the Ensign coming down the hangar deck.

It wasn't but a few minutes later that the Seaman left his post by the doors and went over to the box with the other Seaman. They were shaking the box back and forth on the deck as the Ensign arrived on the Fantail. Just then one of the Seaman was down on his knees looking under the box and started yelling that "he saw it."

It was obvious that the Ensign was somewhat taken aback and didn't know if he should salute and report to the Gun Boss or find out what all the commotion was about. The yelling of the Seaman again was that he "saw it" as he tipped up and looked under the box, while down on all fours and the other Seaman yelling at him "don't let it out" was too much for the Ensign. The Ensign was, it looked to me, going to find out what "all the disturbance" was about.

Where upon the First Class approached the Ensign and saluted, still holding the corn broom in his left hand, and explained to the Ensign that one of the Seaman had caught a "Sea Bat" and had the "Sea Bat" under the box.

The Ensign exclaimed, "... a Sea Bat?" The First Class said, "... yes sir. A Sea Bat." Haven't you ever seen a Sea Bat sir?" To which the Ensign stated, "I didn't even know there was such a thing." The First Class said, "oh, yes sir. It's amazing when you're this far from land that you'll find them. Looked like it was resting up in the corner there in the flight deck overhang," pointing his finger towards a spot on the upper bulkhead.

The First Class then asked if the Ensign wanted to see the Sea Bat and there was some discussion then the Ensign said he wanted to see a Sea Bat.

The Seamen turned loose of the box and gave control over to the Ensign, who bent over to have a peek at the Sea Bat.

With the Ensign bent over trying as hard as he could to see into the darkness under the box the First Class squared off with that new corn broom as if he had a White Ash Louisville Slugger in his grip and swung with all his might.

The corn fibers made a distinct whoosh sound as they sped through the air and when they connected with the Ensign's back side it was with a thunderous whump! The Ensign went flying over the box and tumbled on the deck howling as if Dracula himself had just bit him.

I didn't know what to do, laugh or keep working, so I choked down my laugh and continued watching.

The Ensign jumped up, quite shaken and started yelling at the First Class Boatswain's Mate that he was going to place him on report for striking an officer.



**Immediately the Gun Boss intervened and called the Ensign to attention saying words to the effect that if you're that stupid to fall for a shipboard trick like that you deserved what you got. "You're dismissed," to which the Ensign, red faced, about faced and left the Fantail.**

**I was stunned.**

**I made a mental note never to go to the Ship Fitter's Shop for a Ship Fitter's Punch.**



**USS Princeton LPH-5  
Underway off of Southern California for post Overhaul Sea-Trials**