

A Fond Farewell ***USS Holland, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 1996***

The afternoon of a Hump day, and the week had already gone to hell and back, twice, but it looked like things were starting to improve. Of course, how bad could it get – I was living in Hawaii. The LPO had told me to do a short inspection on the sub berthed at the north end of the building.

I packed my bag and took a short detour past the Coke machine on the way out the door into the bright Hawaiian sunshine. As I popped open my soda can I took a right turn at the end of the building and stopped dead in my tracks. At the pier, across the basin from the sub, was a sub tender, a tender with AS-36 on the bow and stern. It was the USS *Holland*, the first tender I'd served on, way back in 1980 when it was in Holy Loch, Scotland, and after that in Charleston, South Carolina.

I have many, many fond memories of living in Scotland. My country apartment was a mere 100 yards from the banks of the Clyde River. I could put on my muck boots at low tide and dig clams. It was, and still is, the most beautiful place I have lived. And now, here it was at Pearl Harbor, but it looked odd, the waterline was high out of the water, she was riding pretty high.

Rattling over the sub's aluminum brow, I saluted and requested permission to board. While my ID was checked against the access list, I asked the top watch if he knew anything about the tender across the way. He did. He told me it was the *Holland*, and it was on its way to the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet near San Francisco for decommissioning. I've never been sentimental about machines, and mostly scoffed at those who spoke emotionally about 'their' ships, yet with that news I experienced sadness. I decided that I'd stay in uniform at liberty, walk over to the *Holland* and say goodbye. I wondered how I'd feel prowling the passageways, shops, mess decks and berthing where I'd spent so much of my time in the early 1980s.

I finished the inspection and got back to the shop in time for clean up, so I finished my area and told the LPO I was going over to the *Holland*. It was a short sight distance to the *Holland*, but a long walk around the basin. As I walked down the pier I resolved to make sure, if I got aboard, to go to the ships store and buy an enlisted *Holland* ball cap.

I climbed the ladder to the platform, rattled my way up to the aft quarterdeck. I saluted and requested permission to come aboard. The OOD quizzed me as to the purpose of my visit. I told him that I'd been assigned to the *Holland* when it was anchored in Holy Loch. He said that several former crewmembers had visited, and invited me aboard to go look around. I thanked him, and headed forward and down on the port side.

I opened the first door I came to, slid down the handrails to the bottom where I found the passageway leading to the mess decks. I'd done that hundreds of times on my way to breakfast.

On the mess decks I found an empty, quiet place, which was sort of spooky. I saw it wasn't as clean as we had kept her, which was only logical with only a small crew decomm crew aboard. It was also quiet, which was a bit unnerving – during the day a ship is always humming with voices- the ship was missing what made a ship a living thing - the buzz of life, of lots of people talking and going about their daily business, doors slamming, fans whirring, diesels rumbling and decks vibrating. All those sounds that make up the heartbeat of a living ship, and when it is off you notice.

I sat down on the mess decks just to listen and watch. From my memories came the vision of torpedoes being loaded during meals. They came in a side hatch, then moved by

shrieking, air driven hoists to long, narrow hatches in the aft part of the mess decks, where they were lowered deep to the bowels of the torpedo shops and magazines.

I decided to prowl, so I moved aft using the port passageway. I made my way past emergency power cables, remote valve operators, berthing spaces, offices, fire main jumpers and the myriad furnishings that makes up a functioning war ship, but this was no longer a functioning warship; a lot of equipment was missing.

Passing through a couple of hatches I approached the hatch to what I now remembered was the RADCON passage way. Just before the hatch was a ladder that beckoned me to climb it up to the 01 level. Long dormant memories were directing my steps now. I found the foundry, the periscope and optical shop, the coke machines. I came to a ladder, climbed it and at the top exited onto weather decks on the starboard, 02 level, then walked aft till I came to the CO2 recharge shop, which had been my office as damage control 3M coordinator. I'd shared that tiny space with Günter, another PO2 who later had gone UA to Germany. A year later at work he was surrounded by the FBI, only to escape by lying under some trash in a friend's pickup truck. Strangely, after going through all that he turned himself in a few days later and was returned to the *Holland*. Remarkably, at request mast, he got out of it.

I turned to survey Pearl Harbor, to look at the Arizona memorial, Ford Island, the dive tower and other landmarks of historical import to the Navy. But, in my memory I shouldn't have been able to see them at all from the recharge shop door. Something was missing, and that something was the T-shed. The T-shed was a sheet metal building that had been built on the flight deck to provide extra storage for supply department. I had always the T-shed because it blocked my view of the spectacularly green and beautiful highlands surrounding Holy Loch.

I retraced my steps, going down and forward, finding myself again at the port hatch to the RADCON passageway. This time I opened it, crossed to its twin opposite, and opened it. The handle creaked, and the door groaned as I swung it aside to reveal what I thought the heart of a repair ship, the machine shop. It was eerily quiet, far different from the space that had been filled with the shriek of metal being machined, motors whirring, pounding, tools dropping, people talking and oftentimes much cursing.

The machine shop was nearly over the engine rooms, so I could hear the rumblings and feel the vibrations of the big, weird opposed piston diesels through my feet, a sound and feeling that had always been a comfort, silenced only during the overhaul. I remembered, just after I'd gotten to the *Holland*, a story a machinery repairman told me about a lathe that had broken free of its moorings during a storm. He said they'd had to literally go in like cowboys and lasso the thing and tie it down.

After passing through the aft machine shop door I came to a space I'd never been inside of; the Poseidon Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) magazine. I'd passed this magazine countless times, curious of its contents, but never dared show that curiosity lest the Marines guarding become too curious of me, but this time the door was wide open, not a hint of a Marine anywhere. For the first and last time in my life, I was finally able to look inside the holy sanctum - I even stepped inside. It was a huge space, at least three decks tall and as wide as the ship's beam and seemed fully 100 feet long. The destructive power this space alone had contained during the multiple warhead missile days of the Cold War could have destroyed the world as we knew it...it was beyond the mind to comprehend. Just round the corner from the missile magazine was the ships store, which I found closed. I uttered a quiet curse - I'd really wanted to buy a *Holland* ball cap. I decided to try again as I departed.

I kept going aft, past repair locker 3 and the red door of damage control central (DCC) where I'd stood many watches. The next water tight door was the last door on the 2nd deck, and I climbed a ladder up to the main deck, then through another door and out onto the fantail. I'd spent many a dark night out here on lifeguard watch, some nights awesomely warm and beautiful, and some miserably cold and awful.

I looped around the fantail to the starboard side and reentered the ship. I was in search of the HT shop, R-1 Division, my slot while I was on the *Holland*. After a few turns, I found it looking not much different from what I remembered. There was still the large, central workbench and bulkhead workbenches, but it seemed smaller than I remembered. In the office a couple HTs were relaxing and watching TV. We talked a bit. They said they had little to do as part of the decommissioning crew, and that they did feel sadness at the ship's fate. They asked me how I felt, having been on the *Holland* so many years before. I told them I did feel sad, but it wasn't a deep sadness because it was tempered by all the years gone by since I was last on it. I'd probably feel more were I part of the present crew, full of fresh memories. We chatted for a while, then I bid them goodbye and continued my lurking.

Back up the ladder to the main deck and all the way forward to the anchor windlass room where I'd spent many General Quarters and fire drills leaning against the capstans (A capstan is a vertical electric winch used to reel in lines) as a member of the fwd repair locker. After a pause there I moved aft again, this time down the port side.

I came to a ladder and, for some reason stopped. I decided to go down a deck; maybe I'd find a clue to why I stopped. Halfway down the ladder I remembered that this was the torpedo shop and weight test shop access. I'd worked in the latter, but the shop was locked so I couldn't look in, and the torpedo shop and magazines were empty. I climbed back up the ladder and turned aft.

I came to the port side chow line, the serving windows down and closed. Spaghetti was on the menu for the evening meal, which was one of my favorite meals. I considered staying for one last meal in the First Class Mess, and I was sure I'd be welcome, but I had somewhere I had to be. I walked around to the open galley door on the starboard side chow line, and looking in I remembered an incident in the yards. Two huge microwaves had been installed in the galley, and as I had walked by those many years ago they had turned them on for the first and last time. The insides erupted in a brilliant display of red, yellow, green and orange sparks, a veritable 4th of July fireworks show accompanied by pops and sizzles and smoke pouring out the vents. Lots of yelling and hollering got them turned off. Two days later, they were gone.

I still didn't have my ball cap, so I walked aft again, hoping the ships store would be open, and this time it was, but the cupboard was nearly bare. I asked for an enlisted ball cap, but she (She; we had very few women aboard when I was on the ship, mostly officers) only had command ball caps left. Oddly, despite the effort I made to get that ball cap, I rarely wear it because it feels odd to wear an officers' command ball cap when I was an enlisted crewmember.

I still hadn't visited my berthing, but I couldn't quite remember where it was. I knew it was on the port side, down from the main deck near amidships. So, off I strode till I came to a down ladder that felt right, and it was right. I found my rack and stand-up locker. The rack was devoid of curtains, mattress and emergency escape breathing devices (EEBDs, used for escaping fires). My stand-up locker was dirty and had some papers in it. Looking around I saw most bunks were missing the same stuff that mine was. Sailors liked double mattresses, so I was sure the missing ones had found their way onto racks in the tender that had taken *Holland's* place in Guam. The space was deserted, with only a few bunks looking occupied, and they were clustered near the head. It was a depressing and desolate sight, so I left.

I was beginning to feel the regret, and that 'my' ship was no longer going to sail the vast blue sea, caring for all the souls aboard and bearing them safely to their destination, and back to their loved ones.

It was time to leave. At the quarterdeck I saluted and requested, for the last time, permission to leave the *Holland*. Permission was granted to depart. I stepped onto the platform at the top of the brow, saluted the flag, turned and clattered and bounced my way down to the pier. As I walked away I turned to look at her one more time. In the morning, she was gone.