

“SEA STORIES”

The Fate of the USS Harwood - DD861

(from Julius “Butch” Guzejko - 66-68)

What prompted me to suggest this was an article in the most recent issue of Tin Can Sailor (Jan-Feb-Mar 2017). The article in one of their ongoing features, Destroyer History Notebook, was about my first ship. It was titled, "The Fate of the USS Harwood (DD861)." I served on the Harwood right out of boot camp in 1964 for seven months awaiting a secret clearance to go through before going to oceanography school in Key West. Since my assignment was top secret, my orders simply stated "pre school indoctrination"; go figure. I know what you are thinking, that is, I was a sonarman, but that is another story for another time.

Anyway, when I got off the ship for school, the Harwood was scheduled for a 'West Pac' cruise and Vietnam. During my seven months on the Harwood I made many good friends and exchanged letters for a while during my Key West and later days. Some of the letters were written while the Harwood was in Vietnam off Cape Ley, north of the DMZ.

During that time the Harwood was fired upon by coastal gun emplacements and they took a hit in their mount 51. Now, the article in the Tin Can Sailor paper was different in detail from the many letters about that very incident. Actually, the article sugarcoated it, anyway, at the time the letters meant a lot to me because those sailors were my friends. I can only imagine what they went through.

I do remember the guys were pissed when they went to Japan for R&R and were made to stand off out of sight of land to fix their mount 51 before coming into port. This work required welding a plate to the gun mount and painting it so it would look good before coming in. However, the main point of the article (i.e. 'The Fate of'), was the sinking of it after the Harwood was sold to Turkey and a Turkish aircraft mistakenly took it for a Greek ship and attacked. They bombed and sank her, killing eighty of their own sailors.

This happened in 1974 when Greece underwent a military coup and Turkey invaded Cyprus. I knew this story and the History of the Harwood and her sinking because it was mentioned in Navy History magazine years ago. The article was about destroyers sunk during war time. The Harwood piece stood out because it was different from the US destroyers sunk by enemy action and therefore had its own story. I remember reading it in my kitchen with some people in my house and my reaction was, loudly saying, "the assholes sunk my ship." It seems like these two countries do not like each other and have been at it throughout history.

Editors Note: “Butch” will be attending the reunion in Harrisburg, PA and bringing his trumpet. He will be playing “Taps” at our annual memorial service to be held at Gettysburg.

