

Navy Days

I was inspired to write this little tome and in fact had started writing it, but there was a real need to remind myself of some of the details of my Navy experience. When Bruce and his clan visited in October of 2000, I got some help getting down a box from the garage rafters. The box itself had originally been used to ship textbooks to the Ferndale California schools. We had used a number of these boxes to move from Ferndale to Seattle to graduate school in 1962. We had to hunt around for the box that I knew existed somewhere. The notations of previous items had been stricken out and it was sealed up with tape and re-entitled “Diplomas, Year Books, Navy Stuff, Pics, and Some Scout Stuff—8/1/82.” My tangible papers, pictures, and booklets were there to joggle my memory!

In 1950 I was enrolled in John Muir Junior College and President Truman’s “police action” in Korea had started. The draft was re-instated and it became evident that it would only be a matter of time before all eligible males would get the call.

A couple of my friends in the band at Muir had suggested earlier that the male members of the band should join the Army National Guard so they could have a band in their unit. It turned out later that because it was a medical unit, they were some of the first to go to Korea. In another instance I was with a friend who was with an Army unit and I went with him to the armory for some reason. One of the officers was there and was trying to talk me into joining their tank unit. You may remember that at the beginning of the war—and it was a war, not a “police action,” that the North Korean Russian made tanks had heavy armor and were not being stopped by U.S. World War II style bazookas. (The original bazooka was a one-of-a-kind novelty musical instrument played by Bob Burns, a radio comedian. It was shaped like a small stovepipe, hence the name of the military ordinance.)

Now there were two “opportunities” that I am happy that I didn’t take advantage of. There started to be lines at the military recruiting offices. The Air Force was a popular choice and out of the ground combat situation, so sounded not too bad. Their waiting time to get in was a longer wait than I wanted. It was January 1951 by this time and I was not interested in school. I wanted out to do most anything! Because of the wait the Air Force had indicated, I headed over to the Navy recruiting office and signed up. It turned out the wait was just about the same as the USAF. With the need of personnel versus the scheduling of new recruits, it was hard to predict when a new boot camp company would be formed.

Boot Camp

There was a large induction center in Los Angeles where we were to take our physical exam. There were hoards of guys standing around in their shorts waiting for the next examining station. Check your heart, lungs, and “turn you head and cough” exams, very scientific whisper hearing tests, bend over and spread your cheeks exams – all were part of the ritual. We were then all herded aboard a trolley – they still existed in Los Angeles then – and headed to the train station to be taken to San Diego Naval Training Center. At the Naval Training Center there were more physicals and shots. To keep track of everyone, a corpsman took a swab and painted a number on our chests with Mercurochrome, a red anti-bacterial solution that lasted for days.

We arrived at night after the physical in Los Angeles and things were pretty much secured. They assigned us temporary barracks. We were to endure nine weeks of military training, and we were apprehensive, yet anxious to start this journey into the unknown.

I was assigned to Company 177, led by a First Class Boilerman who was rather skinny and when he stood at attention looked like a question mark. He led us in formation over to the barbershop. Formation is probably an exaggeration, as most of the fellows hadn't marched a step in their lives. At least I had the experience from the Scouts and the marching bands at Punahou, South Pasadena, and Muir. The haircuts took very little time, as no style was involved – just the removal of all your hair. I think they took special delight in cutting off “duck-tail” style haircuts, which were popular at that time.

Uniforms were issued. We were measured and fitted for dress blues and pea coats. The dungarees and other clothing were simply issued. After receiving our clothing they all had to be stenciled with our name, service number, and company. I still have my stencils and have used them to mark our stepladders and other possessions.

The “boot” could be characterized by his unfaded chambray shirt with crisp black lettering on the back, new dungaree pants, a white hat, lack of sideburns, and leggings dating from World War II. The leggings were khaki with lacing and hooks on the side with a strap that went under the boot next to the heel. The pants had to be carefully folded as the leggings were put on to give it the proper look, of course. The dress blues and “undress” whites were not worn on base and were reserved only if you were allowed “liberty” to go off base sometime after the first six weeks.

There were numerous inspections. All of one's clothing had to be rolled up in tubular fashion, each in a very special way, then tied with cording called “clothes stops,” using a square knot of course. The clothes stops had metal crimping on them to keep them from unraveling. They were also used to tie washed clothes to lanyards behind the barracks to dry. They were akin to sailing ship rigging and apparently the tradition had to

be kept. The rolled clothing also harkened back to the days when clothes were put in a rolled hammock which of course was used for sleeping aboard the early ships of the Navy. It made no difference that we slept in regular bunks and were issued sea bags, which were olive drab and were the same as the Army barrack bag. Traditions die hard.

The washing was not done at the laundromat. There were wooden sloped wash racks behind the barracks with a series of faucets. You took a bucket and a brown bristled brush and washed your clothes. There were some neophytes that didn't realize that new blue dungaree pants should not be washed with white clothes. A lot of bleach got the telltale light blue out of a white hat.

The day started out at about 5:30 because you had to shave and dress, clean up the barracks so that it was spotless, eat breakfast and be ready for classes. Classes often consisted of training films on various naval procedures, health, and various other aspects of the Navy. Nomenclature to knot tying. I was able to help out the Chief with the class, as my Scout training had given me a lot of practice with knots and spicing.

As time went on it was easy to determine how long a given company had spent in boot camp. At about week four we received our dog tags and some of the less secure folks had to wear them up high on the neck for all to see and know that he had "arrived." Doing "mess duty" came about week seven. For a week we served all meals from our station on the chow line then cleaned up the entire mess hall after all the other companies had eaten- steam tables, floors and seating. Some worked in the "garbage locker." Upon leaving the mess hall, everyone had to clean his mess tray and separate the garbage into meats, liquids, paper, etc. It was then sold to local hog farms. Managing the garbage cans and steam cleaning them was one dirty job. One fellow who had been serving on the line had some newly acquired "crabs" and served food on the chow line with one hand and under his apron had his other hand down his pants for convenient scratching. The rest of us strongly objected. His job quickly changed to the garbage locker.

During fire-fighting training the company wore a wool watch cap, because the white hat would get really dirty. Fighting fire is very important for all to learn, as fire aboard ship is serious stuff if you are out in the middle of the ocean. A couple of us were talking as we awaited our turn to go in a simulated ship's structure, which had been laden with oil and kerosene and lighted. We were to advance with a charged fire hose and a nozzle that put out a wide spray pattern. Because we were "skylarking" in the Chief's eyes, he let the next set fire really cook and get nice and smoky before he sent me and my partner in. I came out with my face smudged with a black oily film from putting my face down to the deck in order to get enough air to breathe. One must show his authority and control!

One time I got into trouble because I didn't smoke. I was part of a "work party" doing some picking up and cleaning up around the base. There were those taking a smoke break, so I thought that I was entitled to a short break too. Accused of goofing off, I was given extra work to do. Had a cigarette been hanging from my lip there would have been no problem.

There were more classes including rowing a whale boat, marching, the 16 count manual of arms with our old plugged-barreled Springfield rifles, exercise drills with these old relics, and time on the rifle range. They had just given us a series of shots and tightening the rifle sling around the arm was very uncomfortable. Then came getting up early one morning to take the GCT's, the general classification tests which help place you in the proper job within the Navy. There were many that didn't give a damn about the test and later found out that it determined what they would be doing for the next four years. My overall score was high, with the mechanical aptitude being just a point below. My math and clerical was not so hot.

In retrospect I should have chosen a rating of instrumentman or such, as I most likely would have earned the right to go to a training school and would have advanced in rank more quickly. As I mentioned in my "What If?" chapter, Herb Hynson, my sister's husband and a naval flier suggested the aviation ratings or jobs. I requested it. I will have to admit that the aviation ratings put me in a better situation than the seaman or the "black shoe" ratings of the below deck jobs. I became an "Airedale" and spent the rest of my Navy career around aircraft.

Miramar NAS

I was assigned to Miramar Naval Auxiliary Air Station, which was later to become Miramar Naval Air Station. It is just north of San Diego and near La Jolla and Escondido, so a group of us were bussed from the Training Center. We had just had a few days of leave time and just returned to the Training Center for our assignment and transportation. We checked in on the base, which meant we had to go around to all the major administrative offices on base, from the Chaplain's office to the pay office. They then told us to take the weekend off and report on Monday. Good grief! What happened to the rigidity of the Training Center?

Miramar had at that time a highway that separated the base in to the Miramar side and the "Kearney" side. Camp Kearney in the early days had been an Army firing range for large bore weapons. I was assigned to the Security Department and was given gate duty. Most of the traffic was from one side of the base to the other. The barracks and general facilities including mess hall and administrative offices were on the Miramar side, but most of the jobs of the Air Station and the landing field were on the other side. There was a gate on each side of the highway so we waived

them to the other side and the guard on the other side waived them through. Vehicles coming up the highway were given more scrutiny. We had to check the ID and Liberty card of everyone. We went aboard busses and checked private vehicles. You had to prove you had insurance before you got a base sticker, otherwise vehicles had to be parked in a lot just outside of the base. When the drunks returned late at night, they had to be checked for bottles of booze. We were supposed to confiscate the bottles, but usually we suggest that they hide them near the fence of the parking lot!

Standing out in a little shack with a .45 Colt automatic pistol at my side and looking important became boring, especially in the wee hours of the morning. The Security Department also included the Fire Department and Crash Crew, so I requested a transfer, which was honored.

During my approximately two-year tenure at Miramar I had experience with both the all Navy Crash Crew and the civilian manned structural fire-fighting crew. There were two structural crews; one on each side of the base. I was assigned to the structural crew on the Miramar side for a while. The basic crew was civilians and there were two of us sailors assigned to the crew also. We had two rigs at the station; one was a Seagraves V-12 pumper and the other a military rig outfitted for brush fires. We did have one brush fire just north of the base and we did have one run using that rig. Unlike the U.S. Forestry rig near us, we didn't try to conserve the water in the tank, but continually ran back to the nearby fire hydrant and kept dousing the smoky fire mostly of oily manzanita bushes. We came back sweaty and sooty. The mess hall people were not going to let us in to eat because of our dirty appearance, but common sense prevailed.

The other fire was down the road at Escondido. They called us out as a second alarm to a restaurant fire. It was nearly out and we just mopped up and got the hot spots. Somewhere in all of my papers there is a letter of commendation to the members of the crew from the base commander, Captain Coffin. (Who could forget a name like that!)

The crash crew was a totally different ball game. We had rigs that were designed specifically for aircraft fires. The FFN-3 (Fire Fighting - Navy) was a one and a half ton rig with 418 gallons of water, 17 gallons of foam, two high pressure hose reels on the sides and one inch and a half hose on the back. These were all designed to cool the fire down to rescue the pilot and to lay a blanket of foam down to keep the fire from flashing back. The fire had to be contained quickly, as at full output, the water and foam would only last four and a half minutes.

The FFN-5 was a larger truck two and a half-ton rig with a turret on top and ground sweep nozzles mounted underneath the front of the truck. It held 800 gallons of water and 80 gallons of foam with low-pressure foam lines pulled off the rear.

The "Cardox" FFN-4 carried 6000 pounds of liquid CO2 and 300 gallons of pre-mixed foam. There was no pump, as the CO2 pressure discharged the foam. The tank was covered in cork insulation and was refrigerated when not on a run. An electrical cord pulled out as the rig left the station left. It had a huge boom suspended 10 feet out over the front of the truck from on top, a large nozzle mounted to the front of the truck, and a nozzleman on each side. It could put out 2500 pounds of CO2 a minute from the boom and 1250 pounds from the ground sweep and the front nozzles and 750 pounds from the side nozzles or "play pipes." When the truck was in action, there was a huge white cloud, which quickly snuffed out a fire. However, because of the danger of flash back, it was up to the other trucks to lay down an adequate foam blanket.

All of the rigs required drivers, hose men, and rescue men, and the larger units required boom and turret operators. At Miramar I had the opportunity of being on the FFN-3 and Cardox rigs as nozzleman.

To sharpen our skills, we had regular drills with burned out aircraft fuselages by setting them afire and rescuing the asbestos dummies. To make sure we were up on the latest, the Naval Air Mobile Training Detachment from Memphis came to air stations to offer training. I attended the "Class C" school in aircraft crash fire and rescue twice at Miramar and once when I was later stationed at Leeward Point NAS at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Our duty was 24 hours on and 24 hours off with a 3-day weekend every other week. Not too bad unless there was FCLP (fleet carrier landing practice) going on at night. We had to be out on the line, i.e.: near the center of the runway with nothing to do except watch the aircraft. Pilots had to qualify ashore before they went aboard a carrier both for day and night landings. It was hours worth of "touch and go" landings with the Landing Signal Officer with his paddles guiding the planes in for each landing. Nowadays carriers use a light system to line up aircraft for landing on the deck.

We always had one person listening to the truck's radio to get any word from the tower about any emergency. The two on-line rigs were known as Gravel Gertie One and Gravel Gertie Two, usually shortened to Gertie One or Gertie Two. The name of course came from a character in the Dick Tracy comic strip. We typically had our "turnout" pants and boots on and if an emergency came up, quickly put our coats on and doffed our helmets which had a large plastic face shield and an asbestos skirt to completely cover our head and neck. At night we were awakened because it was required that when an aircraft was coming in or leaving the field, the crash crew be on line. Our pants were pushed down over our boots so that we could simply jump into the boots and quickly pull up the pants.

Most of the time it was quiet. Crews changed early each morning and we took turns going to chow. There was always someone on duty. When

we were eating at the chow hall we went to the head of the line and had our special table and a red crash phone near by. Later food was brought to the firehouse, which saved a lot of time. Occasionally we had a little action.

The “deferred emergency” was the typical call. Pilots always called the tower if they were experiencing any difficulties. The Navy “Banshee” jet often lost hydraulic pressure. To ensure that braking would be adequate upon landing they used the emergency system. It consisted of charging the hydraulic lines with compressed air. It meant all or nothing on the brakes. We often cooled down hot brakes with a little shot from the nozzles.

On one occasion the disk brakes, which are almost as big as the tire got cherry red from the heat caused by the emergency procedure. A tractor was called out to haul the aircraft back to the hanger. During the trip along the taxiway, the heat of the brakes softened up the tires sidewalls and the 125 psi tire pressure blew out a tire. The plane had been out on target practice over the ocean and when the tractor driver heard the loud bang, he thought he had been shot with one of the 20 mm nose cannons! We could see it all as we were following the plane in, but there was no way to warn the tractor driver of the gradually bulging tire. I never saw anyone jump so high!

On another “deferred emergency” the plane came to a stop and the pilot was just getting out of the cockpit. Our truck was at the ready. We had rolled up and the pump was engaged ready for action. At 800 psi the seal at the hose reel blew showering the pilot with a nasty foam bath. He was not a happy camper to say the least. The foam that was used at that time was made of “animal protein material” which translates to “animal blood.” It smelled after a while, was sticky, and drew flies. One positive note was that when we cleaned out the truck tank and pump filter, we simply sprayed the side yard of the firehouse with the discharge. The grass was really well fertilized and needed mowing frequently.

The Navy was in the process of changing all fighter squadrons into jet aircraft in the early 1950’s. There were still a few gull winged Corsairs out there, the backbone of the Navy’s World War II fighters. Most of the squadrons flew the F9F Panther jet. When pilots changed over from the radial engine to jets and from the high angle stance of the two-wheel landing gear and tail wheel to the tricycle landing gear of the Panther, life was interesting. They came in hot and at a different angle. There were a lot of hard landings and blown tires. One of the big problems with the early jet planes was a “flame-out.”

You mention the term now and people look at you funny. Jets literally lost the flame of the jet and the turbine quit turning causing the aircraft to lose all power. I recall seeing the yellow “shot gun shell” cartridges that were on each side of the jet engine. In case of a flame out, these shells were discharged which shot out “fire and brimstone” re-igniting

the engine—hopefully. They were chambered in a 12-gauge-shotgun size, and there was a terse warning on the casing not to use these cartridges in a shotgun!

A Panther came into Miramar as a result of a flame-out. The wings of a jet are designed for high trust engines, not for gliding, so when it lost power it glided like a rock. There is a full account of this crash in the February 9, 1952 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, complete with pictures. Lt. E.V. “Skip” Crangle who called into the tower indicating he had lost power. He came in on a dead stick landing and crashed the aircraft. There is a great picture of the crash showing the aircraft and runway covered with foam and the crash crew doing its thing. The photographer took the picture from the opposite side of my truck and crew, so I missed my moment of fame to have my picture in the *Post*. After I had looked at the article to joggle my memory in order to write all of this down, that evening I went on the Internet to see if I could find an E. V. Crangle. Sure enough, he retired as Captain Crangle, and was living in Sugar Land, Texas. I gave him a call and we chatted for a short while. He remembered that crash of nearly 50 years ago and thanked me for helping save his life.

Another emergency at Miramar made it in the *Naval Aviation News*. An Air Force C-47 (Navy R4-D) could not get its landing gear down. It burned up its fuel and came into Miramar, the closest landing area with the least traffic. The pilot really knew his aircraft and was very cool. The C-47 is a two-engine plane and the landing gear wheel well is just below the engine nacelle. The restricted space necessitates the wheel be exposed about six inches below the wheel well. The pilot got way back on the glide path to come in. To avoid severe damage to the propellers and engines, he cut the engines, feathered the props, and used the starter motor to crank the engines so that the three-bladed prop had one blade straight up. The other two blades would then have maximum ground clearance. He came in on a wheels up, dead stick landing. With much skill, the pilot landed the aircraft on just the six inches of wheels showing, and the plane had nary a scratch. They simply jacked it up, locked the landing gear down with a pin, and taxied it in to the hanger. Exceptional!

Transfer to Bainbridge NTC

It was nice having every other day and every other weekend off. We often went to Mission Beach for a little sun and surf or checked out San Diego. Tijuana, Mexico was just down the road and we sometimes went down there for some action. On weekends I headed up the road home to South Pasadena to see family and friends. It was only about a two to three hour drive. Things were getting rather routine, however. I had passed my tests for Aviation Boatswain’s Mate, but because of the influx

of personnel at that time, there was little chance of advancement in rank. I came across some information that would allow a certain number of people from the "fleet" to enter NROTC programs at various universities. I took the test and had an extensive interview by a group of officers, some of whom were Naval Academy graduates.

I passed the test and interview. About 3000 fleet wide had taken the test, but only about 1500 passed. That 1500 was finally reduced to about 300. I was one of those and was given travel money to get to Bainbridge Naval Training Center at Bainbridge, Maryland, south of Washington, D.C. I chose the cheapest air travel to get there. It was a big mistake. The noisy prop planes stopped at every major city across the U.S. Crying babies and the smell of barf filled the air. I was really tired when I got to Washington, D.C.

From a modest (i.e.: cheap) hotel near the bus station where I would be taking a bus to Bainbridge, I called my Uncle Heck. (Cloyd Heck Marvin, my mother's brother, who was then president of George Washington University.) I ended up staying with him and his family for a day before heading off to the Training Center.

The group of us was assigned to two barracks and after some orientation and class assignment, marched down to Tome Hall every morning for classes. (Don't you love the original thinking in naming the building?!) The classes we took had been determined by earlier testing. They consisted of English, Math, and Science. There were about three levels of each subject, so placement was based on how well one had done on each tested area. The supposed purpose for the classes was to prepare the student to be prepared to get back into the classroom mode in order to enter the NROTC programs at the various universities which offered the training.

It was like being in school again and there was homework every night as well as periodic tests. There were frequent inspections, which wasn't so bad in itself, but the weather was terrible. It was so humid that our whites (uniform) became like a rag by noon and if there was an inspection right after lunch, it had to be changed. The sun was so hot that the carefully shined shoes turned a matte black because the polish had softened in the sun. You dare not even touch them!

Because time was precious, I hated to wait for the washer and drier in the barracks to do my uniforms, then come back to the cubicle and iron them. All of this and trying to get homework done. I worked a deal with one of the fellows; he did all of the washing and drying and I did all of the ironing. He had to fuss down in the laundry room waiting his turn, but I could do the ironing at my leisure. I had a portable travel iron and used a blanket on the study desk as the ironing board. The barracks were unique in that we had cubicles of four bunks instead of one large room partitioned off by lockers and bunks. It gave a sense of privacy and it had chairs and a built in desk arrangement.

Having lived in Hawaii and Southern California did not prepare me for the weather at Bainbridge. As I mentioned, it was very humid and hot, but the thunderstorms were something to behold. On one particular evening, the thunder and lightning was spectacular. The whole sky was lighted up by the lightning – one strike after the other. We were up on a hill, so you could see the storm for miles. The rain was coming down in buckets.

One fellow in our barracks called the poor guy who was on barracks fire watch one night and pretended to be the duty officer in the headquarters building about a quarter mile away. The sailor was to come to the headquarters and pick up a message for something or other. After slogging over and being told that there was no such message, he returned and was ready to do battle! He was a wet “unhappy camper!”

The military can be pretty “chicken shit” when it comes to procedures sometimes, and a training center is especially guilty. One of the officers of our group was a Marine lieutenant. He thought his own didn’t smell and was a stickler for regulations. I had an occasion to go to his office one time. Because I didn’t knock and come into his office properly, I was sent out and told to do it right. Geez!

On another occasion the fellow that I did the ironing for came down with appendicitis. He had a bellyache in the morning so he went to sick bay. They sent him back to the barracks with a couple of APC’s (all-purpose capsules, a generic aspirin, etc.) Later he was in real pain, so we called the sick bay for an ambulance. They told us to bring him up. In great pain, two of us helped him to the sick bay. Later he was taken to the base hospital. We went to see him. He told us that he woke up all the patients that morning and told them to pull up the blankets and sheets tightly, put their arms out at their sides, and lie “at attention,” as the Captain was coming through for inspection. Now that is really chicken @#**!

On a couple of other occasions I had the experiencing the wisdom of similar behavior. When leaving the base on “liberty,” you were required to line up and show your liberty card and ID card. There were many taxis coming and going on the base because of the distance to town or to the bus line. We hopped in a taxi on the way out, but the gate guard made us stand in line to show our passes and then we could get into the taxi.

There was another “C.S.” behavior shown by the mess cooks in the chow line on one occasion. For all the time I had spent in the Navy it was common practice to put one’s silverware in the shirt or jumper pocket to facilitate holding the mess tray and not having your silverware covered with food. Well I was told to take it out of my pocket. This “order” was given by some punk sailor who no doubt had less time in than I did. I refused, so they refused to serve me. I already had plenty on the tray, so I found a place to sit and did so. They told the Master-at-Arms (M.A.), a First Class Petty Officer equivalent to a sergeant. He went searching

around for me, but he never did find me in the sea of white uniforms in the mess hall.

This wisdom must run amuck in the mess halls. After having my wisdom tooth removed by a Navy dentist, I had to miss a day of classes because my jaw was obviously swollen. All I could eat was soup and have a small carton of milk. I asked for another milk and was refused because I didn't have a "chit" from the dentist requesting a "special diet."

Sometimes it is hard to stay out of trouble because of such idiotic behavior. I was put "on report" when I called an M.A. at Miramar "C.S." The Officer of the Day adjudicated this horrible infraction and wanted to know if I wanted to settle my differences with this idiot behind the barracks in a pugilistic fashion. I didn't, but isn't that what you wanted to hear from an officer. Did he ask the circumstances? Of course not!

The tour at Bainbridge was finally over. Three hundred started the program, about 150 finished, and 60 made it to NROTC programs at various universities. I was not one of the chosen few. The remaining group was transferred to another barracks awaiting orders to our next duty assignment. We did a lot of sitting around, but we were put to work too.

One popular game while sitting around was to find a fly that had landed on the barrack table to seek a drop of pop that contained sugar. There were many to be had. The trick was to take a can of lighter fluid and from the spout drop just one drop from several feet and try to hit the fly. Not as easy as you might think! Irregular holes in the spout or just a slight miscalculation would prevent a hit. The reward of course was to hit the fly. The fluid is very volatile and when it hit the fly, there was no doubt of the fluid's effectiveness. The fly would convulse, beat its wings a bit, and then succumb to the effects of the hit. Great sport, when you haven't anything else to do!

One of the "work parties" we went on was "something to do; unload some flour for the galley. Not just some flour, a lot of flour. There are a lot of personnel aboard a training center and a lot of bread and pastries are baked. There was a railroad spur that went into the base to facilitate bringing in supplies. On this occasion it was a boxcar and a half of 50-pound bags of flour. I don't know how they loaded the cars, but the bags were jammed in without the benefit of pallets and it was floor to ceiling bags. The doors had to be opened carefully. We formed a line tossing bags of flour so they could be stacked on pallets then hauled away using a forklift. It was hot and the paper bags were not that well sealed. We ended up with our clothes saturated with flour and our hands and faces white. Little rivulets of sweat caused lines running down our faces. It caused another situation in the mess hall just like Miramar, except this time we were white, not black with soot. The Chief in charge made it clear to the mess hall that we would eat and were not to be given any hassle.

My orders finally came in. No more sitting around or going on some work detail. I was being sent to Guantanamo Bay Naval Air Station.

Guantanamo Bay NAS

A group of us reported in at GTMO as it was known. It was the Navy abbreviation for Guantanamo and was pronounced "Gitmo." The bay divided the Naval base into two parts. The larger consisted of the Naval base, the Marine barracks, the dependent housing area, and the main air station. Across the bay was Leeward Point, and air-strip that was used by the fleet primarily for fighter aircraft gunnery practice. Because of my crash crew experience at Miramar, I was assigned to the crew at Leeward Point.