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

Description

The day was long. Longer still because of the heavy emotional burden. Here was a ship full of people who always got the job done, sitting mere miles from a job worth doing, for self, for family, for shipmates, for just someone who needed help, and we were not allowed to go there. Additionally, were werenâ€™t being told to go anywhere else, either. The sky, once again the brilliant blue we had seen near Miami the day before, and behind the many storms we had collective seen at sea among the lot of us. The waves were essentially non-existent, too.

The bare essentials of the routine for being anchored, and life aboard a ship continued, but mostly people stood on deck, staring at the devastated beach, or on the signal bridge, waiting for a turn to scan the beach nearby. If below decks, they were in the berthing compartments, watching the news on over the air TV.

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Even the unmarried sailors and officers had a load on their minds, foremost for most was the status of their vehicles parked at the piers, not far from the waterâ€™s edge in most cases. Not having someone to drop you off at the pier on the day you sail is the condition that got them to that state of mind.

So as we swing at the anchor, in limbo, the mood was quiet, pensive and tense.

Late in the afternoon, the Bridge-to-Bridge VHF radio spoke a familiar voice, that of Chief Petty Officer Steve Hatherly. Just this morning, he had climbed aboard a zodiac and headed into the Coast Guard Station, which was at the tip of the Charleston Peninsula, and now he was calling us from the Naval Station, several miles away, across a city without power or public transportation at the moment. Steve was always the resourceful one, and to this day, I never have found out how he did it, but at that moment, we didnâ€™t care. I recall a large number of people crowding the bridge near the Captainâ€™s Chair, listening intently as Chief Hatherly read off the list of who he had contacted, providing status of each family. He had managed to reach at least 3/4 of the people listed on the Alpha roster, all within a work dayâ€™s period, in the middle of the devastation.

I recall three homes of families of the crew were uninhabitable, but all of them were safe with neighbors or other families of the crew. Smiles and sighs of relief began to break out. He finally was about to wrap up his report, and he said to let the Doc (HMC Mentzer) that the windows of his van had blown out due to the stormâ€™s over-pressure, but it was otherwise fine. Then he said â€œI have bad news for the XO.â€• It was quiet on the Bridge. He then said â€œA tree fell on his RX-7.â€• It had been parked at the Mother-in-Lawâ€™s house for that trip to sea, as my family had moved in anticipation of orders following the upcoming deployment. Deployment you say? Yes, in just 40 days, we were scheduled to sail for the Persian Gulf, and our homeport was pretty much destroyed.

We ate chow that evening, knowing a little more of the conditions ashore, but still without plans. The Charleston ships that had sortied, still were no where near getting back, having run far to the north east for safety. We turned in, not knowing what the next day would bring.

Category

1. Navy

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