

Altair years

Spoke to an old shipmate today and dredged up so many memories I had to put them down on paper. It for some reason not known to me brought to mind the first two times I ran into CWO Goodson, The first time was in Machinist Mate A School in Great Lakes. It was a Sunday Morning just before graduation. Goodson was the schools commandant and had a rep for being a no holds barred tight ass by the book CWO. The sound of a locker crashing to the floor and the fear filled cry of “attention on deck” got my focus.

I had been lying on my rack reading, I shot straight up and I sort of bent over backwards to straighten up my bunk. Then Goodson stepped around the corner into my cubicle. His kaki's were crisp every medal in place. Here standing in front of me was the beast that eat Brooklyn breathing fire. He looked me up and down and said “ what's a BB? “ Hull ID for a Battleship sir I replied. The heat on my face and the pounding in my ears was good indication my heart was still working.

He turned to my cube mate and asked “what's a DD”? A meek voice answered “a dishonorable discharge sir”

“What kind of ship is that”?

“ The kind they ship you out of the Navy with sir?”

As he turned and left the cube there was just a hint of a smile on one corner of his mouth.

I received orders to report to the USS Altair AKS-32 in Norfolk VA. I had no idea what an AKS was so I went to the base library and found a picture of the Altair in a James Book of Ships. A freaking supply ship? I had visions of a Mr. Roberts kind of supply ship that sat out the real action and did nothing. Boy was I ever wrong. We didn't sit long and we did nothing for even a shorter time.

I was aboard ship for about a week, we were tied up to a pier in Norfolk the next time Goodson and I crossed paths. If you remember the water tight doors on the main deck aft near the chow hall had a threshold about two feet plus off the deck. If I stepped over with my short legs I would always bang my shins so I started jumping over the threshold.

I was heading aft and airborne when I next met CWO Goodson. I came to rest on his spit shinned cordovan shoes with a slight skid across the toe of both shoes. The next five minutes I was informed about how stupid, ugly, clumsy, and close to death I was, punctuated by the F word every other word. “What gang are you in he asked” Never been in a gang sir tried to stay out of trouble. No I mean what division on the ship”? The M Division sir.

“Good that means your ass is mine” Thus began the cat and mouse game that went on for three years. The next two years we played the Tom and Jerry game. He would try to catch me doing something wrong and I would somehow manage to escape. During that time I began to appreciate what a great engineer he was and some time in that period we became friends.