

Salute to Our Flag

About 1960 or 1961, I was the operations officer onboard the USS Krause (DD-849) out of Norfolk, VA. The ship received orders from President Kennedy to proceed to St. Eustatus, a Dutch island in the Caribbean, to honor the 100th anniversary of the first salute to our flag. We were to fire a 21-gun salute and they would answer with a 21-gun salute. We using modern 5"/38 saluting rounds and they were using muzzle-loading cannons that were over 100 years old.

The Krause arrived in the harbor on time and proceeded to fire the 21-gun salute. The Chief Gunners Mate was in the mount to ensure that all went well. With the proper timing between shots there was #19, #20 - - -. The commanding officer yelled, "Where in the h--- is the 21st salute??" The Chief said they had fired all the rounds and there were no more in the mount; so, we must have fired 21 rounds. There is always smoke in the barrel after that many rounds, so the C.O. said, "Blow the smoke out of the barrel." Then the Dutch answered, very smartly, with their 21-gun salute from their 100-year-old guns. After the chief of the mount looked around the mount, directly in back of him was the 21st round!!!

Then the C.O. and X.O. and I went ashore to make the proper "calls". We were in "dress whites" with medals, swords, etc. In our motor whale boat we got to the surf-line and transferred to a surf boat to land on the beach. The C.O. and X.O. went to make "calls" on the governor and I was to go and inspect the troops. Five or 6 rows of Dutch sailors, in dress whites, were at parade-rest as I approached. The Dutch commander yelled, "Attention, Present Arms" and proceeded to take his sword out, swing it about and come to a salute with his sword. Needless to say, I was surprised but left my sword at my side; gave a smart hand salute. Better to do that than hurt two or three people in the front row. At the Merchant Marine Academy, they didn't teach us about sword saluting!!

Submitted by CAPT Ace Trask, USN RET