

**A DAY ON THE USS GEN. W.H. GORDON
EN ROUTE TO VIET NAM
5000 TROOPS
A STORM
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So there we were: 5000 or so troops of the First Infantry Division on the USS Gen. W.H. Gordon, a WWII Liberty Ship undertaking in June 25 of 1965 what was then the largest single U.S. troop movement since the Second World War.

Our little group of 48 ASA guys was assigned to a small sector of the ship all the way down and, with the exception of the brig, all the way to the front. All the better to bounce up and down and side to side in rough seas. The rough seas came in spades about 4 - 5 hours after our departure from San Francisco. It was a very big storm with huge waves.

Keep in mind that we were Army guys – ground troops – not sailors. Most of us had never been on a ship at sea. When the storm started, our ASA group remained stoic. Some of us were getting a little queasy and others were looking pretty bad. One sergeant actually turned green – no lie! I was handling it fairly well, so one of the noncoms sent me to find the ship's medical bay to get some seasick medicine. I set out having no clue as to the layout of the ship or where I was heading.

I thought the best course of action would be to go on deck and work my way back looking for directions to the ship's doctor. Bad idea! When I got to the top of the ladder and opened the

hatch to the deck I was confronted with an amazing sight. I was reminded of the opening to the old Victory at Sea series in the early days of TV. As I opened the hatch and looked forward (remember, we were already toward the front), the bow of the ship was angled upward. I stopped and watched, hanging on to the hatch, as the bow came down and a giant wave crashed over it. I'm not kidding – the bow was lower than the level of the water and the sea was washing over the deck. The spray was incredible. I guess it's obvious that I wasn't going on deck. I retreated and closed the hatch in short order. Then my adventure switched to the bizarre.

After my aborted attempt to go on deck, I climbed down the ladder and encountered – again no kidding – a drunk member of the Gordon's crew. I made the mistake of asking him where the medical bay was on that boat. "WHAT BOAT?" he growled at me. "THIS IS A SHIP!" he said with a loud bit of drunken slur. At that point, I felt that my best move was to again retreat. I wandered down a corridor holding on to alternate sides as the ship rocked and came to another hatch. It opened into a cavernous area. This was one of the places where large quantities of troops were housed. The bunks, row after row of them, were six high. Then the smell hit me.

It seems that most of the 5000 or so troops of The Big Red One were seasick. Violently seasick. I had to pass through this area to get where I guessed the sick bay might be. It was an experience that I nor anyone else who was there will ever forget. It was an incredible sight. The floor was covered, literally covered, with vomit. I looked into the head (latrine) and saw a row of at least 20 toilets, each with at least two soldiers barfing into each of them. I saw a guy barf into a water fountain because he had nowhere else to do it. A private was trying to mop up the mess; he barfed on his own mop while another guy barfed into his bucket. I saw this. But perhaps the most interesting experience of this was when the ship would move up and down and side to side with the waves. Those of us with nothing to hold on to would literally slide from side to side of the deck as the ship rolled. Some barfed as they slid. Some slipped and fell on the barf covered floor. To stay on my feet, I had to kind of flex my knees and use my arms for balance as I slid. Hundreds and hundreds of soldiers in this area were seasick, really seasick.

Well, it took a while, but I made it across the expanse of slick floor and went out the other side. I'm sure there were numerous areas on the ship just like the one I went through. Eventually, after 20 - 30 minutes, I located the sick bay. It was full of seasick men. I kind of made my way around them (they were in no condition to stop me) and found a guy who appeared to me to be a doctor or medic. I told him I was with Det. 2, 3rd RRU, located at the bottom of the front of the ship and we needed seasick medicine. I guess that was the funniest thing he had heard for at least the past couple of hours.

He told me that he basically had nothing left, but he gave me a bottle of capsules that he said might help. He said to take a pin and make a small hole in the end of the capsules and use them like suppositories. I am not making this up. We just looked at each other for a few seconds, then I said "thanks" and left. After sliding my way back to Det. 2's little area, I took the capsules to the noncom and told him what the medic said. He looked at me like I was crazy. I just shrugged and said, "that's what he told me." I then went to my tiny little bunk and climbed in. I don't know if anyone used those capsules. I didn't.

A couple of days later, I went back to that area of many bunks and much vomit. They had done

an exceptional job of cleaning it up and only a slight smell remained. But what does remain, very clearly, is my memory of our first day at sea on the USS Gen. W.H. Gordon.