

U.S.S. SOMERS DD-947

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Engelhardt,

July 19, 1960

For the past six months we've been on our first Western Pacific deployment and now that we're returning to our homeport of San Diego on August 4, I'd like to let you know just what we've been doing and where we have been.

I'm sure that after reading this letter you'll be fascinated by the ports we've called upon. But let me say now that while we were visiting these fascinating countries we were at all times upholding our main job, that of being a ready defense against aggression in one of the most explosive areas of the world.

While traveling throughout the Far East area we were either in a escort capacity or on operations that kept us a part of the ever ready Seventh Fleet. Continually the crew was kept aware of its main objective through general drills that maintained our main purpose.

Our deployment began when we left San Diego on February 16 arriving in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii six days later. After spending two days on the beautiful resort island, we said "Aloha" to our sweet state and headed for Guam. We arrived in Guam, March 3, and spent seven days there before departing on the 10th of March for Keelung, Taiwan. We were in Keelung just one day before we once again hoisted the anchor and shoved off, this time for Yokosuka, Japan. During our stay in Yokosuka, the crew got the chance to take tours of both Tokyo and the ever beautiful Mt. Fuji, reflecting in the mirror like Lake Hakone. We were in Yokosuka from the 22-31 March before we headed for Subic Bay, Philippines. After spending ten days at Subic Bay, from the 13th through the 23rd of April, we left the Philippines to participate in operation "Sealion" with the other members of the South East Asia Treaty Organization.

Held in the South China and Philippine Seas, during the early part of May, "Sealion" was the most comprehensive, combined maritime exercise to be conducted by the S.E.A.T.O. member nations. All eight member nations - Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States - participated with the intent to improve over-all coordination and cooperation among the forces of these nations. The two week exercise involved some 20,000 personnel, ships ranging in size from 38,000 ton aircraft carriers to 160 ton mine sweepers as well as several hundred land and carrier based aircraft.

Initial preparations for operation "Sealion" were held in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. During our four day visit the 275 officers and men did much to further the President's People to People Program. Childrens parties, athletic contests, and open house were some of the means used to promote good will and understanding between the people of Bangkok and the United States.

The visiting group that will be most remembered by us was a group of blind orphan children. All hands on board were overwhelmed when they saw these blind children board the ship, and took it upon themselves to personally escort each child about the ship. Although without sight, the children were nevertheless thrilled to "sense" and "touch" the ship. Despite the fact that many of these children were too young to understand the complexities of a modern ship, they will long remember the friendliness and hospitality accorded them by the crew.

Highlights for the crew during the short memorable stay in Bangkok, were the daily tours arranged by the ship through the American Embassy. Some of the well known places the tours included were: the Pasteur Institute (referred to as the snake farm), the Marble Temple and the Royal Palace.

Probably the most memorable single event occurring during the ship's stay in Bangkok, was the capture of the mascot of the Australian frigate Queenborough, a brass kangaroo named "Harvey", which was returned as soon as the capture became known. Besides creating a bond of friendship between the two ships, the incident also resulted in the presentation of an exact duplicate of "Harvey", dubbed "Harvey Mark II", by the Queenborough when the ships met again at Singapore. "Harvey Mark II" now adorns our open bridge.

On May 16th, the ship cruised into King Neptune's domain, the equator, and his "Trusty Shellbacks" initiated all the ship's "Pollywogs", including myself, into the ancient order of the deep. The ceremony will be well remembered by everyone.

Seldom visited by American warships, the city of Saigon, Viet Nam proved to be a most fascinating and cordial port. We were well received by both Vietnamese and the resident Americans in Viet Nam. The warm reception by the resident Americans in Saigon will long be remembered by some of the sailors who were invited into their homes for dinner.

Once again daily tours of the city were arranged. The wide tree lined boulevards, the quaint sidewalk cafe's, and the carefully kept gardens and parks of Saigon were really enjoyed by all.

A few members of the crew took a 125 mile trip to the very primitive village of Hlao to distribute Care packages to a tribe of natives. In addition, old clothes obtained from a clothing drive held on board the ship were given to the San San Leprosarium, that had recently been raided by communist guerrillas who took most of the possessions the patients had.

On June 16th, we escorted the Seventh Fleet Flagship, the cruiser St. Paul with President Eisenhower aboard, from Manila, Philippines to Keelung, Taiwan.

The next port we called upon was the city of Hong Kong where a great many of us added to our wardrobes by buying custom made suits at fabulous bargain prices. Hong Kong is the true cross road of the world, just about anything you can think of is bought and sold there. Our bargain hunting in Hong Kong was short lived, however when we were chased out by typhoon Olive.

On our final visit to Subic Bay we celebrated the Fourth of July at the Fil-Am Fiesta. The Fiesta commemorates Philippine and American friendship and is such like a carnival back in the states.

From there we returned to Japan for visits to Kobe and Yokosuka, before heading back to San Diego via Pearl Harbor on July 19.

As you can see we've been on the go during the past six months. Since our departure last February we've visited over nine different ports. During our 105 days at sea we cruised over thirty two thousand miles.

Although we have enjoyed visiting these Far Eastern countries and seen for ourselves the manners and customs of our Asian friends, nevertheless we are anxiously looking forward to our return. Even though most of our operating took place over 7,000 miles on the other side of the world, our thoughts about home were as close as our fondest memories.

August 4 is only two weeks away but for us it will seem like many more.

E. J. Curcinius, Jr.
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Commander, USN
Commanding Officer
USS Somers (DD 947)