

## Where in Hell Did They Go?

by: Garland Davis

They were famous throughout the Navy. The Gut in Barcelona; East Main Street in Norfolk; Flatbush Ave in Brooklyn; The Combat Zone in Boston; The Pike in Long Beach; Market Street in San Francisco; Broadway Street in San Diego; Hotel (Shit) Street in Honolulu; The Honcho in Yokosuka, China Town and Sakuragi-cho in Yokohama; Wanchai in Hong Kong; Buggis Street in Singapore; Magsaysay in Olongapo; and all the other places where fleet sailors congregated. People ask, "Where did they go?" Well shipmate, they didn't go anywhere. You are asking the wrong question. You should ask, "Where did all the fleet sailors go?"

Long ago, on payday night and in the nights following, these streets were a paradise to the North American Blue Jacket. A person could look down the street and see neon signs advertising beer and bars and a sea of white hats bobbing up and down as sailors made their way from bar to bar. At liberty call these became a shopping center for intoxicating beverages and sex. And in some places a PO2 could get that new First Class crow sewn on or that old Third Class crow sewn back on. No need for crows these days. It is all collar and hat devices. Hell, I don't see much need for dress canvas these days. The only time I see it worn is when a ship is leaving or returning from a deployment. With all the straight sailors and females, the gays and lesbians and "don't knows" aboard these days, I figure sailors are shopping for sex closer to home.

The smoking lamp is cold and probably over the side or being saved for recycling or Mary Soo (forget her, CumShaw is Fraud, Waste, Abuse and misappropriation of government property. I'll tell a story about the consequences of CumShaw some time.) Instead of trading useless gear to Mary Soo for painting the ship, the Navy now recycles and lets a multi-thousand dollar contract to get the job done. Smoking is now frowned upon. Surface ships limit smoking to a tiny, uncomfortable topside space. My shipmates in the Bubble Head world can no longer smoke anyplace aboard the boat. Municipalities and states have also jumped on the bandwagon and banned smoking in bars and restaurants. Drive past any bar or lounge and you will see a group standing on the corner smoking and no, they cannot bring their drinks outside. It is against the law to drink in public.

Drinkers are now pariahs in our modern Navy. The clubs are closed. They no longer exist or have been converted to MWR game rooms where the strongest drink available is a f@@king Red Bull. Quarterdecks of ships, in addition to a podium, log books, long glass, and weapon are now equipped with a Breathalyzer and probably a watch stander to operate it. Many commands are requiring that sailors refrain from drinking the day prior to a duty day.

Back in the day, a sailor ashore knew that his shipmates had his back. Whether in a confrontation with a sailor from another ship, marines, or Limeys, he knew his shipmates would stand with him. Too much to drink? A shipmate would help you back aboard and even help you to your rack. You would do the same for him. These days, you are assigned a "Liberty Buddy." You are to stay together and, I guess, keep each other from drinking or smoking. With the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", I guess a dalliance with a

“Rump Ranger” would be okay. But, before you go ashore, you have to formulate a “Liberty Plan” and get it approved by your Department/Division Liberty Coordinator. If during your liberty, you or your Liberty Buddy change your plan, you must contact your Liberty Coordinator and get the change approved. I surmise that, “I’ll be in the Barrio some place getting fucked up, blown and laid.” Would not be an acceptable liberty plan. Always worked for me!

They were more than streets and bars. First and foremost, they were the repositories of small bits and pieces of the history of America's forces afloat. They were the unofficial clubhouses of those of us who went to sea on old gray steel under the flag of the United States. They were places where a thirsty bluejacket could go and park his ass where sailors of earlier fleets had parked theirs. They were the poor man's Valhalla, where lads who plowed deep salt water, could go and share fellowship and sea stories with fellow practitioners of the nautical arts... A place where well-intentioned exaggeration and bullshit-gilded flawed recollection were readily forgiven and accepted.

They were places where lonely strays could tie up alongside a warm feminine fanny on a cold night... For a few bucks, and sometimes love.

**Where did the streets and the bars go you ask? Where the f@@k did the sailors go?**