



WEATHER SHIP DUTY

An article on Weather Ship Duty appeared in the February 2009 Aerograph. It was very factual and interesting.

Little did I know after receiving orders to FWC Guam in December, 1948, that I would be assigned duty to one of these weather ships. After arriving in Guam via the General Brewster, checked in at the FWC, I was told

not to unpack my sea-bag as a ship was awaiting me at Apra Harbor. It turned out to be PCE 896, a ship I will never forget. It was 176 feet long, and the crew consisted of approximately seventy (70) officers and enlisted. It had none of the amenities the ships today have. Our mission was to relieve another PCE at station Bird-Dog (11 N, 156 E).

I believe we steamed for about 3-4 days out of Guam and arrived midway between Guam and Kwajalein to do roughly 23-24 days on station taking surface and upper air observations. Additionally, the ship was to act as a plane guard in case any aircraft crashed or ditched between Kwajalein and Guam. The weather crew consisted of **Bob Beasley, Dan Collins, Jack Hardman, Harry Pratt** and myself. We were all AERM 3/c's or strikers. Dan was the only one with experience in taking radiosondes. The rest of us took the surface observations and PIBALS. The data was transmitted to FWC Guam. We were berthed with the QM's and additionally assigned collateral duties: radar watches, deck watches in port, but mostly chipping and painting the QM spaces.

I would like to pass on a few incidents that occurred during our deployment: **Jack Hardman** (a heck of a nice person) became very sea-sick and when we returned to Guam he had to be transported off. I believe he laid in the 20mm gun tub the entire time we were at sea. One of the officers told him to go down to the galley and get a big chunk of fat to chew on. Our anemometer located on the mast was always squeaking and apparently go on the EXEC/s nerves. He ordered me to go up the mast and do some oiling. The trip up and down scared the life out of me and to this day I believe the EXEC had it in for us weather types.

Another time we were chipping paint and it was very hot and humid. We were in a fairly small area chipping away when Beasley said something that ticked me off. I called him a Mississippi mud rat and he said "call me that again and I'm going to hit ya." I started to say Mississippi when he plowed me in the mouth. He was small in stature but he packed a punch and my mouth was really bleeding. I jumped up with chipping hammer in hand and started to chase him as I think I wanted to kill him. I ran into and almost knocked the EXEC down and subsequently received extra duty for my efforts. As you can see, the EXEC didn't care for AERM'S.

When we returned to Guam, I happened to participate in a big poker game aboard a floating crane. The cards were real kind to me that evening and believe I was ahead 800 or 900 dollars when a BM 3/C by the name of Robinson went broke and asked if he could borrow a couple of hundred from me. I agreed and a couple of hours later the old axiom about never lending money in a poker game never was more true as he wound up with everyone's money.

About two weeks later, our weather crew was transferred off the ship and we were flown to Kwajalein to pick up another PCE which was coming out of dry dock in Pearl. Believe it was PCE 882. On this patrol our evaporators broke down and we were rationed water. Our refrigeration also failed and all of our perishables and meats were tossed over the side and the sharks really had a field day. After that we survived on beans, powdered eggs and bread for about two weeks.

The water situation was never resolved during the remainder of this deployment. However, one day, dark ominous clouds started to roll in and the captain was informed that rain showers would commence very shortly. The entire crew was notified and they all hurried to take salt water showers and they all raced top-side expecting to rinse off with fresh rain water. To our chagrin, the clouds went over and not one drip of rain did we receive. Needless to say, the weather yogi's were on everyone's hit list, including the old man's.

I could go on and on writing about these and other incidents, but think you all realize we weather types had our ups and downs. I do want to say that when we reached port, an ATF (Reefer ship) came along side and off-loaded plenty of fruits, vegetables and meats. I would up eating 6 or 7 bowls of strawberries and whipped cream (nothing else) and shortly after became very sick.

I could have transferred off the ship but some LCDR from Fleet Weather said if I did one more patrol, he would see to it that I'd be transferred to FWC Shanghai. Readily agreed- did another patrol, but when I returned to LCDR had been transferred stateside and the commies had forced all personnel at FWC Shanghai to evacuate. More icing was added to the cake as the powers to be at FWC Guam offered me duty at Truk or Yap as a reward for my PCE days. Staying put on Guam was my reply to their suggestion.

I'm sure similar incidents occurred on most ships, however, I hope this article was informative and even provided a few chuckles. Looking back, I wouldn't have missed those experiences, but did learn what every sailor should know – DON'T VOLUNTEER.

Submitted by AGCS Jim "Gordo" Welch USN RET