

Earl Rupp - KENNEBEC MEMORIES

Updated July 2, 2012

I reported aboard Kennebec in September 1966 as a 21 year old, newly minted Ensign and the Communications Officer. At the time the ship was undergoing repairs at the TRIPLE AAA Machine Shop Yard in San Francisco.

Before year end it was decided that Junior Officers would stand some watches in the Engine Room. Although I had been in the Engineering area while in port, I had not been there when the plant was lit-off.

My first Engineering Watch underway was the Mid Watch and it did not go well. I went aft and opened the door (yes, it was a real door, not a hatch) to the Engineering Area and was immediately hit by a blast of hot air. Hesitantly I stepped through the door on to the small platform 2 - 3 stories above the plant. Looking down reminded me of scenes from the book Dante's Inferno and its "9 Stages of Hell", but which Level of Hell was this? There was steam, noise, dirt and Snipes who looked like midgets from that height. Some were stripped to the waist.

I knew I had to start down the ladder or pass out from the heat and be part of Kennebec folklore and the butt of jokes forever. I reached out and took a firm grip on the railing which burned my hand - damned was it hot. After I composed myself I headed down the ladder and, of course, it got cooler the further I descended. Standing Watches I learned that a number of the Lifers were hearing-impaired because of the noise.

Four hours later the Watch was over and I headed forward to my State Room, only to get lost in the darkness on the Main Deck. After about 5 minutes I saw a sailor walking forward and safely trailed him.

All of this convinced me that I did not want to be a Snipe. To this day I admire them as I don't know how they lived or worked in those conditions and still looked good when they went on Liberty.

Update added from email received 10/11/2013:

After my first watch in Dante's Inferno (the Snipe Area), I headed forward to my Stateroom which was mid-ships below CIC. It was 0400 with few stars in the sky.....and I promptly got lost in the maze of lines, shrouds and other obstructions on deck. What to do? If I wandered around I might trip over something and injure myself. Or, I could stand at Parade Rest for an hour or so until it first light. Again my main concern was not being the butt of jokes and part of KENNEBEC lore. Fortunately after about 10 minutes I saw a sailor walking forward and fell in about 15 feet behind him, thus dodging another bullet.

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1966-68

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Added Comment from Erv Remmele:

Earl, I can relate to and understand your early experience with the boiler/engine room uptake, as well a nice chuckle. Thanks.

You probably entered from the 01 level, and I remember when I came aboard in 67 those uptakes were not only hot and humid, the stack gases and soot were terrible. One of my memories came in 67 just after checking in and the ship got underway, someone told me that there was a problem in the boiler room. As I entered from the main deck level, I looked up to the boiler blower level (01) and to my surprise there was Captain Hunt in the middle of a discussion about one of the blowers. Chief Sheets was in charge of the boilers at that time. I can't remember whether Blake was there or not. I was impressed to see the Skipper get involved, a first for me.

Eventually, we got control of the stack gases and soot by sealing the boilers furnace and casing leaks, but it was always hot and humid while underway.