A Sea Story

Michael Rebresh
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol16/iss1/25

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact orenick@cod.edu.
A Sea Story

It was a dark and gloomy night. A dense cover of gray, damp pillows spawned from horizon to horizon. The stars were not shining as they had on previous nights when the weather was cooperating. The seas were rough with waves cresting at thirty feet causing the bow of the naval vessel I served on to dip into the depths of the Atlantic ocean in between swells. Waves came crashing overhead, spraying my workstation six decks above sea level with 100% pure saltwater. It was a terrible night to at sea.

We had been out for approximately two months of a six-month tour to the Mediterranean Sea. Our assignment was to perform United Nation sanctioned inspections of all vessels entering or leaving the Dead Sea through the Suez Canal. We had performed our jobs with great expertise. Although I personally had done nothing to jeopardize the safety of the crew of the USS John Hancock, I had indeed performed strange “acts” to arouse my shipmates curiosity regarding my sanity.

It had been my goal, at the time, to confuse those with whom I came into contact. I had figured if they thought I was nuts, they would pretty much leave me to myself. And whether it be in the living quarters or the signal bridge, I performed this task with the mark of a true professional. I would often hold intimate conversations with my gear locker while in the presence of others, causing them to use extreme caution when near me. Success! But to understand the reasons behind my insanity, one would have to understand the conditions in which we were all forced to live.

To put it bluntly, I was on a large, heavily armed, floating machine of war with three hundred other men, all living in close proximity. Without contact with the outside world, the mental pressures and stress associated obviously required some sort of release valve. I found that performing these little insanities was great for suppressing these negative emotions. Now some personnel were able to adapt to “life at sea” without a problem, while some were not so lucky. Most hid the obvious pressures, while others could not. I fell into the latter category. And on this particularly dark and cloudy night, while at my station, I demonstrated perhaps the oddest way of discarding the negativity, only to be caught in the act by an unsuspecting officer.

My particular workstation, known as the “SIG” bridge, was the highest attainable point on the ship that did not require safety harness. Being so high up, it was an extremely isolated place, and only myself and the other three signalmen were ever present. We each had our own shift for which we were responsible. Mine was the 2400-0800 shift. On a seemingly nightly basis, I sat in a dazed and extremely bored state with nothing to do but read a book to occupy my time. Reading was a sufficient cure for the boredom. However, when the book ended so did the cure, thus requiring that alternate measures be taken.

I had just finished reading a novel written by C. Dean Anderson the night before and desired a quick replacement. None could be found so I decided that something new was in order. Something different. Something that had not been attempted in recent history. I sat for a while, at least twenty minutes, when I hit upon a plan that I knew was what I had been longing for. I have always had a theatrical nature about myself, having played many different characters on stage. And it came to light that this playing of roles, under the right circumstances, was a possible method for curing the monotony and at the same time, be perfectly harmless. With careful consideration to my location, situation, and available materials, my character was designed in detail. I couldn’t go wrong.
I proceeded to inform the main bridge that I would be departing my position to retreat to the lavatory. An all clear sign was indicated over the sound powered phone system informing me that I may go. And go I did. Only I did not go and visit the almighty toilet gods, as I had on numerous drunken occasions, rather I went to my gear locker to retrieve my costume. While at the locker I partially got into character by inserting a large, golden hoop earring into the lobe of my left ear. I gathered the rest of the costume under my arm and proceeded back to the signal bridge. There I was confronted by an irated Chief Petty Officer who inquired into the devious acts I was committing in the middle of the night. I had to react quickly so that my plans would not be in jeopardy, so I made up some cock and bull story. From the look on his face I knew he wasn’t buying into my act. He seemed to let pass all he’d seen with one exception - the earring. He gave me a song and dance on how wearing earrings while in uniform was strictly forbidden and how he should write me up. After about fifteen minutes of the lecturing, he finally relinquished me to return to my post. I said, “Aye, Aye Chief!” and was quickly on my way to the signal bridge.

As a signalman it was my duty to communicate with other vessels through semaphore, Morse code, and the raising of coded messages by flag. And as it turned out, with much thanks to the recent generosity of my brother, I had in my possession a small black flag with skull and crossbones that could be raised and lowered on the halyard lines. I quickly raised the flag, and proceeded on with my role as a twentieth century pirate. I was wearing my blue bandanna and a single black eye patch that covered my right eye. My shirt was stripped red and white and my blue jeans cut and frayed at the knees. I stood barefoot with earring in place, paying no heed to the chiefs warnings on the consequences of my actions.

So there I sat perched on the flag-bag, mocking the cinema version of a sixteenth century pirate plundering the seven seas. An occasional “Aarrrgghhh!” erupted from my throat and was the epitome of the character I was portraying. I sat peacefully, careful not to arouse suspicion. All was well until to my surprise a tap on the shoulder alerted me to the presence of another. Lt. Commander Rogers, second in command, peered at me with his cold, dull red relentless eyes and asked only one question, “What the hell are you doing Rebresh?!” He asked this in such a forceful manner, I was certain that brig time was inevitable. Either that or he would extend my role by making me walk off a non-existent plank over the side of the ship. But he did neither. I explained to him how I was having difficulty adjusting and that dressing up as a pirate was a relief valve for the stress.

I can only assume the response I gave him was so profound that he had no choice but to disregard my strange ways and go about his business, for that is what he did. At that point I suppose the wise thing to have done was to keep my big mouth shut and not utter another word. But I was not wise, I was a pirate, and did exactly the opposite. As he turned away from me, I let out a slight, casual, barely audible “Aarrrgghh!” to which he responded with only a slight giggle and walked off. Fortunately for me he had not noticed the skull and crossbones that flew overhead signifying that I, a lone and single pirate, had seized his great sailing vessel.

AARRRGGHHH!

-Michael Rebresh