

## **SAM POOL**

### **US NAVY 1962-1966 / SEABEES 1982-1987**

“I joined the Navy when I was 17 years old. Since I was underage, my mom and my dad had to sign for me. I went in as what they call a “Kiddie Cruiser”. I was supposed to get out the day before I was 21. I got extended briefly for Vietnam, but I never had to go because our ship was



in the Naval Shipyard. My Navy career was an adventure for a young man seventeen years old. I had just gotten out of high school. My parents wanted to send me to college, and I said, no I didn't want to go. I didn't want to get drafted; I think I'll just join the Navy. I talked to a recruiter and he said, well you'll have to have your parents sign for you. I said, I'll go ask them. They said, we'd rather you go to college but if that's what you want. I said, I don't want to be drafted into the Army because I had two brothers in the Army and one in the Navy. The one in the Navy was in supply personnel. He said, yeah you want to go in the Navy. You don't want to go in the Army. In the Navy, you'll get three meals a day and a clean place to sleep. It was interesting. There were times I wished I would have stayed in. I was a Machinist Mate. I made a rank of E-6.

“My brother worked for International Harvester. I wanted to be a diesel mechanic when I got out of the Navy. When you come out of boot camp, you have two red stripes. That means you're a fireman, in the engineering department. That's what I told them I wanted to do. The executive officer said you are going to be a fireman. I questioned him. He said what did you expect? I said, I expected to work in the engine room. He said, okay we'll put you in the starboard engine room. So I went and put away all my gear and got acquainted with some of the guys. The next day, I went into the starboard engine room. I said, where's all the diesels at? Stupid me, I thought the engines ran on diesel.

“He said, you're not in A-Gang, you're a Machinist Mate (A-Gang is Navy slang for Auxiliary Division). I said, I know. That's what I wanted to be. They said, you want to go to A Gang if you wanted to be a diesel mechanic. That's where the diesels are...in the back. In the engine room it was steam. Not diesel as I thought. We took the water and sent it to the port and starboard boiler rooms. They make the steam and send it back to us and that's what we turned the turbines with. We had port and starboard screws we turned the turbines with. That's all of our auxiliary power. I said, 'I didn't know that!' I went back and asked if I could change. They said no, we need you in the engine room. We got a slot there for you. I said, okay I wasn't going to argue with anybody. I was only seventeen years old! I was dumb as a block of wood. I didn't

know anything! When I made second class, they needed someone in the A-Gang to work on the refrigeration systems aboard ship. In Norfolk I had attended school for refrigeration. So they put me in A-Gang. That's where I really wanted to go when I came onboard ship. That's where all the diesels were at."

### CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

In late October Pool's ship supported the warships in the Atlantic Fleet for blockade/quarantine of Cuba. *Editor's note: The blockade was ordered by President Kennedy in response to the setting of Soviet Missiles in Cuba. It lasted for 13 days--from 16 October to 28 October, 1962* The ship returned to Norfolk at the end of the crisis.

"I was seventeen years old; I went to bed that night and they sounded general quarters about 11:00 PM (23:00 hours). I knew sounding general quarters for real, that wasn't good! So I jumped up and my GQ was the lower engine room where the pumps and everything were at. The Chief wouldn't tell us where we were going. Later they told us we were going to Cuba because there was some Russians going there. I said 'Oh, no!' I heard about the Russians, but I didn't know a whole lot. I didn't know what was going to happen. I knew about the guys that got torpedoed and killed ?????? 15:05. Down there in the engine room, it's kind of nerve racking, especially to go through that at such a young age. Down in the engine room, you can't hear anything because it's so noisy. Finally we slowed down a little bit they said the other ships had gotten there before we did. During our time in the blockade, you could see approaching ships in the far distance. I stuck my head up a few times to look.



"Another time, we had been in Norfolk getting ready to get underway. Somehow, we went forward, when we were supposed to go aft, and we knocked a hole in the back of a ship tender. The hole was about as big as a door! I looked up out of the engine room and there was a guy standing in the doorway with all this gold on his arms. (I've never seen so much gold on a uniform!) He shouted, "you son-of-a-gun, you get this blankety, blankety ship outta of here and never come back to Norfolk!" When you are on throttles, you open up the main steam valves going to the turbines. That's how you get your revolutions and speed up. *I was lucky I wasn't on the throttles at the time!* I was in the forward engine room at the time. We never went back to Norfolk. We went to Philadelphia Naval Shipyards.

“While patrolling the St. Lawrence seaway our ship ran aground on the way to New York. We were on the St. Lawrence Seaway and we had a tugboat with us – a Harbor Captain - to guide us through the channels. He was on the ship with us and somehow, he told us to go too close to the right shore and he got us over too far. We hit a rock or something and it tore up the starboard screw (propeller). We had to go Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for repairs. All the way back to Philadelphia it was going blub, blub, blub shuddering and vibrating! That’s how we ran aground. The Captain blamed it on the Harbor Captain. I never did hear how that turned out. The Chief would say, ‘that’s past history--don’t talk about it!’ They didn’t want anybody to know anything about it. The repairs to the Barton took about two months and the crew members were placed in a barracks in Philadelphia.

“In 1963 we cruised in Middle East and North Atlantic. We were working alongside the Enterprise with our sister ship, the USS Laffey (DD-724). We trailed the Enterprise and if a plane didn’t make it off the deck, we pulled off to pick those people up (the pilots). That was our main objective and that is what we were doing in the Mediterranean. We made two “Med cruises” during my time.



“One time I stood shore Patrol at a Bowling Alley in Beirut Lebanon. I was scared half to death. I didn’t know what was going to happen! The scariest time on the Mediterranean tour was when we went to Helsinki Sound. We were on a goodwill tour along with our sister ship the Laffey. We went right through the Russian Operational area near Helsinki. I remember getting up that morning and going to chow and I walked out in the after-birthing – where we were at – I turned around and didn’t see anything but ships all around us with big red stars on them. They were all around us! They

had their goggles out looking at us. We were on the fantail (rear or aft deck of a ship) looking at them. They were trying to cause an accident. They would pull in front of us. We had to have an emergency backdown to get the destroyer to stop. (We had to shut it down, back up in order not to run into these guys.)

“They were trying to cause a national incident going through their operation area. I thought, my God where did all these ships come from? There were big ships, small ships maybe 30-40 of them. This is the area they performed all their operations exercises just like we did in the Mediterranean. There was a British Escort taking us through there at this time. They’d go right

alongside of us. Just a few hundred feet off our beam. It was kind of scary! It was just our two ships (Barton and Laffey) and the British escort.

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“After the Cuban missile crisis and our close encounter with the Russians in Helsinki Sound, we went into reserve fleet. We were in Philadelphia and we took the reservists out for their two weeks active duty. They would be aboard ship learning what to do and all that other stuff. We’d return to Philadelphia and ready the ship for the next reserve trip and take another bunch out. This was the latter part of 1965-1966.

“The USS Barton was the only ship I was ever on for all four years.

“I came out of the Navy and worked in Heating and Air Conditioning in St. Louis and later when to work for Monsanto. One of the guys I worked with said, why don’t you join the Seabees? I said, I’m too old. He said, no you’re not. So, in 1984 I joined the Seabees.

“I entered the Seabees under a program keep my E-6 status, if I completed the required home study courses in three years. I was in Granite City while in the Seabees. I was in a hospital unit. Our mission was to set up hospitals. I was a UT First Class. We were responsible for the water supply. We went out there and took these containers. From what I understand, they were stationed in Europe. When war broke out, they’d bring these containers in to certain areas in the rear. It was sort of like a MASH unit. We set up operating rooms, recovery rooms, and barracks. We had one container that was nothing but showers. We were responsible for the laundry. After three years, I joined a “ship build” for two years. So, I was in the Navy for a total of nine years. Just after I got out, they were deployed to Iraq in Desert Storm.

“While in the reserves, we’d go to schools on the weekend and put up swing sets. One of our two weeks active duty, we went to an Air Force base in Indiana and put in an irrigation system on their golf course. It was pretty neat duty putting in all the plastic water lines. We even put in water for the restrooms out on the golf course.

I probably should have stayed in the Seabees and completed my twenty years. But I just couldn’t do it. I was trying to raise a family at that time and had two young kids.

“I was a tinkerer. I worked for the Heating and Air Conditioning company for 17 years. Then I worked for Monsanto for 15 years as a pipefitter. In 1997 another company came in and offered us a separation package. I took the package. I went to Boeing and worked for them about a year. I received an offer to back and work for Washington Group for about five years. I retired in 2001. After about three years, I went back for a special project bending stainless tubing. I could make my own hours. It was supposed to last about a month. It ended up lasting about a year. One day they came up to me and said, we’re going to let you go. We’ve got enough money

where we can hire a fulltime fitter. I said, thank you very much because I was about ready to quit anyhow.”

*Sam spends some time working with wood these days. He cuts out Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine figures and paints them. They are 36” tall and made from 4x4’s. Sam also volunteers for Honor Flights. He and his wife volunteer at Lambert and hold the flags.*

*Samuel E. Pool, 12-15-2019*

Editor’s note: USS Barton (DD-722), a Sumner Class Destroyer was launched in 1943. The Barton received six battle stars for her service in WW2. It was decommissioned in 1969. When the USS Barton was decommissioned, it was used for target practice. During a reunion a few years back, rumor circulated that they tried to sink it but couldn’t. They had to send divers aboard to set off charges to blow it up before it would sink. The forward section of the wreck was discovered by Robert Ballard in 1992. To date, the stern section has not been located.

The USS Barton was damaged twice during conflicts. It was shelled during the Korean War and it took out one of the guns and on another occasion, it hit a landmine and killed a number of sailors.