Memoir: A Collection of Short Stories

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

Memoirs: A Collection of Short Stories

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR FARRELL
AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS
BY
JEFFREY KANG

FOR
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Memoirs:
A Collection of Short Stories
It was winter in Annapolis and I had probably been on restriction for over two months now because I remember seeing the Fall leaves when I began restriction and now there was snow on the ground.

I had been doing this for so long and yet here I was, in my warm sleeping bag, the sleeping bag on my blue magnet, the blue magnet that was tightly wrapped over my rack, the rack that was bunked above my desk, the desk in my room in Bancroft Hall 3-0.

It was dark outside and when I reached my hand out to touch my window, my warm hand stuck for a moment to the frozen glass. And there I was in my warm sleeping bag and I had been doing this for months and I knew that what I was doing was all wrong. The moment was all wrong because I had been doing this for so long and unless my cheap, issued alarm clock was wrong in telling me that it was 0630, I was all wrong.

That I was now hosed would be an apropos way of describing my situation.

Restriction: is to be restricted; restricted to the U.S. Naval Academy grounds. A Midshipman (Mid) on restriction must be present for five musters a day: 0630, 1015, 1530, 2000, 2230. On weekends, there is also a “Surprise Muster”. The musters are to insure that a Mid is on the Yard; the “Surprise Muster” is called to fuck mids over. The uniform is specified over the 1-MC and said uniform must be in immaculate condition. Roll is taken at the Restriction Muster by means of yellow Restriction Cards. These restriction cards are initialed by either the OOW or MOOW (whichever is present for the muster). Whoever is present to administer the muster inspects each restrictees uniform and then some words are addressed to the restrictees. Restriction is complicated and a strange sort of prison hierarchy is in force. The longer one’s restriction, the more one’s clout with the other restrictees. Mr. Kang spent roughly two-hundred days on restriction; his longest stint was in the ballpark-figure of 120 days; he may have set some kind of record, but is not proud of this fact at all.

Blue Magnet: is a ridged, blue bed sheet. Each midshipman is issued two blue magnets, but in the madness of the laundry system a midshipman may end up with more than two. The blue magnet is so called because it attracts mids to itself, primarily for naps.

Rack: not the medieval torture device as much as that might have made sense. In this case, a rack is a midshipman’s bunked bed.

MOOW [as in “now”]: Midshipman Officer of the Watch

OOOW [as in “o...o...w”]: Officer of the Watch
I could tell myself that I had a choice, but I would know that I did not have a choice. I knew I didn’t have a choice and yet, for a few more seconds, I would continue to hose myself.

You see, I had somewhere to be. I should have been at this place fifteen minutes ago. I had been at this place every morning since the falling of the leaves along Stribling Walk — without fail. And, now, this morning, when snow was on the ground, I was not at this place where I should have been sixteen minutes ago.

The following takes place over the eternal, methodical, practiced, psychotic span of three minutes:

Jumping out of my rack onto my desk chair. Black dress socks, underwear, and crew-neck undershirt are what I have been sleeping in for months. SDB shirt with shirt-stays draped over my desk chair is now buttoned onto me (soft shoulderboards on the shirt). Stays go over my feet and now, the trousers (also draped on my desk chair), now on me. Belt buckled (my asshole is not showing). My black oxfords are underneath my desk chair and I slip into

ASSHOLE: not the sphincter-type and not the personality-type. The asshole can be found on all military buckle belts. When the buckle is properly fastened, a small hole on the backside of the buckle (asshole) is covered. The asshole must not be shown in public; this would be indecent.
BANCROFT HALL: is the largest dormitory in the world; it houses all 4,000 mids and has more than 1,700 rooms, 5 miles of p-ways (passage-ways), and 33 acres of floorspace. All the basic facilities that midshipmen need for daily living are found in the hall.[6] It is affectionately referred to as "Mother B" or "The Hall" by Midshipmen. Bancroft Hall was designed by Beaux-Arts architect Ernest Flagg and its central rotunda and first two wings were built in 1901–06. Over the intervening years it has been expanded to encompass eight wings of five stories ("decks") each numbered 0-4. In addition to the midshipmen rooms, Bancroft Hall houses offices for the Commandant of Midshipmen, six battalion officers, six battalion chaplains, thirty company officers and their senior enlisted leaders, a barbershop, bank, travel office, a small restaurant known as "steerage," textbook store, general store ("The Midshipmen Store"), laundromat, uniform store, cobbler shop, the USN Band, the USN branch of the United States Postal Service, a gymnasium, spaces for extracurricular activities, and full medical & dental clinics as well as small optometry and orthopedics clinics. The Hall has its own ZIP code (21412).

The building also contains King Hall (named after Fleet Admiral Ernest King), where all midshipmen are fed simultaneously three times daily, and Memorial Hall (see below). Memorial Hall and the Rotunda of Bancroft Hall are open to the general public, but access to the rest of the building is normally limited to assigned Naval personnel. There are rooms in Bancroft dedicated to each Academy graduate Medal of Honor winner in the Navy or Marine Corps. THE ROTUNDA: Central to the Hall is the Rotunda, with wings on either side. Over the Rotunda is a large mural of the USS South Dakota (BB-57), during the Battle of Guadalcanal in World War II. Memorial Hall opens off the Rotunda. This hall contains the honor roll of all Academy graduates who have died in military operations. It includes scrolls and plaques that commemorate alumni and naval personnel lost in battle. Below Memorial Hall is Smoke Hall whose walls honor those who lost their lives while still Midshipmen.

SECOND CLASS DOORS: Second Class (Juniors) and Firsties (Seniors) rate (are allowed) to use these doors. There are two such doors that lead into Bancroft Hall and they are clearly marked in gold lettering. Please visit Annapolis one day and after watching Noon Meal Formation in T-Court (Tecumseh Court) look to your right and left as you walk up to the Rotunda. These two narrow doors are those doors which are allowed only to the upperclassmen. There are also two other doors which are de facto “special doors”. These are the doors that lead into 1-0 and 2-0. All underclassmen must use the breezeway doors between 1-0/3-0 and 2-0/4-0. Confused? You mustn’t be.

PORT

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It’s over. I’m so late it’s over. Fuck.

Compose yourself.

I compose myself and heave open the inner storm doors (too narrow and too heavy). Why are the all the doors so damned heavy around here? I compose myself.

The Officer of the Watch is…
God knows how this is going to go. Oh shit.

I walk up to him: “Sir, I’ve been on restriction forever and this should not be the case because I’ve been on restriction for so long, but I slept through my alarm and now I’ve missed your muster and I really have no excuse but I really can’t afford to get fried for this because I’ve been on for so long and I can’t take being on for more days or getting fried again.”

He just smiled at me… “Mr. Kang…” Oh shit, he knows me by name? “…what are you going to do for me?”
FIVE BASIC RESPONSES

"Yes, Sir"

"No, Sir"

This has certainly not happened before. This is not supposed to be happening. A deal? Okay.

“Sir, I’ll do anything. How about I drop for you? How about I drop fifty for you?”

And so, in SDBs, with my cover on, in the Rotunda near the starboard doors, with some of my fellow restrictees, the MOOW and OOW watching, Mr. Kang pumped out fifty pushups at 0638 on a winter’s day.

Flushed from embarrassment and exertion and the rush of it all, I got up. The OOW was pleased; he marked my card, present! The MOOW was shocked; he was an asshole (do not see note). My fellow restrictees were shocked as well. I was pleased.

He didn’t even look at me as he started to walk away: “Please don’t miss any more musters today, Mr. Kang.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

"No excuse, Sir"

"I'll find out, Sir"

"Aye Aye, Sir"
**MORNING QUARTERS FORMATION:**  
0700: the first company formation of the day. Everyone is sleepy. Everyone is bored.

1205: Noon Meal Formation. For Battalions 1-4, Noon Meal Formation usually goes outside in T-Court (Tecumseh Court) in the uniform of the day. This is quite an event on the Yard for visitors. When you visit Annapolis, make sure to watch this spectacle. All four battalions are in formation, a quick inspection is held, (in booming strident voices) all squad leaders report to their respective platoon commanders, all platoon commanders to their company commanders, all company commanders to their battalion commanders, all battalion commanders to the Brigade Adjutant, then the Adjutant reports to the Brigade Commander, who finally gives the order to march into Bancroft Hall. Each formation turns towards the nearest entrance and the entire Brigade marches in for lunch in King Hall. All midshipman officers are under arms during this event and the drawing, flourishing, saluting, and sheathing of shiny dulled swords is quite a rousing thing to watch.

I walked back to my room accompanied by some of my fellow restrictees who lived on 3-0. They couldn’t believe it and I couldn’t believe it. I had been let off the hook.

**Morning Quarters Formation** (mandatory for all hands) is at 0700, so I never went back to bed after the first Restriction Muster of the day.

After getting my gloves, my earmuffs, and my O-<br>
Coat, I went outside for a stroll on Red Beach and had a cigarette as the sun came up; this had been happening for months because I remember coming out for cigarettes after muster when the leaves were falling off the trees in the MidStore parking lot and now there was snow clinging to the barren branches.

**SLEEPING BAG:** I don’t really like camping and I was not in the habit of camping in my room, but there is a reason why I am in a sleeping bag: a sleeping bag ontop of my sheets. most upperclass mids sleep in a sleeping bag. the rack must be made according to rather strict regulations and it’s kind of a hassle to be making one’s bed everyday, so most mids find it easier to just roll out a sleeping bag and sleep in it onto of the perfectly made bed. some go further and tie down the perfect bed with elastic cables on the underside of the mattress; this pulls the sheets with the blue magnet(see above) taut.

**RED BEACH:** the terrace overlooking the MidStore parking lot is covered in red pavers. Midshipmen marching **tours** can be found on the Red Beach between Wing 2 and Wing 4 at 0530 most days of the week. Midshipmen are not allowed to tan on Red Beach. See: MIDREGS 823u1902u.
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USS Juneau (LPD 10): Austin-class amphibious transport dock: a troop transport with a landing platform for helicopters and a well-deck that houses amphibious troop carriers below. “The Mighty J” was launched on 12 February 1966. Vietnam War...Exxon Valdez oil spill...Operation Desert Storm...Cyclone Nargis. She was decommissioned on 30 October 2008. This was XX days after I bade farewell to her in Okinawa. As all other naval vessels that I had the pleasure of experiencing, she smelled like grey paint and gunmetal; the haze grey so difficult to spot on the open sea has become the grey that instantly reminds me of the Navy; no where else have I smelt the peculiar scent onboard U.S. Navy vessels: baked potatoes, Brasso, hotsauce, paint, aluminum, steel, brass, rubber, air-conditioning, grease, salty sailors.

For hours there was nothing but the darkness. As the sun rose, I could make out the horizon through the haze. And now there was some debris—no, lots of debris (a storm had passed the night before and here were the remains of its fury). It was a welcome sight, though; the clumps of vegetation and the large pieces of wood and the other refuse strewn across the sea that had been so clear for the duration of our journey. Civilization was ahead.

The Juneau plowed through all the shit and the sun rose higher.

This had been and was going to be a long morning. I was standing the Morning Watch. The night before, I ate dinner, saw the sunset, took a nap, wake up at 0400—get a large mug of coffee, smoke a cigarette, and stand down the mid on watch before me.

I was on watch for the final leg of the journey and so the watch was going to be longer than it was supposed to be. Making the final approach, picking up the pilot, maneuvering into the harbor, and tying up; all that would extend the watch.

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Flotsam: floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo.

Jetsam: part of a ship, its equipment, or its cargo that is purposefully cast overboard or jettisoned to lighten the load in time of distress and that sinks or is washed ashore.

Lagan: cargo that is lying on the bottom of the ocean, sometimes marked by a buoy, which can be reclaimed.

Derelict: cargo that is also on the bottom of the ocean, but which no one has any hope of reclaiming.
Ships were appearing on the radar. For weeks we had been trailing the Tortuga and the Essex. The Blue Ridge, the Cowpens, the George Washington, the Mustin, the John Paul Jones, the Bonhomme Richard, and some submarines were all over the Pacific, all vessels making their way North from Australia to Japan. These vessels were all marked on the radar, but we never saw them with the naked eye. Now, the radar was packed with little colored squares. We no longer had the open sea.

A majority of these squares followed a course up the coast of Okinawa: fishing trawlers hurrying back from a hard night’s work, whalers, freighters stacked high…

The Juneau was on course to cross this line of civilian vessels. This U.S. Navy Vessel.

As we neared the imaginary line in the sea, I, even, could tell that one of the civilian vessels was on speed and course to collide with us.

“Get someone who speaks Japanese.”
MESS: All this was a fantastic mess to behold: I was a XX year old playing a big boy on the bridge of a U.S. Navy vessel of war and these were “real” sailors and officers all around me during this confrontation. And here I was in uniform playing a grown man watching other grown men (no women were on watch at the moment) make asses of themselves and the situation was remarkably tense and I had no place in the unfolding drama. Think of a substitute in a play: all made-up, in costume (not quite the right costume), standing right next to the actor you paid to see; the lights go on, the real actor begins speaking and I stand there—trying not to get in the way—and the lights shine down on all of us on stage. Awkward.

One of the junior officers (plump, pale, and uncertain) was brought up from the Mess.

“Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us… Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us.”

No response.

“Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us. Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us.”

“[Japanese translation].” x2

Three or four terse Japanese words came crackling over the radio. These words came out of the mouth of an oily-bearded, sleep-deprived, chain-smoking, salty fisherman. Who knows what he said. The junior officer did not repeat what was said. There was a moment of silence. The trawler was not making any course or speed changes.
“Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us. Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Change course and speed to pass behind us.”

No response. No changes. No nothing.

The Japanese captain was probably grinning, probably smoking his eight cigarette of the day, and probably straining black sludgy coffee through his greasy beard. He was going home to sell some fish. He was not going to change anything.

Our plump, pasty, and uncertain junior officer continued being plump, pasty, and uncertain. He was unnecessary, ineffectual, and inadequate—he was returned to his cold breakfast.

Well…

The Officer of the Deck slowed our engines and the fishing trawler passed before us. It was a four-way intersection moment on the largest body of water on the planet. Somewhere off the coast of Okinawa, a fishing boat and a U.S. Navy Vessel had
approached the same intersection at the same time and the vessel of war had given way (begrudgingly). Impotence, politeness, winning hearts and minds, call it what you will.

Japanese Fishing Vessel, this is U.S. Navy Vessel. Have a nice day.
WEAPONS ABOARD:

**USS Juneau (LPD10) “Landing Platform Dock”:** 8 × .50 caliber M2HB machine guns, 2 × 25 mm cannons, 2 × close-in weapon system (CIWS) mounts. Aircraft: Up to six CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters.


**SSBN (fleets ballistic missile submarine) Armaments:** 24 Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBMs). 8 subs = 192 nuclear warheads

**SSGN (cruise missile submarine) Armaments:** 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles with either conventional or nuclear warheads. 2 subs = 308 cruise missiles

**SSN (submarine) three sub-classes:** Los Angeles (37 × Mark48 torpedoes, Tomahawk Land-Attack missiles, Harpoon Anti-Ship missiles, Mark 67 mobile or Mark 60 Captor mines); Seawolf (50 × cruise missiles, Harpoons, or Mark 48 torpedoes); Virginia (38 × torpedoes or missiles). 31 subs = ?...

**SUBPAC 41**

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USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) “Landing Helicopter Dock”: 2 × NATO Sea Sparrow systems, 2 × Rolling Airframe Missile systems, 2 × 20 mm Phalanx close-in weapon system (CIWS) mounts, 3 × 25 mm Mark 38 cannons, 4 × .50-cal M2HB machine guns. Aircraft: Assault: 42 × CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters; Sea Control: 5 × AV-8B Harrier Ground-Attack vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft, 6 × Anti-Submarine Warfare helicopters.
I was in Northern Carolina at Camp Lejeune to be exact for PROTRAMID (Professional Training Midshipmen). I had been in Virginia for the Surface Warfare (boats), Aviation (planes), and Submarine Warfare (underwater boats) portion of PROTRAMID and I thought it was so much more fun than Northern Carolina. Northern Carolina, in the summer is a terrible place because of how hot it is. I am from the “desert”; California is hot; Maryland can be hot; Northern Carolina is degradingly and soul-stealingly hot. Regardless, I was in Northern Carolina for the United States Marine Corp. portion of PROTRAMID. Here, I was going to learn the niceties of what it means to be a Marine. Already, I had learnt that Marines do not mind the heat. I had also learnt that Marines engage in a select number of activities: they get tattoos, they wash their clothes, and they drink. I could tell this from the succession of establishments on the road to Camp Lejeune. We passed a tattoo parlor, then we passed a laundry, and then we passed a bar; for about four or five miles this is what I saw out the window; laundry, bar, parlor, bar, bar, laundry, parlor, etc… Then, we passed under and through the gates of Lejeune.
There was something written on the gate, but I do not remember what it was at this moment. Either it had something to do with killing humans or establishing the power of testosterone or proclaiming eternal honor. Either way, it was impressive at the moment, but not impressive enough for me to remember it now.

Many places around the “camp” had things written on them. All of these things are written, or rather, stenciled in that unaesthetic military font. The only thing this font imparts on the viewer is that whoever chose the font is disinterested in beautiful things and the person that chose the font is dead serious about his message. The dining hall had something written on it, the laundry had something written on it, the roads had things written on them, and the barracks had something written on them. None of these things was memorable; none of these things is eternal, to me. There was, however, something written on a building within the camp that I have not forgotten:

“Even the brave cry here.”
I could see this sign out the window of the bus that had brought us to this place. There were pine trees all alongside the dirt road and the building stood in a little clearing a couple hundred yards from where the bus had parked. The shack was actually two distinct structures. Both parts were constructed of cinderblocks, but the right side of the building differed from the left in that it had large dirty windows. There were doors leading into both parts of the building. It was on the right part of the building close to the roof that I read the sign. The words had been stenciled in the same ubiquitous military font in yellow on a grey warped piece of wood.

“Even men cry here.” Okay. I cry infrequently, but I assumed that I would be crying here especially because I could feel the sweat roll down the crack of my ass and pool momentarily right behind my balls to fall softly on my athletic shorts which I always wear when wearing battle dress uniform. To say that I was sweating would have been a gross understatement; I was sweating from my feet, my knees, my balls, my ass, my lower back, my chest, my armpits, my neck, and my head; I was sweating
and I didn’t mind in the least—I was a man.

A large black Gunnery Sergeant (gunny) made the bus slouch forward and to the right as he mounted the bus to give us a talk. Everywhere we went, a large black gunny would mount our bus to give us a welcome to whatever place we were at. He was lied to by some recruiter when he enlisted. Nowhere in the gunny’s plans for the future did we factor in; how could he have ever known that one day he was going to be the welcoming party to a bunch of young, inexperienced, pussy, Academy Midshipmen at Camp Lejeune. I can imagine he would have much rather been barking orders to a bunch of young, inexperienced, pussy, Marines in a desert somewhere over the deafening roar of gunfire. Either way, he was in the bus and he was asking us a question: “Who here wants to participate in the Iron Man Challenge?”

The sign was nailed above the Gas Chamber. This was the building on the right; the one with the large window. We would all go through the front door and exit through the back door.
In an amphitheatre on the outskirts of the woods, we all received a briefing on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense in the field. Everyone tried not to sleep – “the field” was at least two years away. After the briefing we were introduced to the suits that would keep us safe in the case of a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear attack in the field. MOPP Suits (Mission Oriented Protective Posture Suits)—layers of rough rubber, charcoal, and other things packaged underneath the ubiquitous woodland camouflage instantly recognizable as something of the American military. Unfortunately, unless there are woodlands in Iraq, the camouflage would be worthless or, in some instances, deadly because a blob of green, brown, and black on the backdrop of a washed out desert is just out of place.

So, we scrambled to get this gear and we scrambled to get it all on and then we waited. That’s one thing I learned from the military: waiting. I can wait forever. I have infinite patience when it comes to waiting. Waiting in line for a bank teller, waiting to board an airplane, waiting to eat lunch with friends, waiting for customer service, or just plain waiting
for nothing. In most situations, we waited for nothing.

And the thing that I learned simultaneously was promptness or sense of urgency or being on time; “if you’re early, you’re on time; if you’re on time, you’re late; and if you’re late, you’re fucked.” And so it is one in the same that I would learn promptness and then, by default, learn how to wait. I was always early and I would always have to wait. I tried to unlearn being early because civilians have emotions and feel bad when they see someone waiting for them, but I’ve been late to a few things and the results are… “fucked”. So, I show up early and I am certainly not on time, but I am never late and I don’t like being fucked.

But in cultivating waiting, I also learned how to smoke. In the uncomfortable, interminable, and selfless time of waiting there are few things to do. Retreating into the mind to think is acceptable, but then one becomes less aware of one’s surroundings and can be hurt or can lose one’s place, or can be thought of as strange; I retreat into my mind in private. One can strike up conversation, but then one
might be seen as uncouth, or overbearing, or senseless of social boundaries; I generally speak to only those I know. Or, one can smoke. I don’t know of the days before nation-wide smoking bans, but I can imagine that they were fantastic.

When I wait, I usually smoke. I cannot smoke inside, but I find myself waiting outside more so than inside.

“Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear”
chlorobenzal malononitrile

I, along with three others, win the Iron Man Challenge.

The Major had to pull us out because we had been in there for long enough. Someone next to me vomits within 10 seconds. I open my eyes a bit and regret it instantly, but at the same time I get to see my friends and enemies crowded against the window.

I could have gone on forever.
We’re taken out, I stumble around for a bit, I get my eyes washed out and know what it means to be blind, people freak out about a frog being at the eyewash station, my neck is burning, my eyes are fine, I can breathe freely, my friends come to congratulate me, I love it all!

Days later at the Rappelling Station, the Major marvels at my intrepidity as I freefalled from the rappel tower and comes over to me in congratulations. He then realizes that I’m one of the three from the day before and it is the most memorable Marine smile I have ever seen.

This Marine was not smiling because he had just killed someone. This Marine was not smiling because he was drunk. This Marine was not smiling because of some personal achievement. This Marine was smiling because he had faith in the fact that intrepid, fearless, and brave young men still existed, those young men were in training, and he would be alive to see them follow in his footsteps.

I will never forget that smile and, for the rest of the trip, hearing that Marines all over the Camp had been talking about the “fuckin’ mids” that did the Iron Man Challenge.
We were not popular.

The group before us had fucked up bad. They had been demanding salutes, they had been slacking off, they had been being stupid. We were there to pay for their mistakes. Actually, the mistakes of one specific midshipman.

Explanation of the rank Midshipman would be good here. Also the short story of the Warrant Officer that I saw at Graduation 2007 and my fumbling and final salute. Right thing to do. Salute if you don’t know what to do.

So, we were extremely unpopular and everyone could feel it. The looks, the snickers, the condescension, the disinterest.

One day, I notice a working party taking food from the hold and moving it up to the galley. Sacks of potatoes, onions, and flour; boxes of tomatoes, condiments, and bread. I hurried to the berthing area to get some friends to come and help the men. We had nothing better to do. I only managed to get four. We asked to join the supply chain and spent
a couple hours grabbing a sack or bag from one sailor and passing it to another down the line. Each of us got to know two sailors really well; the one on the right and the one on the left. When the work was all done we were sweaty and tired, but doing something is better than doing nothing, so everyone felt good about himself.

After that, things began to change. We could actually find seats in the mess hall. We were greeted in the p-ways (passage ways). The men became interested in us; they were so transparently different. Even the Marines stuck out their callused hands in friendship. A group of them even took my friends and I down into the well deck to show us their AAVs (Assault Amphibious Vehicle) and their own berthing areas. Then, the news slowly began its way up the chain-of-command. Shit travels downhill and praise takes it sweet ass time going upwards.

The Marine commanders asked if we wanted to do some shooting off the flight deck. The junior officers were too busy and too removed to care.
The XO and CO congratulated us for “showing initiative” by lending a helping hand to the men. But, the best part was when the real masters of the ship, the Chiefs, Senior Chiefs, and Master Chief allowed us to join them in their mess room. That was coolest moment of the entire cruise. In two groups we dined in the Chiefs’ Mess and knew we had done something right.

The first couple days were tough, but the entire cruise changed because of simple exchange of goodwill. We got to ride in the LCAC (Landing Cushioned-Air Craft), we got to fire the Ma Deuce into the ocean, we participated in the Shellback Ceremony as we crossed the Equator, and I got to do something extraordinary:

The entire night we were confined to a square in the ocean: xx.x longitude by yyy latitude. I was made the conning officer halfway through my watch. Easy peasey nice and easy. What could go wrong in the middle of the night, in the middle of the Pacific? Nothing. Except of course that the Captain showed up. WTF? The captain was in the bridge at 0200? And now he was asking me if I knew what I was about to do.
I hate it when adults ask me if I know what I’m about to do. Of course I don’t know what I’m about to do because I have yet to do it and in all probability I’m about to do something the adult asks me to do. Therefore, to ask me if I know what I’m about to do is to ask me either to read the adults mind or resignedly say “no”.
That’s how I felt in that moment as the eagles on the man’s collars stared at the anchor on my collar and laughed. To feel helpless is one thing, but to know deep down inside that one is actually utterly useless is another.

The gaze of the eagles turned to a junior officer and I was saved. The eagles began asking questions: “Why does Mr. Kang not know what he is about to do?”, “Why hasn’t anyone briefed Mr. Kang on what he is about to do?”, “Why are your shirt sleeves rolled up? Is it really that hot in here? Roll them down.”

Then the eagles quieted down and everything in the bridge went quiet as well. The captain looked at me. I walked over to him.
He put his arm around my shoulder; I suppressed the urge to cringe and tried to stand taller. A then, in the most avuncular and, therefore, unexpected tone he began to explain what it was I was about to do.


Turn the boat around. Calculate by eye Mr. Kang. The book tells you to turn here, but I know better and you should hold off a little more and turn… now. Overshoot a little bit and then overcompensate a little bit and then to bring us about overcompensate for a little more and then right us up. That puts us on course. You’re doing really well Mr. Kang. Thrown the flares overboard. Are they firing off? Silence…Are they firing off? If they don’t fire off we need to do this all over again. YES! They fired off. Okay. Last turn. Count with me to 12. We’re going xx knots, we’re turning xx degrees, so if we count to 12 if should work and we don’t have to use stupid wheels, compasses, or straightedges.
Turn. Overshoot, overcompensate, come around and send the command. Nice and loud Mr. Kang. You’re doing well. Now it’s all you. We’re a couple hundred yards out. Steer the boat between those two flares. You’ve got this.

“Sir, we’re between the flares”

Radio communications. I look at the WEPO, the WEPO looks at the GLO, the GLO looks at the Captain. “Destroy targets”. My world explodes. 8 double-barreled .50-cal. Machine guns are throwing lead at two helpless flares in the middle of the pacific. I can’t hear myself think. The helmet is heavy, the flak is heavy, and I’m the proud. I stand taller. It’s red in the bridge and the yellow flashes outside are rending the thick pacific air. The tracers explode from the delicate muzzles of the machine guns and extinguish on contact with the ocean.

All is quiet. The air is thicker with the smell of solvent and powder. My ears are ringing. The helmsman pulls earplugs out of his ears and smirks at me. The GLO closes his folder and steps out. The
WEPO speaks to the captain and steps out. The navigator pulls marks something on the charts. The captain smiles at me and walks outside. This is not an invitation to stroll. He goes to bed.

I have four more hours on watch, but that’s nothing, especially after a night like tonight.
The doldrums are the death of a sailor. Morale?

No wind, no activity, no movement, nothing doing, nada. Time to kill and killing time and time that kills and time to—time to—time to wait it out: hunker down, twiddle one’s thumbs, carve a bone, pick a fight, eat, shine one’s shoes, smoke a cigarette, fidget, “1,000 yard stare”, talk.

What to talk about?

Women. Lack of women. I love women. What if I don’t like women? We got women?

Sex. Lack of sex. I love sex. Does anyone not like sex? Sex?
2.35.1 RELATIONSHIPS AND CONDUCT BETWEEN MIDSHIPMEN

a. Sexual misconduct is defined as sexual acts at the Naval Academy or other designated places under military control (i.e. ships or aircraft), as well as acts committed under circumstances that are service discrediting or prejudicial to good order and discipline in the Brigade of Midshipmen.

b. Sexual misconduct includes, but is not limited to, any actions of a sexual nature that would reasonably excite or satisfy the sexual desires of the actor. Examples include kissing, touching, sexual intercourse, sexually motivated nudity, and indecent sexual acts including indecent exposure and homosexual acts.

2.35.2.b
Midshipmen shall not:

(3) Exchange backrubs at USNA or while in uniform.
(4) Sit or lay on the same bed at USNA.
COMDTMIDNINST 5400.6L 22 Aug 08
Gays. Too many gays. I hate gays. Who's a gay? You a gay?

Me too. Give me a backrub while we're both in uniform. Get in my bed; let's have sex.