

No More Port Calls
By
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So, they we were... playin' pool from 10:00, 11:00 am until about 1500-ish. Tad goes to the head. Me and Conley are shootin' some pool, and Conley goes, "Where's Tad?" "Well, he went to the head. He's been gone 20 minutes." I go down the hallway there, lookin' for Tad. I ask somebody; "Ya seen Tad?" "Yeah, I did. He was down at the end of this corridor, peeing on a sponge and watching it get bigger." "What?!" "Yeah, there's the sponge." And there was a big yellow sponge they normally use to swab the deck. Apparently, he didn't make it to the head. Anyway, he's gone. I don't see him. I go back and tell Conley, "No one's seen him since he peed on a sponge in the hallway." "What?!" "Yeah..."

So, Conley, he's been around. He's older, late 30's, and had been to Pearl Harbor and knows Pearl City well. And The Monkey Bar out in town. He says, "Come on, Flash. Let's go back to the ship, hit the rain locker and get cleaned up, and then we'll go out and I'll buy you dinner." I said, "Okay. Sounds good man." So, we start walking back to the ship and it was a beautiful day. Freaking beautiful. Not a cloud in the sky. Pearl Harbor type of day. It was early April. And we're going down this quiet street because we know where the submarine base is; it's probably a half a mile. And I remember the quiet and the birds chirping. What a day. I feel

good. I've never been to Pearl Harbor. I'm with my buddy. But we're still kinda' wondering; what happened to Tad?

And then, this beautiful quiet is broken by some kind of rumbling. I didn't know where it was coming from. A rumbling. It got louder. I finally turn around, and there's a freaking crane coming down the street. It's actually a 26 ton Pettibone weapons loader. The tires are taller than me. Really, a foot taller than me. Big tires. It's a big unit. A 26 ton job, and also had a twenty-five foot boom for loading weapons. Okay, this thing is coming. "Shit, Con, let's get out of the street. Fuckin crane coming." It's going slow. We get out of the street. Conley looks up and goes, "Holy shit! Tad's driving!" "What?!" "Tad's driving!" "Oh, fuck!"

Sure enough. He pulls up. "Tad, what are you doing in this?" He says, with a drunken grin, "They were outta' Jeeps." I swear. Tad's a funny guy. And I still know him, and still talk with him from time to time. He lives in San Diego. He was a genius. He was an AW, and he really knew his shit. "Oh, Tad, what are you doing'?" He's drunk. He's driving this damn crane and he says, "Get on. I'll take you back to the ship." Drunk, and senior man, I say, "Okay." Tad's on a bench seat up there, and Conley goes up and sits next to him. There's a bench seat behind them, but it's like ten feet behind them on the back. Underneath it is a blue helmet. I reach down and pick it up. A blue hard hat, and on it, it says "Supervisor." I put that on. "Take me to the ship!" And off we go. We're in our civilian clothes on liberty, but we have the badge around our neck. We're legal.

Unbeknownst to us, our Officer in Charge and another pilot were walking to the "O" Club when we were going down this street here. We didn't see them. They told us this later. The next day or two. We had a great OIC. Our detachment was known as "Fritos Banditos". Real

nice guy. We were banditos and he was “Frito”. That was his nickname. Still is. Retired Captain, these days, with a 30-year stellar career after this cruise. Ricky was the other pilot. They tell us later that Ricky sees the crane and tells Frito, “Tad’s driving that crane!” And Frito, our OIC, replies, “You didn’t see him. You didn’t see anything.” And off they went. They told us that later. We never saw them that day.

And so, we keep going. The ship is tied up right in front of Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet Headquarters, CINCPAC HQ. It’s on the sub base. We go right up to the base gate and the DOD guards wave us through because they see our badges hanging around our necks. The after-brow is right down on the dock, and a hundred feet across from it is CINCPAC HQ, and all the officers with the four big stars. Big blue sign that marks his CINCPAC’s parking space. So, we’re driving up, and I’m starting to think, oh boy, this is not going to end well. “Tad, Tad, you better – we should –” “Nah, we’re going up.” Right in front of the ship. And there’s a dude, I don’t remember his name, but he had just made chief, and he’s the Officer of the Deck on the after brow. Oh, boy. So I hop off. Tad hops off. Con hops off. And we go up the after brow like we know what we’re doing. Just coming back from liberty, no problems. We went up the after brow. Conley and I were in front, and Tad was behind us. But he got about halfway up the after brow, and we were already – “Permission to come aboard.” And they’re kind of confused, and they’re lookin’, but no one is saying stop. They are just kinda confused, you know.

We were acting like it was a normal day. “Permission to come aboard?” “Granted.” We turned around. Tad had gotten about halfway up the after brow and he suddenly turned around and looked. Then he tore down the after brow and back down to the crane. I said, “What the hell is Tad doing?” Conley said. “I dunno.” He was really out of it. “Con, go to bed.”

Tad went down and jumped on the crane. He had decided he hadn't parked it right. You know, he wanted to park it better. He sure knows how to work this sonofabitch. He throws it in reverse, starts to back it up, and hits this Pontiac Bonneville station wagon which was parked right next to the hangar that was next to CINPAC Fleet HQ. Kind of lifted it up against the hangar a bit. Fucked it up. And he knew he fucked it up. And he, like a kid, put his hand over his mouth in surprise. And right there, he jumped off. Now it's blocking CINCPAC's parking spot. He runs up the after brow. Didn't ask permission to do anything. Threw the freaking crane key into Pearl Harbor. And he just kept motoring. Gone.

I recognize trouble when I see it. Right away, I go into the hangar where the helos are. My cruise box and shit where I got some clothes. I change my shirt. I comb my hair the other way. I come back out, and now there is more confusion on the after brow and the fantail deck. But I did get off. "Permission to leave the ship." I'm going back to the club. I'm gonna get the hell away from here. I'm just past the bow of the ship as I walk down the pier and I hear the ship's 1MC; "Air department, muster on the fantail on the double. Air department, muster on the fantail on the double." Oh, boy. We're busted. But I keep going. And I get back to the club.

And we had the coolest chief on that cruise. It was his twilight cruise, and he just wanted a nice quiet cruise. Joe, a jazz musician that would later retire and play clubs around San Diego. When I got to the club, Chief Joe— he was also buddies with the Chief Master at Arms of the ship. And he was a really cool guy too, and I decided to turn State's evidence and tell the chief, you know, "Hey, Chief, we got a ride from Tad on this crane. And we went back to the ship. And I think he hit something. And there's maybe a problem back at the ship. And I just came here to let you know." As I mentioned, Joe, he's real even keel. I'm all excited, talking a

mile a minute you know, but Joe simply looks at Master at Arms, and says, "Well, I reckon I'll just mosey on back and see what's goin' on." And Chief says, "Sounds like a good idea." I ask, "You want me to go with you, Chief?" He says, "No, Flash, you stay right here." "Will do, Chief". And off they went. And I stayed there, drinking. About 23:00 I'm back at the boat. "Permission to come aboard?" I came aboard, no problem, and went to sleep. Woke up around 06:00 and started to re-live the day before. Oh, boy.

At the time I was giving my whole paycheck to my wife and kids back home. I didn't need much on the ship. And suddenly I feel like I should call her. So, I grab some quarters and go down to the pier payphone. I call Laura and tell her, "Laura, you won't believe this but" – and tell her the whole story. There's a bit of a pause, and then she says, "You stupid asshole." "Honey, I'm calling for some sympathy here." "Sympathy my ass! What a stupid thing to do!" I guess it was. So, I go back up. "Permission to come aboard?" "Hey, you're one of those airdales they're looking for aren't ya?" Now they find me. I've been on and off this ship twice since yesterday! He took my ID card. Not a good sign. He says, "Get to your quarters, and we'll be in touch." And they were in touch.

What happened was Tad went – after he threw the key in the harbor, and I went back to the club, Tad went right to his rack. He closed his rack curtains and just passed out. Done. They didn't look in the rack for him. They were looking all over the ship for him, but not in his rack. They found Conley, passed out. But they were looking for me and Tad. They finally found us, but not until next morning. There were things and conversations going on behind the scenes for about a week. Meanwhile, the crane is still sitting right where Tad left it, all crooked in the Admiral's parking space. The Ship's cruise book even had an 8x10 photo of it at the beginning of

Air Department section. It was there for over a week, because no one has another key to this thing, it's at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, and nothing big enough on base to tow it.

Needless to say, the Captain of our ship is very upset because there's a four-star admiral screaming at him, I think. The word was through ship's Master at Arms, and through Chief Joe, that Tad took the whole blame. "I drove it, I told them to get on." All Tad's fault. Okay. Tad's a standup guy. So Chief Joe says, "Flash and Conley are probably going to take slaps on the wrist at XO's screening". Tad's gonna have to make reparations to the car that he pushed up against the hangar. Plus, whatever non judicial punishment the XO wants to throw at him." Okay. Now we have our scenario. We know what's probably gonna happen.

So, on a Saturday morning a week later, we go to XO screening all dressed up in our dress whites. We look good. Conley couldn't even remember what had happened. So, we get in front of the XO for questions while he's looking at our records. "Freischlag, you've got a beautiful record here, exemplary evals are 4-O's all the time. Why didn't you reach up there and pull your shipmate off that crane? You were the senior man." "Well, Sir, I thought he had a license." I did. Tad had told me about driving bulldozers before and I thought heavy equipment is heavy equipment. He's qualified.

Well, this hit some kind of a switch with the XO. He stood up and took my service record and slammed it down on this desk. Papers flying everywhere. It was like TV. He says, "You don't expect me to believe that do you?" I guess it was going to be a nice slap on the wrist until I opened my mouth. And I said, "Well, Sir, I thought it was worth a try." All the wrong shit coming out here right now. His next words were, "You're all going to Mast." And he points up to the bridge. A half an hour later we were all up in front of the Captain. He was even worse. No sense

of humor either. He starts asking the same kind of questions. "Conley, what happened?" Con says, "Whatever Flash says, sir. I don't remember." So, Captain asks me, "Freischlag, you were the senior man, why didn't you get him off of that weapons loader?"

I only had one left. That's all I had. I said, "Well, Sir, have you ever been drunk?" He looked me right in the eye real hard and said, "No." I had no reply, just thought to myself, "Who hasn't been drunk, at least once? You're in the Navy!"

Tad was fined \$200 and ordered to compensate the owner of the Pontiac station wagon, restricted to the ship for 60 days, and a suspended bust in pay grade for 6 months. Conley was not fined, because he was an E2. He was given 30 days of EMI (extra military instruction) and had to shine the brass and clean the ships company's heads for two hours every day, for ten days, after his regular twelve workday. I was also fined two hundred bucks, no suspended bust, but "Cinderella liberty" for 30 days, and no restriction. However, since most of my paycheck was allocated to Laura, I received three "X's" and \$11 on my next four paydays. I actually had to borrow a toothbrush and toothpaste from the Chaplain we had onboard.

Tad spent most of his restriction at sea, as we steamed for Thailand, and points West, eventually playing an important part in the evacuation of Saigon, and the rescue of the Mayaguez, which was a merchant ship seized by Khmer Rouge forces of Cambodia..... and those are whole other stories!