

Pete Ashen's Experience with the
USS Salisbury Sound (AV-13)



Claude "Pete" Ashen

Claude "Pete" Ashen was a sailor during WW11. He wanted to be a navy pilot like his Uncle John but due to hay fever he had to choose a different naval path. He took the Captain Eddy test and entered the navy as Seaman 1st class as a kiddie cruiser. When Pete and his DeMolay buddy boarded the troop train in Los Angeles, they heard the returning vets say in unison, "You'll be sorry."

*On the trip to the Great Lakes Boot Camp, some sailors got off the train went to the near by store while the train was stopped. They returned with a case of beer to the cheering sailors. The train continued on its way. A military policeman came into the car and saw the case of beer and asked, **"Who does this beer belong to?"** Instead of answering, a group of sailors rushed him and pushed him out of the open door of the moving train. What an intro to military life.*

At boot camp Pete learned to be a man who followed orders from marching to washing his own clothes and cleaning the head. There were lessons in fire fighting in a big metal pit and how to handle ropes and lines. Finally, Pete went to radio and electronics school. He was promoted to Aviation Radio Technician 2nd class.

Here is his account about being aboard the USS Salisbury Sound (AV-13):

I was given my orders to report to my ship, the USS Salisbury Sound (AV-13) in San Diego in 1947. I got off the train in San Diego. Everyone was willing to help a young sailor with his sea bag over his shoulder and asking for directions. I was told to go down to the pier and catch the Nickel Stature. The Nickel Stature was a boat shuttle service from San Diego out to the North Island where ships were tied up. I got off at North Island and asked where the USS Salisbury Sound was docked and sailors pointed it out down at the pier. I could see it and hoisted my sea bag on my shoulder to walk down the pier. I got to the seaplane tender and saw an odd looking ship. The front of the ship looked like the front of a regular ship but the back was cut off. It was made to hoist seaplanes out of the water with large cranes. Seaplanes were to be hoisted onto the ship for maintenance and repairs. The seaplane tenders would provide the support to maintain the crew's food, and

quarters and maintenance for the ship and the seaplanes in ports while they were at sea-drome control.

When I first stepped aboard the USS Salisbury Sound, I was a second class Petty Officer. I gave my papers to the ship's officer at the quarterdeck and he welcomed me aboard. He had a fellow shipmate take me to the air department quarters. They got me a bunk and a locker. I was told to get up to the galley for dinner and to report to my air department the next morning on the hangar deck. I would be introduced to my division officer.

The next morning I learned the ship was leaving the next day to go to Buckner Bay, Okinawa. I was quickly introduced to the responsibilities of a new 2nd class petty officer. I had to learn my aviation technician's rate, my general quarter's responsibilities, and my firefighting responsibilities. I also needed to learn my mates of the aviation equipment at the place we were maintaining in the air radio office which was on the second deck just up from the big hangar deck. I found that I was in charge of air radio. As a 2nd class there was a 1st class aviation electrician mate who was senior but he was not in charge of the air office. I was responsible for the air office for radar and electronics. I had a 2nd class aviation radio man and a 2nd class aviation electrician on the ship. My under way responsibility was to be a lookout on the deck below the bridge, starboard side, inside by a life raft. There was a latch to release the life raft in case a man went overboard.

We left Okinawa to go to our new assignment at Tsingtao, China. Our aircrafts would be flying from Buckner Bay to Tsingtao where we were setting up a sea-drome control in Tsingtao. Tsingtao supported the Chiang Kai-shek Chinese Nationalist Air Force. The Navy in Tsingtao now had a Navy destroyer tender and several destroyers that were at the dock. The USS Salisbury Sound would be the seaplane tender that would anchor out in the bay. Seaplanes would land in the water hooking

up to anchors and the crew would live aboard the USS Salisbury Sound. We were a support providing maintenance and crew for the squadron operations.

In route from Okinawa to China we were involved in a typhoon in the China Sea. One of our aircraft, a PBM, flying that route got caught in the typhoon and crashed landed in the water. Then our ship's captain, on hearing of this crisis, immediately deferred the ship to that site. When we spotted the plane in the water in the middle of the storm, our ship's captain ordered us to pull alongside the PBM. We put our hoist out above the stern. The captain called the USS Salisbury Sound to be put alongside up in front of the seaplane, facing into the wind. Then slowly we backed down to the seaplane. The waves were crashing and the winds were howling around us but we were so occupied we did not notice. We lowered the stern hoist to pick up the seaplane. I worked with two other crew members. We had a long aluminum pole about 22 feet long with a rubber bumper on the end of the pole. There was another team at starboard with their long pole. We tried to stabilize the seaplane to bring it aboard. We got the hoist hook down to the seaplane. The crew aboard hustled around and got it hooked up to the ship's hoist. The waves were rising and falling during the typhoon. Then our ship was picked up by a **huge** wave. The ship's stern popped up very quickly and the PBM and the water dropped down rapidly. Suddenly, the seaplane was not in the water any more but swinging in midair. We literally snatched the PBM out of the water and up in the air with its wings flapping around. Our two teams with the poles were posted to keep that seaplane from flopping around in the air and crashing into the side of our ship. Our ship's captain was screaming at the hoist master to get the hoist up as high as possible and to turn the hoist around to bring the seaplane around and over the hangar deck. We lowered the seaplane onto the deck's fitting to tie it down to the ship. The captain ordered the hoist master to lower the plane so the crew could detach the hoist from the seaplane and return the hoist to its

neutral position facing aft. The seaplane's crew came aboard the ship. The skipper shouted, "Job well done! Good work everybody! The ship's mess hall is open for a hot meal."

We thought we had a job well done. We made a rescue during the middle of the typhoon. We hoisted the PBM aboard the ship which was quite an episode. The USS Salisbury Sound proved to be seaworthy even in a typhoon.

Due to a family emergency, I returned to United States soil. My grandmother pulled through so I was sent to the Treasure Island Naval Base. The USS Salisbury Sound was returning also to the United States also. While at Treasure Island waiting for the ship to return for dry dock, I was temporally assigned as the petty officer escorting prisoners from the brig to where they were being held for court-martial, as an armed guard.

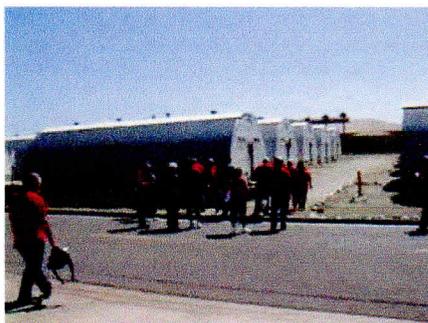


Dry dock at Hunters Point

The USS Salisbury Sound returned to the Hunters Point Navy Shipyard to go into dry dock. I checked aboard ship and was given leave to go home to Montebello so I could marry my bride-to-be Catherine Grandin. We were married in the Montebello Methodist Church on December 28, 1947. My father came up from his job in Taft to the church. I asked him if we could borrow his car to go on our honeymoon. He stammered and finally said okay. Uncle Steve can give me a ride home. We borrowed his car and went to Long

Beach for our first night as a married couple. Later we went to Pismo Beach to complete our honeymoon. On New Year's Day, we went out onto the beach to join in the clam digging contest. I found a clam. At the clam dinner we had a good time.

We returned to Taft to return the car to dad and Catherine stayed with her parents since we did not have housing yet. I took a bus back to San Francisco. I reported back aboard ship. I requested off base housing. Catherine came up later and she stayed in a hotel. Finally, I was given housing quarters in a Quonset hut next to the base. The Quonset hut had two bedrooms, bathroom, a living room, a dining room and kitchen. So I got my keys to go move in. While waiting at the bus stop to go back into downtown San Francisco to pickup Catherine, I met another sailor¹ getting off the ship to go pick up his new bride. They were just married up in Oregon. He was complaining that he was not able to get a housing unit away from the base. He did not know what to do. I said not to worry and held up my keys for the Quonset hut. I told him to pick up his bride and I will pick up mine and we will get a cab and go out to share the Quonset hut as our temporary home. Neither of our new brides knew what was happening to them. As it turned out, both women became pregnant and both got along just fine while we were there for a few months.



Row of Quonset huts

¹ The sailor was the ship's photographer, Hal. If any one knows what became of him or where his family is living, please let me know. My e-mail address is peteashen@yahoo.com. Thank you so much.

We lived in the Quonset hut which was next to the base theater. Every night, the ship's crew that lived aboard the ship would go walking by to go to the movies. They frequently would come by Quonset hut, rapping on the door as they went by to let us know that we were being watched.

Ship went into dry dock for overhaul repairs. We were doing inventory of our repair supplies for the seaplanes that we were taking care of and putting in supplies orders to refill all repair parts so the ship would be ready to go back out to take care of planes flying in the Pacific Ocean. As the petty officer in charge of aviation radio and radar maintenance, I was responsible for the inventory and ordering of supplies to maintain the aircraft's electronic.

On Sundays, when I had duty as petty officer of the watch, my wife Catherine could come aboard the ship to visit. One day after having lunch, we went up to the aviation radio repair room which was on the second deck above the hangar deck. One of my friends came up with us and put a padlock on the door after we got inside so we could have some privacy. We had just settled in our radio room where there was a mattress available when we worked the night duty. In a few minutes the public address system aboard the ship said, "**Attention, attention, Ashen AT2 report to the quarterdeck. Ashen AT2 report the quarterdeck.**" Without delay, another announcement went off, "**Air duty officer, Ashen AT2 report to quarterdeck immediately!**" As panic set in, I realized I had no way to contact the friend who had padlocked the outside of the door. There was one small porthole which looked out of the side of the ship. I looked out the porthole and could see straight down all away to the bottom of dry dock. I managed to wiggle through holding on with my fingers and pulled myself across the side over to the edge past the front of the radio room and dropped down on the deck inside the ship. I hurried down the ladder to the quarterdeck to see my friend watching me. Many of

Tsingtao is now called Qingdao.

After we rescued our down seaplane, we continued our trip to Tsingtao. The United States Navy was being sent to Tsingtao to help out Chiang Kai-shek, the head of the Chinese Nationalist army. They were fighting against the Chinese Communists who were trying to push Chinese Nationalist out of China. The US Navy was maintaining support to Chiang Kai-shek by means of the USS Salisbury Sound. The seaplane tender was anchored in the harbor acting as sea-drome control for the squadrons. The PBM patrol bombers planes would land in the water. We had anchors placed so the plane crew could hook up to an anchor, and board the ship. They would sleep aboard the ship. The ship would act as a repair shop for the planes by providing them with fuel, ammunition and bombs.

Meanwhile, in Tsingtao we had an airbase which provided flying arrangements for United States Marine and the Chinese Nationalist airplanes. They were flying in and out of the airbase at Tsingtao, China. The outside of China was surrounded by the Communist Chinese. So we were actively concerned about being in a protective mode aboard ship. We held "repel boarders" drills every single week because we fully expected at any time that the Communist Chinese would try to attack to take over all of the U.S. Navy materials, facility ships and planes. It didn't happen but we were on constant alert in fear of being boarded.

My role aboard ship was to do repairs on the electronics radar of all of our ships and planes. We would repair some planes in the water or if we had to, we hoisted the seaplanes aboard the ship for ongoing repairs. Another duty was to act as the sea-drome tower control, giving instructions for planes returning from missions and planes taking off like an airbase tower control would be at an airport. My shipboard responsibility, in general quarters, was response and repel boarders response. First, I had a 50 mm

machine gun that was just below starboard bridge. Later I had a quad 40 mm mount. It was on the main deck near the bow. It was for a 40 mm automatic machine gun mounted in a quad mount turret that would rotate a full 300° so we could direct all the machine guns at either boats in the water or planes in the air that might be attempting to do harm to our ship. We had to be alert all the time since lives depended on it.

We did not spend all our time aboard ship. Sometimes we had Cinderella Liberty to go ashore. Our liberty would start around 4:00 PM and end at midnight. If you were not on the liberty boat at midnight, you were arrested and taken to the brig aboard ship. So midnight was the bewitching hour.

When I had the opportunity to go on liberty with my buddies in Tsingtao, we discovered that we would be greeted when we got off our liberty boats by young rickshaw drivers. They wanted to sign you up to hire them as your rickshaw driver. We found out that it was common practice among sailors go to have rickshaw races from wherever you are to one person's favorite bar to another favorite bar. The last guy to arrive at the bar had to pay for the next round of drinks. There was a sense of urgency because you were trying to encourage your driver to pull you faster than the other drivers. It was almost an inhumane attitude for a one man to pull another in the rickshaw but we tipped them well.



<http://www.usshector.com/tsingtao.html>

To be a real Chinese sailor, you had to get a real Chinese tattoo. The Chinese tattoo showed manhood, ala Navy sailor manhood. One night my sailor buddies decided to get tattoos. So we got off the liberty boat and got our rickshaws. After going to the bar for drinks, we went to the tattoo parlor to become real men. While standing in the line watching all my colleagues getting their hands, arms, legs, backs and various parts tattooed, I noticed the tattoo artist mopping up blood as he continued making injections. This did not look too good so I would move myself backwards in the line. I continued to move to the end of the line. Finally, it was time to return to the ship before midnight. So, I did not get a tattoo and I'm glad I did not.

One of my assignments on shore duty was shore patrol. I remember one time going over to Tsingtao in the shore patrol boat. We went to the shore patrol office to see the lieutenant who was in charge that night. We broke into our patrol assignments. One of our visits was to the largest house of ill-repute in Tsingtao. This is the house that sailors who were still virgins were taken to become "men." Those sailors were known as cherry boys. When we walked in to this house of ill-repute, the shore patrol officer and three shore patrolmen in our uniforms, one of the young girls came

running out giggling and pointing, said to our shore patrol officer, "Last night you come as Playboy. Tonight you come as shore patrol officer." The officer blushed.

Poverty in China was so intense; it's very hard to comprehend. For example, aboard ship we would have Chinese workers come out every day and do the hard labor working around the edges of the ship. They worked in the laundry or in the galley. They did the hard labor for minimal rates. I found out one method of payment was when they would leave the ship, they would take the big 5 gallon cans of garbage. In town they would put them out on the street over a fire. The garbage became food for the Chinese people. Another thing I could not believe what I saw was a man lying dead on the street. Another man came over and took a hammer and broke out his teeth, stealing his teeth for the gold. The poverty of China was hard to comprehend.

When in town, I did enjoy shopping and looking for things for my family and friends back home. Vases and kimonos were fascinating to look at and buy.

Being in Tsingtao was an interesting time in my life.

The US government had sold planes to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist Air Force. We had provided training for their pilots in the United States but we did not have training for their mechanics, nor their men maintaining the weapons used on the planes like the machine guns, torpedoes and bombs. This presented many interesting situations. One situation is where one of the Chinese pilots would announce, "Landing instructions, please." This meant that they were going to land with or without landing instructions. We tried to stop them many times from landing until we could give proper directions and clearance. From the base we would fire rockets or fire flares in the air. We yelled and waved them off not to land but once they said, "landing instructions,

please" they were going to land the plane. This made for many tense moments.

They seem to understand pretty well about adding fuel and petroleum oil but they didn't understand the maintenance of the machine guns on the planes or the handling of bombs. They were loading 500 pound bombs aboard passenger planes. Then they would fly over the Chinese Communists and roll the bombs out the airplanes to drop them. No one had told them they needed to put a fuse into the bomb so the bomb would explode upon landing. The bombs were pushed out of the airplanes and came hurtling down but they would not explode upon impact. It was just a 500 pound piece of metal falling through the air that did not explode.

The fighter planes we sold to the Chinese Nationalists had 50 caliber machine guns facing forward in action. One, two or three of those machine guns were firing when they were going out on patrol because they didn't know how to fix a jammed machine gun if it got locked up. So it was a very difficult time was the liaison of the Americans supporting Chiang Kai-shek's effort to stave off the attacks of the Chinese Communists.

In order to support the Chiang Kai-shek Nationalist Party, the US government allowed US Navy personnel trained in the maintenance of aircraft weaponry and bombs to be discharged at the convenience of our government for the purposes of permitting them to be accepted as officers in the Chinese Nationalist Air Force. The deal was that you would be a lieutenant in the Chinese Nationalist Air Force and be paid \$1000 a month plus your housing and meal cost plus \$1000 a month to be deposited in your bank in San Francisco, California. This seemed like a real opportunity to play the role of Terry and the Pirates from the comic strip. I talked to my executive officer on the USS Salisbury Sound about this offer. He said it was an official offer but he certainly would not encourage any one to accept it. He said you don't speak

Chinese. You will be here and surely sooner or later Chiang Kai-shek is going to have to fly out to Formosa probably in the middle of the night and those Americans who speak English will wake up in the morning to find all of the Chinese Nationalists had left and the area would be surrounded by Chinese Communists which would be a very sad condition.

Shortly after that discussion, I was aboard ship to hear, "Ashen, ATEM-2 report to the executive office." There was a message from my grandmother's doctor in Montebello, California, via the American Red Cross, requesting my presence back home because my grandmother who raised me was very sick. They were asking for an "emergency leave" to bring me home for her. The executive officer had a huge smile on his face as he read the notice to me and said, "Go pack your sea bag. There is a plane flying out in two hours going back to Pearl Harbor." That was my first priority and I forgot about becoming an officer in the Chinese Nationalist Air Force. I flew back to Hawaii in a PBM. The Navy had a big passenger seaplane that flew from Honolulu to San Francisco. The seaplane took off in the water and landed in the water. I arrived back in the states at the Alameda Naval Air Station in the San Francisco Bay. Then I had to get transportation from San Francisco to Montebello which is about 350 miles south. I hitch hiked back to Montebello to see my grandmother. Grandma was doing better. Now I needed to wait for my ship to return to San Francisco Naval Shipyard for my next adventure.

Thank you for taking the time to read Pete Ashen's account of being in the Navy and on the USS Salisbury Sound (AV-13). He speaks warmly of that time of his life. He wanted to be present in person at the Sally reunion but is happy to send this account instead. After his time in the Navy, Pete spent about thirty years with the American Red Cross. He has enjoyed married life with his sweetheart for 65 years. They now live in a retirement village near their son and daughter.

If you would like to contact Pete in person, here is his information:

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