

James Johns Memories of the “Johns Boy”

Memory One

I was on stationed on the Kennebec from 1964 thru 1966 as a QM3 and hidden away in some dusty corner of my mind I unearthed these two relics from my distant past.

The year was (I believe) 1966 and it was early dawn on a summer day as the Kennebec slipped into Olongapo’s harbor hugging the red channel buoys marking the harbor’s entrance on water that was glass smooth. The harbor pilot was on board, had the conn and as quartermaster of the watch I busied myself out on the port wing by propping up the pilot house bulkhead, sipping steaming hot coffee and taking in what promised to be a beautiful day.

The ship was running empty placing the bow maybe forty feet over the water which also restricted the visibility of close up, dead ahead objects from the pilot house but then, that wasn’t much about nothing, because with exception of the local sea birds and the Kennebec, the world of Olongapo still slept.

I thought that I caught a very short glimpse of an object dead ahead and not being sure, moved out to the end of the wing for a better view forward. From there I saw a banca boat with a cargo of two sleeping Filipinos perhaps twenty yards ahead of the bow and at this stage it was way beyond too late to do anything except watch the events unreel themselves.

One of the Filipinos woke, sat bolt upright and went wide eyed and white knuckled at a sight that was the equivalent of a four story building bearing down on their boat, only twenty yards away. He poked his buddy one time and jumped off the boat swimming hard followed by his fellow passenger. Because the ship was moving very slowly ahead, their boat just bumped and bobbed down the starboard side without any observable damage being done, no harm no foul and most importantly...no injuries or drowning.

The duo, now clear of the ship, was treading water and screaming up at me in Tagalog before swimming to retrieve their boat. They demonstrated excellent communication skills in that it wasn’t difficult at all to imagine what they were saying.

Memory two

I don’t remember which year this occurred but, we were in operating in Westpac as a player in Market Time. During our refueling operations other commodities such as provisions and mail along with occasional human beings were routinely transferred between ships via high line and Burton whip. Movies, as entertainment for ship’s crews, were also part of this exchange going from ship to ship like the game of musical chairs.

One day the music stopped and the Kennebec was the player left standing, clutching only a tattered copy of an old school 1950’s era Alan Ladd western called Shane for a period of some weeks.

Movies were shown on the mess deck at 2000 and as might be expected on the first night everyone who was not on watch showed up to watch the movie. On day two everyone who was not on watch showed up again, a not unexpected event since those on duty the previous night hadn’t been in attendance. On day’s three thru twenty one...everyone not on watch showed up to watch the movie. Who knew?

I watched the movie Shane a few nights ago and the flood of memories was absolutely amazing. I’d also forgotten how good the movie was.