

## Navy Midshipman Cruise

As most of you know, I was in the Navy. My Dad served in the Army during WW2 and the Navy during the Korean War. Recognizing the significant differences in those Services, he preferred his son serve in the Navy. And one other thing; he wished I would be an Officer.

In college I joined ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) for the US Navy. During the program all candidates (midshipmen) were required to attend a 6 week training session aboard a ship. During July and August of 1968 my assignment was on board the USS Chara (AE-31), an auxiliary ship configured to carry ammunition for naval ships and aircraft. I was to report to Mare Island, Vallejo, California. Also aboard were other midshipmen from other colleges. This 6 week training involved spending time among all the departments, such as Engineering, Deck, Supply, Navigation, Communications, and Operations.

Prior to the cruise I had the opportunity to visit with cousin Orin Adair who lived in Novato, California. Taking advantage of the location I even took in a San Francisco Giants baseball game. After a few days visiting, Orin was so kind to drive me to Mare Island where the ship was.

After a few days orientation we got underway. The first city visited on this cruise was Olympia, Washington. We left Mare Island on July 9, anchored briefly at Port Townsend before mooring at Olympia on July 12. Our 4 day visit probably coincided with their annual Capital Lakefair. I went with other midshipmen on a tour of Olympic National Forest hosted by some of the Queen's Court from the fair. This was set up by [Governor Daniel Evans](#); he gave keynote address at the 1968 Republican National Convention held at few weeks later where he refused to support Richard Nixon and instead supported Nelson Rockefeller.

After Olympia. the ship spent 1 night at Crane Point Pier, Indian Island, Washington. [This is the only deep water ammunition depot on the West Coast.](#) From there we headed back to the San Francisco area. On the way, we held man overboard and fire drills, gunnery and casualty exercises. We spent about 3 weeks at Mare Island, Alameda, and Concord.

On shore patrol duty at Concord, I heard about an explosion at nearby Port Chicago during WW2. From [Wikipedia](#) **"In 1944, thousands of tons of munitions aboard a Navy cargo ship exploded while being loaded, resulting in the largest number of casualties among African Americans in any one incident during World War II. On the evening of July 17, a massive explosion instantly killed 320 sailors, merchant seamen and civilians working at the pier. The blast was felt 30 miles away. A subsequent refusal by 258 black sailors to load any more ammunition was the beginning of the Navy's largest-ever mutiny trial in which 50 men were found guilty. Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall sat in on most of the proceedings and declared that he saw a prejudiced court."**

The final time we midshipmen had was participating in a fleet exercise conducting several underway replenishments with other ships. On August 16 there was one ship in particular that looked very streamlined; I liked its looks and asked what type of ship that was. A quartermaster told me it was a DLG (Destroyer - Leader - Guided Missiles). It was the USS Mahan. Before my commissioning midshipmen were asked 3 questions about our interests - Ship type, department, and location. I asked for DLG, Operations, and Yokosuka, Japan. It was nice that I got all 3, but more interesting was that the ship I was assigned was the USS Mahan (DLG-11).

Finally our 6 week adventure was coming to its conclusion. On my 21st birthday, August 23, 1968, the USS Chara (AE-31) moored at La Playa Pier, San Diego Bay where we unloaded ammunition then continued to Naval Air Station, North Island. I probably disembarked the next

day and flew home to Chicago area; this flight was my first ever First-Class seat. This training was certainly eye-opening to me in understanding how the Navy operates their vessels. I thank the Captain and crew of the USS Chara for all the support we midshipmen received.

I was able to carefully reconstruct this time due to the availability of the ship's Deck Logs from that time. There are many that have been digitized and posted [online](#). You can see my actual writing at top of page for July 18 (including initials) and again on August 10 (whole page) and August 11 (first entry).