

“If You Can’t Tap Dance”

By: Garland Davis



We grew up in the “Cold War Navy”. There were more than six hundred ships, most left over from World War II and showing the effects of their age. Some had been Fram’d, jumboized, or rebuilt to extend their usefulness. But, they were still old, rusty, and showing their age. Most were overcrowded and uncomfortable. We kept them clean, sharp and operational. No one told us we couldn’t do any damned thing that we decided needed to be done.

It was a time that we refer to as the “Old Navy” or the “Real Navy” as opposed to today’s Navy with modern new technologically superior (?) ships that don’t work, sailors who don’t know how to make them work, who wear khaki and black uniforms and “Blueberry” dungarees that make one wonder if they are sailors or trying to look like a bastardized version of the Marine Corps.

Today’s diverse, politically correct and socially relevant Navy with male and female sailors who identify as Homosexuals, Lesbians, Transvestites, and Transgenders all serving together raises the question, “Is there anyone who identifies as a Heterosexual, a Boatswain’s Mate, a Machinist’s Mate, or a real sailor any longer?”

On many ships, smoking tobacco is no longer permitted or is frowned upon. I remember a time when it was almost impossible to see the evening movie for the cloud of blue smoke that filled the mess decks. When you were out of smokes, all you had to do was go to the movie and breath for your shot of nicotine.

We served during a time when shipboard sailors wore “steamer” dungarees straight from the laundry bag and they showed every wrinkle and hand lettered stencil. The newer Seafarer pressed dungarees were saved for inport. It was a time before all the embroidered unit ball caps. We wore the old shapeless “Blue Working Cap” or a dirty threadbare white hat with our dungarees.

We all served during the era that proceeded something called the “Don’t ask, don’t tell policy.” If a person was queer, you couldn’t ask them and they shouldn’t tell you. A common method of establishing heterosexuality in my Navy was when some drunk

staggered up from his barstool and yelled, “Any Son-of-a-Bitch in Here That Can’t Tap Dance is Queer!”

And all the other drunks in the place would jump up and go into gyrations as if they were spastically stomping piss ants to immediately prove their passion was still for Asian girls packaged in frilly bras and lace panties. Their efforts at tap dancing also established that Gene Kelly and Bing Crosby had no worries about job security. It was a time before liberty buddies and liberty plans. If there was any planning to a liberty, it was to allocate how much of his meager pay a sailor would relegate to cigarettes, alcohol, getting laid, more alcohol, and transportation back to the ship. If there was any money left he recklessly fooled it away at the ship’s store buying toothpaste, soap, and shaving cream.

It was a time when we were all invincible. And being invincible, we would never grow old.

That was a long time ago. Someone stole our invincibility and we grew old. So old that about all we can do is haul our asses to Branson, Missouri each May to live it all vicariously in the stories we tell and laugh about. That and calling the urologist for some Viagra to boost the hydraulics of the gear we tap danced for.

And we got Fat – Ugly – Ornery - More worthless and not a lot smarter. But we are smart enough to know that the crap coming out of Washington and the assholes we deal with at the VA is the same stuff that a John Deere manure spreader works with.

We have each other and a sea bag of memories. In many cases, memories of a time now past. A time when a boy could grow up with real men as mentors and examples. Where else but in the company of such men could he be accepted and be allowed to write the bullshit he does about us and our lives and not have his ass kicked.

I love you guys - Did then and do now.

And when I wrote that last statement, I was tap dancing.