

## Reminiscence of a "Snipe" aboard the Altair.

In the spring of 1967, I was fresh out of boot-camp and propulsion engineer school, Great Lakes Illinois. I was assigned to the U.S.S. Altair home ported at Norfolk, Va. At the conclusion of a 10 day leave my parents drove me from our home in Maryland to the Altair. (My Dad said he wanted to see my ship). The ship had just gotten out of the yard for repairs and was not at pier 4 N.O. B. as stated on my orders but at a pier at Littlecreek Va. We found the ship there and I remember my father saying as we drove along side at the pier " I used to make those ships". He worked as a riveter at the "Maryland shipbuilding and dry dock Co." before and during the second world war. The Altair was launched in 1944 or 45 39 days from when the keel was laid. My dad said "we could build ships faster than the Germans could sink them."

On board the Altair, I was assigned a rack and locker in the engineering berthing compartment. BT 2 Cassidy was my contact. I was on the Altair for only about 9 hours when I was awakened at 0400 by Cassidy and told to get dressed. From the dim light down the passageway to the fire room I managed to open the combination lock on my locker and get dressed. Cassidy soon returned and led me to the fire room. I will always remember when he opened that water tight door and we stepped inside onto the catwalk of the engineering space. It must have been at least 100 degrees and the smell of the bunker oil. I thought well we are high up and heat rises so it won't be so hot down there. Wrong! The lower we got the hotter it got. In the fire room our space was about 10 feet wide between two boiler fronts. We were still on auxiliary steam. That is only 1 boiler on line. The whole B division was online in preparation to set the special sea and anchor detail. The call was made to the bridge for permission to light fires in boiler number 2 which was granted. We were scheduled to get under way around 0830 and it would take about 4 hours to build up a full head of steam to get under way. A long steel rod with a rag dipped in diesel fuel was lit and shoved through a peep hole under a burner and the boiler came to life. Four hours later we were "standing by to answer all bells". Some of the BT's I remember in addition to Cassidy were BT2 Hall, BT2 Brower, FN Evans, FN Rickert, FN Romain, BTFN Spiker, FN Beach, POI BT Baker, BT Chief Jordan and BT PO 3 Stone who was the "Oil King." Lt. Kennedy "a Mustang" was the engineering officer. We worked 3-4 hour watches. 4 on 8 off. A underway watch consisted of a fireman to operate burners, mike valve, forced draft blower. A messenger of the watch who took and recorded instrument readings, changed and cleaned burners, cleaned fuel oil strainer and blow tubes. "Blowing tubes" was done every 4 hours by injecting auxiliary steam in the fire box and manually rotating a crank to blast soot from the main generating and super-heated tubes. There was also a "check-man" he regulated the feed water into the boiler steam drum by observation of a water gauge glass. The Altair did not have A. C. C. "automatic combustion control." The BT of the watch was of course in charge. Normal cruising speed of about 16/17 knots consumed 1100 gallons of #9 Bunker oil per hour. That's about the equivalent of a 7000 gallon tanker truck you see on the highway today every six hours. The flash point of the oil, I think, was 140 degrees F so we had fuel oil heaters to heat the oil to 180 degrees F. 1100 gallons/hr equates to 26,400 gals per day and a 12 day cruise to Naples would take at least 316,800 gallons. Fuel had to be transferred from tank to tank to keep the ship in trim. The two 450 p.s.i. boilers ran everything on the ship. The steam it produced propelled the ship, powered the electrical generators which made our fresh water, powered the steam jacket cooking utensils for the galley etc. Speaking of the evaporators. They were designed to produce enough fresh water for about 40 people when the Altair was a merchant ship. I think we had a crew of about 450 so 2 or 3 days out to sea we were out of fresh water for Bathing and Laundry. All fresh water was reserved for the Galley and the engineering plant. So everybody was pretty ripe by the time we reached our destination in Naples from Norfolk in a minimum 12 days. Especially us BT's.

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