

Net Tender Story

Bill Thomas - USS Suncock AN-80

Our Net Tender reunions have brought many of us together that never knew each other before. It has renewed memories of many men to their days on this funny looking ship.

However there is also another group of men whom we can't forget. For various reasons they were unable to attend any reunions, but they furnished us with stories and kept in touch with us. One of these men is Bill Thomas from Citronelle, Alabama.

He has furnished us with a few stories and recently sent me 15 pages of his recollections from the time he entered the navy in about mid 1944 until 1946 when he was discharged, but was later back in the navy where he remained until 1969. It's mostly about the time that he served aboard USS Suncock AN-80.

The last paragraph in his letter hit me rather hard. It read as follows.

"I don't know if I told you but I have Pulmonary Fibrosis (No known cause, no known treatment, but it is lethal) and the end is not far away. I doubt that I will know who the next president will be. And so it goes. I hope all is well with you and yours. My best to all. Take care...Bill HMC USN Retired since 1969.

The following is notes taken from the 15 pages of Bill's navy history:

Bill has completed boot camp and service school where he became a Pharmacist Mate. He is at Pier 91 which I remember that is where I got my ship USS Anaqua AN-40, however Bill refers to it as a Receiving Station near the Pier.

He finally got his orders to board a small AG (Miscellaneous Auxiliary) ship headed for Hawaii. The first 5 days were quite hellish due to the rough seas resulting in seasickness by most of the passengers including himself. The seas calmed down and they finally sighted Diamond Head and the pink of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel moving into the channel of Pearl Harbor.

His stay in Hawaii was too short to be allowed liberty. He was given orders to go aboard USS Bayfield an APA for transportation to the Naval Base at Guam for further assignment. Upon arrival in Guam he was taken to the Receiving Unit to await orders. While there they took in some beautiful sight seeing along the beaches and at one location saw burned out vehicles rusting in the water where the invasion evidently took place.

It was now March 1945 and Bill received his orders to report to USS Suncock AN-80 for independent duty. This surprised him because usually this billet is assigned to a 2nd or 1st class rating because you are the only Medical Department Representative for the ship. He was only a 3rd class. However they were short of men. The crew only numbered 24 men at this time. Bill discovered that his Sick Bay station consisted of 2 cabinets, one above the other, on the Mess Deck. Later he found out that he also had a storage area in the after storerooms below deck for all his medical materials that couldn't be stored in the 2 cabinets on the mess deck and some little used large equipment were in the ship's hold below deck.

Previous to this Suncock had Net Tending duties at Eniwetock for 7 months.

After being aboard for awhile Bill enjoyed the crew and they seemed to like him.

After the war in 1946 Suncock and USS Shakamaxon AN-88 headed for Bikini Atoll to assist in the laying of moorings for the target ships to be used in the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll. Normally the Pharmacist Mate is not required to perform any other duties than his own, however due to the crew shortage he was assigned helm duties. He had no experience at this, but he was given help in learning. He had a stool to sit on however the sea was rough so most of the time he stood with his legs widely separated to allow the shifting of the weight while the ship was rolling. The trip to Bikini took about 7 days in mostly heavy seas.

While at Bikini Bill was the mailman and appointed official movie exchanger. This job required him to listen to complaints about the movies he picked. The ship was about 2 to 3 miles off shore while working, so he made

the pickup trips in the ship's motor launch. Usually the ship arrived at the night's anchorage about the time he finished his errands.

Some of their recreation was swimming and looking for sea shells.

When the battleship Nevada arrived she dwarfed all the other ships in the lagoon. Two other ships were the Japanese battleship Nagato and light cruiser Sakawa. The arrival of the German cruiser Prinz Rupert caused the most admiration. The target ships were tied up to the buoys at both the bow and the stern to prevent them swinging out of position.

With so much work to be done there was little time for recreation and tempers sometimes grew short.

The ship's assignment was coming to an end and Bill found out that he was going to have enough points to be discharged. When he left the ship he felt a touch of sadness at leaving his first ship, his happy home for the last few months.

When the ship arrived at Treasure Island there was a band playing and friends and relatives were waiting. Later when processing was completed Bill was given orders to leave for New Orleans the nearest military base to his home

On the 11th of July he was officially a civilian. However he said that the 2 years in the navy were the happiest years of his life. He joined the reserve but later as we know he was back on active duty and remained in the navy until 1969.

Glenn