

MEMORIES OF USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754)

by PC3 Charles Michael "Mike" Smith 1968-1969

Memories of USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) returned to me as my wife and sons toured USS LAFFEY (DD 724) at Patriots Point in Charleston about seven years ago. This was my first time on a destroyer since that night of June 3rd. I asked my family to go on ahead and let me stay a few more minutes and reflect on events, since this was Memorial Day.

After one final walk through the ship, I slowly started back toward the prow that led to the pier where reality starts again. I had to stop and look back one more time, for I was sure I heard a voice from the past call out, "Get a haircut Postman." I was confident that no one was there, but I could feel the old crew watching me. I was convinced that we had spent the last hours mingling in the presence of heroes. I was aware that many of the words I spoke that day were not for anyone present in the flesh. I know that our 74 brave sailors rest in glory down in King Neptune's hallowed ground and their souls are in Heaven sitting at the right hand of our God, but their memories will follow me and the other EVANS survivors, forever.

As we walked the decks of this old destroyer, memories had started flowing from somewhere in the back of my mind where I had buried them so long ago. This day is not a day for selfish thoughts so I turned my remembrances to the crew, ports, and pleasant things and this is what I wrote.

I remember USS FRANK E. EVANS in Long Beach shipyard so far out on the mole that we had to take the old raggedy Navy bus out to her.

I remember EVANS in the shipyard covered with the orange and yellow primer and soon afterward, she was completely gray with all new equipment and modern weapons.

I remember my first rack, top bunk under the 1MC loud speaker. When reveille was sounded the next morning, I jumped up and hit my head on one of the overhead pipes.

Then there were the short cold showers, the distinct stench of the scullery, and standing fire watches for the civilian welders as they transformed our old tin can into a superior fighting ship.



I remember how amazed I was to see EVANS in dry dock with no water to float her. Then the first time we went out past the breakwater, which would determine if I was going to be sea sick; that is when I first learned to respect the moods of this enormous ocean that was to be our front yard, which we would sail over for the next two years.

I remember the calm beauty of the sea, but I couldn't comprehend how angry and deadly it could get. I feared the lighting storms and the concern of the restless waves that washed up on the bridge and drenched all of us on watch.

I remember our cruise to Hawaii and taking bearings of Diamond Head for the XO. One of the greatest and most humbling experiences was the manning the rails in dress whites with an appreciated and reverend salute to USS ARIZONA and all who perished that December day.

The Post Office where I handed out the mail, the only links we had to love ones back home and how frustrated and angry I was when I learn that our mail had been mis-routed.

I remember the glorious sun set behind Mt Fuji and the depressing slums of Olongapo, and of course, the time we ran out of fresh water and how thirsty we became.

I remember the big five-inch guns blasting away at the coastline of Vietnam and then at night firing illuminating shells so the Marines could see to continue their battle. That's when I moved to a lower bunk because my top rack was filled with paint chips and asbestos dust.

I remember buying the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club patch to go on my work jacket with the other patches as a map of memories to all the places I had been.

Then there was an oyster I purchased in Japan that was guaranteed to have a pearl growing in it; a material reminder from King Solomon that God has treasures hidden all over his beautiful earth. I sent it back home to my girl friend where she set it in a ring to reveal my love for her.

I remember how lonely Christmas was as we sat gazing at the decorated tree with festive holiday music tenderly playing in the background. Even though the adorned mess decks were crowded, it was unusually quiet throughout. No one was talking, and we all wondered if our family would think of us during this special season. I overheard Melvin softly whisper, "Happy Birthday Jesus!" God, we were so young and innocent.

I remembered how awful it was the first time we ran out of milk and eggs and went to powered, but then I remember how good ice cream was and how enjoyable the weekly "Star Trek" and "Mission Impossible" TV series could be.

Learning new card games from friends on the mess decks. I didn't realize then, but we were becoming more than just friends; we were an elite Destroyer Family.

Finally, I remembered my last evening aboard EVANS, a new movie on the mess decks, then laughing, talking and playing cards in a smoke filled Sonar room until almost midnight with friends I would only see again in nightmares.

Life on a small ship like our destroyer goes deep in your blood, and of all the men aboard, I hate that I can remember so few, especially on this Memorial Day when as the postal clerk, I should be able to remember everyone onboard USS FRANK E. EVANS. I don't want to spoil it by forgetting any crew member especially one of the 74, for this is their day.

On the 3rd day of every June, I'll be up early to pay my respects. I'll be up late remembering. SALUTE!

USS Frank E Evans (DD-754)