

She Was Reluctant to Go

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While serving in MONTEREY (CG-61) as Fire Control Officer, we were operating with the AMERICA Battle Group in the North Puerto Rican Operating Areas in preparation for our upcoming Mediterranean Deployment. I was standing a relatively quiet Mid Watch (00-04) as Tactical Action Officer (TAO), so I looked ahead at the Schedule of Events (SOE) to plan for the "full plate" of activities ahead of us over the upcoming days at sea.

I noticed we had scheduled a "SINKEX" involving the ex-USS RUSHMORE (LSD-14). This was the first SINKEX I had encountered in my short career, but I was able to put two and two together to realize the ex-RUSHMORE was about to meet her final resting place.

The thought of sinking an old Navy ship really had me thinking. It was ironic to me that I was on a ship that was at the beginning of her life, and we were about to end the life of another ship that held so many memories and provided so much experience and training to people I had never even met.

The following evening, we were assigned station in the area surrounding "the hulk" (as she was being called). When we arrived on station, it was after dark, so all that could be seen was the silhouette of a large ship with a white light attached for safety purposes. We stayed in the vicinity of the hulk throughout the night, ensuring the hulk would not pose a navigational hazard to any traffic in the area.

The next morning I had the Rev Watch (04-08). I instructed the O.O.D. to notify me when it became light enough topside to see the hulk. About 0500 I went up to the Pilot House and caught my first glimpse of the ex-RUSHMORE. What a sight she was. It looked like a Navy ship. I'm not sure what I expected. . . I guess I expected a "hulk." She was mastless, but besides that, she was in relatively good shape.

I stood on the Starboard Bridge Wing for a good ten to fifteen minutes just staring at this ship. She was so devoid of life. It was eerie. I had visions of what a great ship I am sure she was. I thought about her commissioning ceremony so many years ago. I thought about the officers and men who served with her. I thought about the contributions this ship provided to the

defense of our beloved nation. Then I thought about what would be happening in just a few hours, and what her fate would be for the rest of eternity.

I had to wonder about my ship, MONTEREY. At the time, she was not even three years old, but I knew she would not last forever. What would be the fate of this ship that I was serving on in thirty or forty years? Would some young naval officer, not even born yet, in the year 2033 be standing on the bridge wing of his ship thinking about the contributions of this obsolete "hulk," the ex-MONTEREY?

My thoughts turned back to the hulk. I knew nothing about this ship prior to the previous evening. I had never even heard of her in fact. Now I was about to take part in ending her life. This feeling I experienced was like one I never had before. All I could think of were all the memories and experiences this ship gave so many people, some who still may be in the Navy today.

I headed back down to Combat and sat at the TAO Console. Track 1276 labeled "HULK" was on the Large Screen Displays. We continued our east-west legs back and forth staying within 4000 yards of the hulk, as directed in the Captain's Night Orders.

Later that afternoon, the day of 28 April 1993, we commenced the first phase of the SINKEX. The Battle Group was in position at a safe distance from the hulk, and a coordinated Harpoon Missile Attack was launched. The preparations were many for the crew of MONTEREY, for this missile shoot had long been awaited. It was not every day that we got to fire a Harpoon Missile, and it was an event culminating literally months of training.

I viewed the launch from the Helicopter Hangar. What a beautiful sight it was to see that missile leave her canister. Everything went according to plan and deemed a success. The F-14 chase plane roared overhead and out of sight.

Direct hit! The cheers were deafening. The crew of MONTEREY was ecstatic about the report received from the Tomcat. Later we learned that the hulk had received numerous direct hits from the various launch platforms of the Battle Group. The hulk would be gone now,

or so we thought. The Tomcat passed word that she wasn't going down. She wasn't even taking on water. How could this be? How could a ship take so many missiles hits and not go down? She was a fighter.

The Battle Group Commander directed us to investigate. The Battle Group formed in a column and proceeded to the hulk. As she came in view over the horizon, she looked like she had earlier that morning. The column passed her at 500 yards, almost like a "Pass in Review" and we could see the openings in the hull left by the missiles. She was taking on some water, but not a lot. It was like she was holding on to life.

Dusk was approaching, so the Battle Group dispersed and waited for further direction. It was decided that if she hadn't gone down by the next morning, the Carrier Air Wing would get a little target practice.

The morning of 29 April 1993 brought news of the hulk still floating as the day before. What was it going to take to bring this ship down? The aviators were anxious and the air attack began. The strikes were many, as we observed from Combat. The training received was unmatched. A couple hours passed, and the hulk was still afloat. Was it time to give up on the impossible?

MONTEREY was directed to proceed toward the hulk and finish the job with guns. The Gunners Mates were excited, as it was not often they got the chance to shoot at real ships. It took us a couple hours to get into the vicinity of the hulk, and as we came into visual range, she was already bow down and going under fast. We did not shoot one round. At 1203 (Q) on 29 April 1993 at position: 20 deg 15.45 min. North 064 deg. 50.75 min. West she was gone. We would never see RUSHMORE again. She had contributed to the training of the fleet until the very end.

The ship was gone, but the memories remained. Not only my memory of a ship that was considered just a "hulk" but more importantly, the memories of literally thousands of people over the years who experienced the life of RUSHMORE (LSD-14), the ship that was reluctant to go.