

From Boy to Seaman

by Harry Zirkelbach

His first physical was at fifteen. He joined the Guard, a pseudo military group, whose entrance physical consisted in stripping, having a beer barrel with neither top nor bottom, placed over his head, assure he was not too fat to have the barrel get stuck on his shoulders, belly or rear, and then see over the barrel top; identify the Colorado flag colors; he had passed the physical; was enlisted.

Later at a birthday, forged documents saying his parents approved, and that he was 17, in 1937 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. That physical took less time, was amazingly thorough. He was trained to San Diego, to begin weeks of Boot Camp with a bunch of strangers. At first roll call he foresaw, he was in a different world.

The Chief Petty Officer and his team made it clear, for those weeks the recruits' Ass and Mind belonged to the Navy and "Yes Sir" or "No Sir" were the only acceptable reply.

At the end of day one, the cadre welcomed Taps and their bunk. Even those who cried, managed their greatest night's sleep. Minutes later, Reveille was a shock; all wanted more sleep; Caesar said no; a repeat of yesterday began.

The large calendar in the Mess Hall mentioning each day of training, showed both days complete, remaining. It was of no consolation those first days.

But gradually he saw in others and himself, new people emerging. Boys, not destroyed, being transformed, becoming men. That's when the training snarls, curses, demands, insults, extra duties, lost their sting. Taps, still welcomed day's end; but Reveille, seen as dawn of a new adventure, further refinement of the boy who had left home slowly realizing that departure had been forever.

When the transformation was complete he thanked each of that Training crew, personally. They had done what Mythology only dreamed.

He was transformed. Entered a boy, graduated a Seaman.