

Story #26 Vol III USS Tonawanda

The histories of all 77 Net Tenders can be found in the volumes of "Dictionary of American Fighting Ships." However, most of us do not have access to these volumes unless our Local or University libraries have them. We are fortunate however to be able to view these histories on the Internet. All the Net Tender histories can be found by going to www.navsourc.org. If they do not have your history, reference will be made to another site that does have it.

These are general histories. Therefore we can fill in the blank spaces ourselves for more detailed history. From time to time we do get more history from former crewmembers. The following is an account of USS Tonawanda AN-89 written by Hank Lawson:

I have written our history as best as I remember after Tonawanda AN-89 was re-commissioned on March 20, 1952 in Orange Texas.

We went out in the gulf for sea trials then on to Boston. We hit a storm off Cape Hatterus, N.C. We broke a couple of turnbuckles on the main mast that put the radar out of commission. We then went to Little Creek, VA for repairs. All the seasick guys were grateful for that.

Sometime during the summer of 1952 while we were still finishing up painting and doing maintenance, we took out a deck load of Radlo Active material incased in cement. We took it off shore to the 600 fathom circle and dumped it overboard. The materials were brought by Armored Vehicles to dock side. We repeated this again a few weeks later, but I don't remember the details because it didn't leave as much of an impression on me as the

first time. I understood the materials came from M.I.T. and I think Harvard.

Late in the summer or early fall of 1952 we were set up with one of two underwater T.V. cameras to help locate a piece of high tech sonar gear that the navy had lost off a destroyer. It was an experimental gear being tested by the navy. We looked for it for 2 or 3 days, but did not find it.

We went back and forth from Boston and Melville, R.I. doing Net Experimental work. This was our main function.

We took part in the first active NATO operation. They would send out a plane and drop 20 new designed mines in a 20 square mile area. We along with Mine Sweepers from other countries tried to sweep and locate and retrieve these mines. After 48 hours the mines released a rope with a float so we could retrieve them. One mine apparently pre-released a buoy which got tangled up in a prop of a Liberian Tanker that had nothing to do with the operation. It was a very interesting project. We recovered the mines. These mines were the infancy of plastic explosives. As I remember, the size of the mines were about 4' to 5' long and 2 ½ feet wide and 18" to 20" thick. I remember someone said the force would blow a cruiser in half. That's how powerful they were.

One time we were doing some net work in front of the torpedo station at Newport, R..I. We hauled back one of our nets and found a fuel pump and fuel lines that came off a jet plane that had crashed. Divers were sent down who found the rest of the plane.

I was always in the engine room, so I was only able to get bits and pieces of the things we did. I remember once going to Belfast, Maine over Mothers Day for R&R. Our Captain's Mom and Dad lived there in Belfast.

This history took place from March 1952 to August 1954.

Hank Lawson