

Midshipman Summer Cruise Memories

Soon after Christmas 2021 several of our classmates engaged in an exchange of entertaining emails about Youngster Cruise experiences in 1960. This led Jim DeFrancia to add an account of his adventures on First Class Cruise. Extracts from six of the emails are copied below.

From Dave Thornhill:

Holystoning. I also did youngster cruise aboard MACON CA-132 with Spencer and about 300 other classmates and a few members of USNA '61 on their 1st class cruise. I liked holystoning...out in the fresh air and sunshine...sure beat working down in the boiler rooms where the temps were 120 F +.

As I remember, the chant used was:

1 and a 2 and a 3 and a 4

5 and a 6 and a little bit more

9, 10, 11, 12

13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, switch

On the switch we all backed up one board and started the chant again.

We were barefoot, dungaree trou rolled up to knees, and tee shirts. I wish I could remember the name of the big 1/c Bosun's Mate who supervised us. Quite a character. There was no doubt he was in control.

From Tom Taylor:

To join in on the conversation, here is what the process looked like on the New Jersey, BB-62, in 1968 enroute to Vietnam. The deck was Teak, very hard wood. Pumice and sea water kept it smooth and a stainless light tan color. Holystoning goes back a long way. Sailors in 1968 didn't know many sea chanties, so they kept time with songs like 'Row, Row, Row your Boat," and "Take me out to the Ball Game." My time on NEW JERSEY was like living a history lesson.

From Neil Smart:

I have enjoyed the sea story tutorials on the fine art of holystoning and chant singing, Alas, I cruised the USS Northampton (CLC1) up and down the east coast from Bermuda to Montreal – the inaugural cruise up the Saint Lawrence. I did not holystone, though - as a choir and glee club guy - I might have added support to those chants! My penance was to descend alone to the hull of the ship – under the boilers, turbines and evaporators to wipe down the oil and slime down there. It was gooey red paint (uuugh) and oil – but it was so cool! The thought of being an inch or so from the sea beneath and the massive equipment above would not go away for that 4 hours or so.

That recollection had a lot to do with my going Army. I have wiped down the bottoms of several boats since then– but my feet were on the ground!

From Dave Lutes:

I have to agree with you that summer cruise was no vacation. I really had a difficult situation. On a destroyer in the Mediterranean we were mostly in port. I was forced to spend time on the beaches of the French Riviera for several weeks and then we were at sea for several hours and arrived in Naples, Italy where I took a break of two weeks to visit Rome. We then went on to Sicily and several of us climbed Mount Etna. Going north, Norway was really difficult. We would go into the nightclub at sundown 2200 hours and leave at sunrise, about 0200. So it goes.

From Jim DeFrancia:

My travails on First Class cruise, as follows:

Joined the destroyer Purdy in northern Italy in Livorno/Leghorn.

Was immediately given 7 days shore leave since the CO advised that we had but one more port call and then would be at sea crossing the Atlantic to Newport for 2-3 weeks.

Returning to the ship after 7 days, left that port for Naples. During the shore leave, had visited Pisa, Milan and other northern Italy areas.

4 days at sea doing drills, and into port at Naples.

Then granted a 9-day shore leave, after which we were to head past Gibraltar and into the North Atlantic.

Spent a few days in Rome, then Naples, then headed to the island of Ischia off the Neapolitan coast, next to Capri.

Was traveling with classmate Doug Tozour.

Checked into a small pension, headed to the beach and we met some German girls.

One spoke French (Doug's language at school) and the other Italian (close enough to my Spanish).

Courted them the following day, as well, and then planned a 3rd day.

Alas, I woke up that 3rd day with truly horrible stomach pains.

Doug and the girls went to the beach.

Pain got worse and I asked the manager of the pension to call me a doctor.

She did, and an ambulance arrived to take me to a small clinic on the island – there was no hospital.

Pension manager said she would advise Doug of events when he and the girls returned.

Doctor at the clinic decided I had to have my appendix removed!

Fortunately, Doug and the girls arrived soon after.

I then went through a 4-language diagnosis and dialog.

Doctor, in Italian: Does this hurt?

Girl #1, in German to her girlfriend: Does this hurt?

Girl #2, in French to Doug: Does this hurt?
Doug to me in English: Does this hurt?
Answer remitted in reversing that chain!

Conclusion: Doug would leave immediately on the next ferry to advise the Navy in Naples to come and get me as I would not agree to any appendix surgery in that clinic!
Night fell soon thereafter.
A restless night with antibiotics and liquids.

About 5 a.m. I was awakened by a voice with a New Jersey accent.
He advised that he was an Italian-American living on the island and had been summoned to assist by the local police.
I think he was a retired Mafiosi.
He said a Navy helicopter was coming for me an about an hour, at first light.

I was put into an ambulance, he joined, and off we went to a large grass field (there was airport).
About 6 a.m. a chopper landed with a Navy doctor and a corpsman.
Immediate assessment of my condition revealed NO appendix problem, but rather chronic gastroenteritis.
Off we flew.

Landed in a school yard opposite the Navy hospital on the hill in Bagnoli.
Stars & Stripes photog taking pictures of the "med evac."
I gave a victory V as they took me off on a stretcher!
Big local news.

In hospital I was put on antibiotics, intravenous hydration, and soft diet.
Advised that I needed to stay 2 days.
Ship was to leave on day 3.

Then suggested to the Navy doctor that perhaps 3 or 4 days in hospital might be prudent as I "felt weak."
He agreed, somewhat knowingly.
Extended the stay.
Ship left for the North Atlantic without me.

Was then discharged and reported to ComSouth.
Given Temp Duty orders and lodged in the Hotel Vesuvio in Naples, with actual duty TBD.
Dining at the "O" Club that evening, met a pretty coed home for the summer, whose father was the 2-star CincSouth.

Invited next day to the house for dinner, he asked how I came to be there.
Told the story and he then had me attached on Temp Duty to his staff.

Proceeded to travel to Marseille, Barcelona, Monaco, and Livorno on his plane as he visited forces in the area.

When back in Naples, still lodging at the hotel, continued to court the young lady. Lots of site seeing, dinners, shopping, and O Club time.

Three weeks later was then ordered back to the US via plane with a stop through Morocco.

Arriving at USNA ahead of those on ships, was asked why I was back early. Presented the Temp Duty orders, explained the story - and was paid for the Temp Duty!

All in all, a great summer cruise!!!! Keeping the world safe for democracy.....!

From Doug Tozour:

Jim DeFrancia was unaware of some of the activities that occurred during his brief visit to the island! But during his day of pain and suffering in our shared room I had the honor of taking the two girls we had met to the beach. It was a very rocky beach but nevertheless it served my purposes. The girls were from northern Italy and wore the smallest bikinis I have ever seen in my life!

When we returned to her room, I was actively involved in attempting to achieve something I had never in my life done before. You can imagine what that might have been! Just after my efforts began the house mother came banging on her door. Of course I was not supposed to be there so I climbed under the bed and the Lassie answered the door and got a screaming explanation of what had happened to our friend Jim. Needless to say, I did not have a clue as to what to do. To this day I do not know how I contacted the ship but I did and they told me that they would send an officer to our house to help coordinate events with the local authorities. I was directed to wait at the dock for this officer. When he arrived, he took charge of activities that were required, and I was sent back to the room to wait. Any thoughts of having a good time that evening were long gone!

When he returned the officer informed me that Jim had been medevaced to the Navy hospital and that I should not worry anymore about his care. Then he informed me that we still had two days of liberty left to spend on the island and he would like to join me so I could show him around. I immediately knew that my freedom had been somewhat limited, but I had no idea how badly until moments later when he informed me that he was also the ship's Chaplain! The next few days were rather constrained, and we soon returned to the ship to complete our voyage on the Dirty Purdy. The next time I saw Jim was several months later at Annapolis when he shared with me all that had occurred on his end. Believe me, we have shared the story with each other several times but each time a new level of knowledge is revealed.

Wow, those were the days!