

## Frank Roessner's Recollections, 2012

July 17, 2012 was forty years since the USS Warrington received two underwater explosions off the coast of Dong-Hoi, Vietnam. I have asked some of my shipmates if they would write their memories down for our newsletter. The following is my memory of that day.

My name is Frank Roessner. I was born September 26, 1952 in Yeadon, Pennsylvania. I enlisted August 19, 1971 and was honorably discharged August 18th, 1975. I was given orders upon graduation from Great Lakes Recruit Training Command to report to the USS Warrington (DD-843).

I will fast forward now to that day I cannot forget, and even if I could forget I would choose not to. I reported to the bridge for my six hour watch at 0600 hours and stood the usual watches of Port, Starboard and After lookout, Helmsman, Lee Helmsman and Skunkboard. The morning watch passed without incident so when I was relieved I hit the rack.

One hour later I was awoken by one very loud noise. I heard BM3 Wissinger, "Man that was a loud gunshot!" Then, one second later, another even louder explosion. This time Wissinger said, "Those weren't the gun mounts... we've been HIT!!" I jumped out of my rack, put my cloths on and went up through the scuttle to the mess decks. As we passed the steam table, I noticed I was sloshing through water that was coming from a busted fire main! When I saw that, I knew we were in trouble. My heart picked up a few beats after seeing that.

I do not remember how I got to my GQ station, but I arrived at the after gun mount magazine only to find most, if not all, of the shells from the merry go round (upper handling room) spewed all over the deck and some lying in bunks like sleeping babies. Only these babies were high explosives! After we secured the sleeping babies and the strays that were rolling around the deck, I turned my attention to the magazine. I opened the scuttle and my eyes turned to saucers! Every one of the shells (I would say at least three hundred, H.E, Willie Peter, Star Shells) were no longer secured. They were sitting up right or standing on their nose, lying on their side, some were caught in the ladder rungs. I looked at BM3 Bartleman and told him, "I'm not going down there." After he threatened me with Captain's Mast, down the ladder I went. I don't know how I did it but I was weightless that day stepping on those shells!

We put all the shells back in their cradles nice and secure. Now, on to the powder room. We opened the hatch and what a nice surprise, the powder didn't move an inch! Good thing too, because I did not feel like walking on a deck with cordite!! I think we (my buddy and I) were down there about three hours. I do not remember his real name just his moniker he was given by us deck apes: "Jawbone". I could not have done it without him. We talked to each other the whole time, although he did ask me, "What happens if one of these goes off?" I just looked at him and said, "We won't know it, but every ship for sixty miles will know it!"

When we finished, we climbed up through the scuttle and found ourselves alone. Everyone went topside to see what they could see. I guess the Captain passed the word to secure from GQ and we just did not hear it. So we went up to the passageway and out the weather deck hatch. I went to talk to my buddy Paul Burt on After look out to see if he knew anything. It was then that I saw one of the most beautiful sights I will ever see. Two F-8 Crusaders (actually, these were F-4 Phantoms) were screaming towards us about fifty feet off the deck. When they reached us one jet went feet dry and the other went ballistic and gave us a salute. It was like he was saying "take a breather we have your backs now". I also

remember two other Destroyers that were on Linebacker with us coming to our aid. One was the USS Robinson ( DDG-12) and the other I do not remember.

The Robinson was the first to take us in tow. We were not permitted to go below decks so everyone had to sleep on deck. I grabbed a kapok life jacket and found a nice spot. I swear I am not making this up, but I dreamt I was home in my bed so I had a very restful night. Later the next day the Robinson was relieved by the USS Reclaimer (ARS-42) which was appropriately named because she "claimed " us by stenciling on our port side a blue fish. Perhaps twenty years ago I was watching the movie "The Wackiest Ship in the Army" starring Jack Lemon and Ricky Nelson, and the ship Jack Lemon took command of at the end I recognized immediately as the USS Reclaimer. For the last leg of our three knot tow to Subic Bay we were the charge of the USS Tawakoni (ATF-114). Our tow back was plagued by the tow line breaking many times, and no power at all on the ship. Ships either steaming to the gun line or to Subic would maneuver to within six feet or much closer for a much appreciated underway replenishment of pint sized milk cartons, mixed fruit and whatever else their cooks were willing to part with. Upon entering Subic we were placed next to an ammunition ship (the USS Nitro or the USS Pyro I forget which), to unload our ammo. The Warrington crew started this procedure but the Yard workers took over so we could get a hot meal on the ammo ship. After the unloading of ammo and the filling of bellies with chicken legs (yes I remember the meal) we were taken by yard tugs to floating dry dock number two at 0300. I remember the time because I was phone talker on the fantail. The Navy flew in their INSURV team which was headed up by [Admiral "PT Boat" Bulkeley](#). Enlisted crew were off duty for three days so the INSURV could determine the fate of the Warrington. On September 30, 1972 she was decommissioned. I did manage to visit the Warrington after she was decommissioned, I am happy to say.

After decommissioning, I received orders to the newly built "bird farm" USS Nimitz (CVN 68), which I promptly turned down. Tin Cans were in my blood by then, and I wanted another one!! Second set of orders were to a radio station on Rosey Roads, Puerto Rico. Nope! No shore job either! I found someone in First Division with orders to a destroyer (I think his name is Stoy). In late October or early November my buddy from the Warrington Patrick "Mugsy" Raush and I flew to Pearl to get our ship the USS Perry (DD-844). I must be bad luck for destroyers because this one was also decommissioned, in Mayport, Florida, not the P.I. After the Perry, I was sent to CS/A school in San Diego. After graduation I went to another ship and although she was bigger, she was still labeled a Tin Can. I cooked for the crew of the USS Farragut (DLG-6/DDG-37) for the remainder of my enlistment.

I am a life time member of the Vietnam Veterans of America local chapter 67. In my chapter I have been a member of our school education committee for the last twenty five years. At every school I have been to, I relate the story of our ship to the students and teachers. You see, I have found that we are teaching the teachers as much as the students! For a war to last ten years and only have one half a page in the history books when I started to do this is a spit in the eye like some of us may have received when we came home. To be fair the books have improved greatly!

To all my shipmates (officers too) I would sail with you guys in a second if she were still around!! It may just take a bit longer for me to climb the ladders to the bridge so I can man the watches again!

Frank Roessner:           USS Warrington DD-843   Dec 72 -Sept 30,72  
                                  USS PERRY   DD-844   Nov 72- July   1973  
                                  USS Farragut DLG-6/DDG-37   Sept 73 - Aug 18, 75