

USS Gurke Article

Several years ago, I submitted an article for the website for my old Navy ship, the USS Gurke, DD783. The editor of the website, Tom Cheatum, selected my article for inclusion on the website. The text of the article is repeated below.

Just before I left the ship in June of 1961, I was up on the bridge making an ass of myself by swinging my little short-timer's chain and bragging about how great life was going to be in the civilian world. Finally, Pappy Beeler had heard enough and he walked over and grasped my arm in his unbelievably strong grip--he looked at me with his blue eyes and weathered face and quietly said, "I know one thing Lou, you'll never forget this ship or your shipmates." I had no idea how prescient that statement would become.

The main thing I accomplished in the Navy, and particularly during my two years aboard the Gurke, was to acquire the confidence needed to make a success of life as a civilian. When the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln visited Santa Barbara in 2003, the skipper was quoted by the local newspaper as saying that most people don't know that ships like his are run by teenagers. What he was saying was that the military relies extensively on teenagers to utilize and maintain many millions of dollars worth of equipment, equipment that can have life or death consequences. For me, the effect of that was to instill confidence in my ability to do important things in other walks of life.

Those of us who served aboard the Gurke also learned a few things about enduring hardships. The youngsters who serve on modern Navy vessels probably can't imagine what it is like to live on a ship with no air conditioning and very little fresh water while enduring the heat of equatorial regions. Each specialty had its own problems to deal with. Those of us in electronics had to work with cheap, mostly worthless test instruments and radar and communications gear that had long ago succumbed to the ravages of salt air. We probably griped about that but in truth it mainly had the effect of turning us all into a "band of brothers." Notwithstanding hardships, we worked hard and most of the time found creative ways to get the job done.

I'm sure that everyone who ever served aboard the Gurke has lots of sea stories to tell, but that's exactly why serving on the old ship was so important to us. Those sea stories recollect a period in our lives where we seemed to be much more alive than at any other time. We did things we'd never consider doing in civilian life. Of

course, some of those things were foolish and some were even dangerous, but that's why we remember them so vividly and why sometimes we wish we could go back and take one more ride on the Gurke. It seems inconsistent to think of time spent in the military as a time where we were less conservative in our behavior than in later years--given the reputation of the military for imposing discipline--but nonetheless, that's exactly what happened with most of us. Afterwards we went from being hard working, hard playing, beer drinking, cussing swabbies, to becoming very normal people who just happened to have some very rich memories of our Navy escapades during a time way back when other kids were mooching off mom and dad to go to college. But we didn't ignore education. I wouldn't be at all surprised to find that a very high percentage of Gurke alumni managed to acquire college degrees after finishing their service obligation. I did and most of the guys in the ET gang I served with did as well.

Lastly, I'd like to give some credit to the officers on the Gurke. During the time that I was aboard we were blessed with a great bunch of officers. I won't go into any details about them individually, but I can certainly say that the ones I worked with gave me a lot of inspiration to better myself after leaving the service. That came about as the result of having the experience of interacting with them in the course of performing my duties. A mutual respect develops which is truly exciting when you are only nineteen. In boot camp you think all officers are gods, but later you learn to respect them not because of their rank but because of their leadership skills.

It's amazing how often in later years I became involved in situations where I'd find myself applying skills learned in the Navy to solve a problem. People would ask if that was something I learned in college and I'd respond by saying that no, it was something I learned in a much higher educational facility, the USS Gurke, DD783. In that regard, it is interesting to note that in my home office (I'm retired) the only picture on the wall in front of me is one of the Gurke rounding Point Loma.

Thanks for the memories Tom.

Lou Einung, ET2

Gurke Alumni: January 1960 to June 1961