19 Years Ago â€“ Life at Sea â€“ Part V

Description

Having steamed all day and night in the wake of Hugo, we arrived and sun up off the coast of Charleston. We selected an anchorage and headed there, being the first Navy ship back. We had been preceded by a Coast Guard Cutter, a converted Navy salvage ship, skippered by a classmate of mine from the Naval War College.

We did not have permission to enter port. The shortest distance the buoys had shifted was about 1/2 a nautical mile. Most all of the range markers had been destroyed. The larger concern is that the channel had shifted with the push of the storm going through the area, rendering it unsafe for transit to the Naval Base up the Cooper River. The sea floor in the vicinity of Charleston Harbor is mostly fine silt, so that fear was real.

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What did we know? For one, the crew, about 1/2 of the of the 189, had families ashore. What we didnâ€™t know is how they were. We knew it had been a devastating storm, as we could plainly see the Ben Sawyer turntable bridge from Mt Pleasant sitting at a god awful angle into the sky from our vantage point jsut off the shore. With the â€œBig Eyes,â€• the large binoculars on the Signal Bridge, you got a better idea of the almost complete devastation of the houses on the beach along the Isle of Palms.

With our external TV antenna, we began picking up news reports from the local stations, as they came back on the air. I recall just staring at one reporter, looking like he was stnding in Francis Marion Forest, saying â€œIâ€™m standing on (canâ€™t recall the main road, but it was one of the main roads in Charleston)â€¦â€• I was mesmerized by the thick background of pine branches behind him.

It was quiet walking the decks. Not much work was being done, as our minds were obviously focused on the unknown.

The Captain called me to the Bridge. The Coast Guard cutter was sending a zodiac boat into the Coast Guard Station, and asked if we wanted to put some ashore. He told me to get Chief Hatherly, and an â€œalphaâ€• roster (a recall list, with the home names and addresses of the crew, as well as spouse and childrenâ€™s names). Order the CO gave to STGC Hatherly: â€œTake the roster and do the right thing. Grab a toothbrush and get to the Quarterdeck.â€• Off Steve went. About 10 minutes later, he was climbing down the Jacobâ€™s ladder to the zodiac alongside.

It was to be a long day of not knowing much.



Category

1. Navy

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admin

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