

I Might be Fired on the Spot by Ed Clextan (20)

I was 'called up' to see RAdm "Blinky" Smith, the Commander of the Naval Air Test Center at NAS Patuxent River, MD. after my second ejection in 18 months, one F8U 'Crusader' (fuel starvation) and an F4B 'Phantom' (flat spin). When I reported to the headquarters the Chief of Staff, Capt. Bill Hartung, tried to put me at ease, but ...! After Adm. Smith told me about spinning the original F4B-4, the Navy's first-line bi-plane fighter from 1932-1937, he said "Ed, you have been doing a fine job for me over the past few years, but I can't afford to keep you here anymore (meaning I was losing too many of his airplanes!). Where would you like to go next?" (In 1967 there were only two places anyone went from Patuxent River: Vietnam or 'CivLant', e.g. out of the Navy! So, I got orders to NAS Miramar in San Diego. Passed again!

Mamie's portrait – When IKE was commissioned in 1978, Mamie Eisenhower was (obviously) the ship's Sponsor and Captain Bill Ramsey had approached her to explain that it was customary for the 'Ship's Sponsor' to present a gift to the ship on commissioning. We were told by someone in the family that the portrait of Mamie from Ike's 1964 inauguration was in a place of honor in the Eisenhower's home in Gettysburg, PA, and although it was already 'willed' to one of the children, she would like to 'gift' it to the ship at the commissioning (and "we could 'work it out' later as to whether it would stay with the ship or go back to the family?). The interim solution was one of our dentist's father was a portrait painter and he could make a copy from the original so we would have a copy in case the original went back to the family when(ever) Mamie died. The problem: the dentist's father lived in CT and he could only do it right in his studio in CT! Yes, I came up with the solution: wrap it up REAL 'nice & tight' and send it to CT on the top of a VW 'bug'!, hoping Mamie's inaugural portrait wouldn't get wet or damaged on its way to CT on I-95! I recall it did go through some weather, but ... We ended up with two portraits of Mamie for several years! Skated again, barely!

When I was CO, USS El Paso, LKA-17, and was finally getting El Paso out of the SunShipCo shipyard in Chester, PA, eight months after she was supposed to be ready, I received a call from my boss, ComPhibRon 2, that the new Commander of Atlantic Amphibious Forces, RAdm., Warren C. Hamm, wanted to come for a visit! OK. Prior to this news I had taken a call from an old friend, Capt. Jack Fetterman, who was on his way to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to take over the Fleet Training Group there, and knowing I was headed his way, Jack wanted to know if I could bring his sailboat to 'Gitmo'? Since El Paso had lots of space to carry most anything, I said 'for sure'! So, when Jack's sailboat arrived in Chester we put it in Hold #2, a cavernous space for amphibious vehicles and equipment immediately in front of the ship's bridge. Done! Then, before Admiral Hamm was to arrive, I instructed the ship's 1st Lt (in charge of the ship's Holds) to make sure we leave Hold # 2 closed while the Admiral was aboard and I would tour him through Hold's 1, 3 & 4 among all the other spaces he would see. The day comes, the Admiral arrives, we tour the ship to include almost everything he could possibly want to see and we

ended up in my Cabin having coffee when he says “we haven’t see the bridge” and he was right. The bridge was one ladder up from my Cabin so we go to the bridge and go off to the bridge wing where he looks over the edge and sees the sailboat in Hold #2 which had been opened by someone, not known to this day! He said to me, “What’s that?” I could hear his brain turning over saying to himself “should I kill him now or wait until I return to Norfolk (to kill him)? Did I mention that, by the grapevine, RAdm. Hamm considered himself strictly a ‘Destroyer sailor’; never an amphibious sailor. This was the lore that went around the waterfront about Admiral Hamm; that he was not pleased that he was given the Amphibious forces; not Destroyers. I had to answer: I said “a sailboat”. I could still hear his brain working on what should he do about this naval aviator in his amphibious force who has a sailboat on his LKA? He remained silent, said his good-byes and I escorted him off the ship to his car that would drive him away (from me!). I never heard anything else from him, even when El Paso returned to Norfolk after taking Jack Fetterman’s sailboat to Gitmo! Perhaps the closest one! He must have been forgetful!

When I had IKE I often received messages that were sent to me, and often others, but not to the embarked Admiral, that I thought the Admiral should see. So, I would simply put them aside with a simple “FYI, V/r, Ed” in the upper right corner and take or send them to the Admiral. This would happen at least five times/day. I always thought it best to have important information shared with my bosses, and it worked well for years. Likewise, my Communications Officer(s) who were also the Communications Officers for the embarked Admirals, would on occasion do the same for me on message traffic that was addressed to the Admiral, but not to me. This was risky at times, but was also good for me to know so I was better equipped to deal with various operational topics. One day it back-fired!! I let it slip with RAdm Jerry O. Tuttle! that I knew something that in his opinion and rightfully I shouldn’t, and he let me know!! A slip-up with J.O.T. could be fatal! It had certainly happened before – firings – and would happen again, in his most illustrious career. Since I was his first ship, he ‘cut his teeth’ on me; Apparently, I survived this one due to the long and valued time we had together. Whew, again!

The IKE button saga: IKE was scheduled for a port visit in Monaco during my first deployment to the Mediterranean as Commanding Officer. Prior to the visit I received a message from 6th Fleet that Prince Albert, the only son of Prince Ranier and Princess Grace, and the current Monarch (2020), wanted to spend a few days aboard IKE prior to the visit. The young Prince was about 25 years old and a Navy Lieutenant, as many royal princes are if their family has a naval tradition. Prince Albert, who was named after his famous grandfather, was a welcome visitor. I had an officer from the Air Wing escort him around the ship. He lunched in the Wardroom and with the crew. He also spent many hours with me on the bridge and was very cordial and interested in all aspects of our work. He had never been on such a large and busy ship so everything was of high interest to him. One night, as he was watching night carrier

landings with me, I told him that when I was a Midshipman, we were only allowed to have one picture on our desks and the picture on my desk was of his Mother when she was a movie star in the US! (this was a clear 'fib' because, in truth, the picture on my desk was a picture of your Mother (or Grandmother), Barbara Wright). However, the story wasn't way off because I did have a picture of Grace Kelly inside my locker; just not on the desk! I assumed he would tell his Mother this when he returned to the palace.

As we sailed into Monaco harbor, I received a message to "park" the ship where Prince Ranier could see us from his office." That would be fine, but where is his office?? Well, no one knew the answer to that except it was assumed it was inside the palace. So, since, as a nuclear powered ship, we had to remain outside a line across the outer harbor, I moved IKE along the line until I could see the largest portion of the palace. However, the Prince Albert Museum, named for Prince Ranier's father, was in between the palace and the harbor and blocked the palace from a full view of the harbor. While I was anchoring, two helicopters arrived overhead, and both flew a few times around the ship. I found out later that Prince Ranier was in one of them and Princess Grace was in the other, both returning home from trips away.

That evening the Admiral (Jim Service) called to say that five of us were invited to lunch at the palace the following day! He said it would be he and his wife, his Chief of Staff (Bill Hunter), myself and the Air Wing Commander (Tom Treanor).

A side, but necessary story at this point: I got along quite well with the Admiral, but we had one major disagreement when he first came aboard IKE. It had to do with the IKE buttons we always wore on our uniforms. Going back to when we were building the ship and assembling the crew in 1975-78 at Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Co., (then Captain) Ramsey asked the Supply Officer to get some buttons the Officers and crew could wear that would signify us as IKE crew and proud to be so. Historically, I Like Ike buttons went back to the 1952 Presidential campaign when General 'Ike' Eisenhower was drafted to run for President on the Republican ticket. They were campaign buttons worn by thousands over the next eight years when 'Ike' left the White House in January of 1961. Well, this was to be the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, CVN-69, to be commonly known as the IKE. Thus, while the origin of IKE buttons was 1952, the origin of CVN-69 I Like Ike buttons was 1975. What does that have to do with Admiral Jim Service? Well, when Bill Ramsey was the Captain of IKE (and I was the Executive Officer), Jim Service was the CO of the USS Independence. So, by 1982, I had over 10 years of dubious experience with Jim Service, who was not one you wanted to out-do, and it was my belief that when Bill Ramsey came up with the IKE button idea in 1975, Jim Service was chagrined that he hadn't thought of such a gimmick himself, and he kept it to himself until he came aboard as the Admiral in 1982. So, when he first came aboard, and I was the CO, he said to me "Get rid of the buttons. They are not part of the uniform." He was right, of course, that commercially bought buttons were not part of the uniform, but since the crew had been

wearing them as a matter of pride for seven years by this time, and I was one of the initial perpetrators of them, I wasn't about to back down and have everyone remove the buttons from their everyday wear. After much haggling, including me telling him that there was nothing more important to me than to keep the buttons as part of the IKE sailors uniform, that I was willing to 'take the sword' (symbolic of Japanese Samurai warriors) over this issue.

The resolution was that "OK, but not on 'dress' uniforms." I agreed to that because it kind of made sense, it ended the impasse between us, and it allowed us to keep them on what just about everybody wore every day. The only time we would wear 'dress' uniforms while Admiral Service was aboard would be for a uniform inspection, which wasn't likely, or some special event like a Change of Command, which I hoped wasn't going to happen!

Back to the Monaco visit: Guess what we would be wearing to the palace? You got it – dress uniforms! Thinking to myself - Ouch! No IKE button! But Princess Grace (Kelly), being from a Philadelphia Republican family, would love to see (and have) an I Like Ike button. What to do? There was only one answer for sure – In deference to Admiral Service, do NOT show up with an Ike button on my dress "choker" whites. But, per usual, I always had a few in my pockets. The lunch was absolutely marvelous. There were seven of us, at a lovely setting in an outside garden (I wish I had saved the menu). After lunch, Prince Ranier asked Admiral and Mrs Service to join him on a tour of the castle, which left Captain Hunter, Cdr. Treanor and me to go with Princess Grace. Beautiful! I can only remember one phase of the tour: Grace was showing us an outcrop over the cliffs where, in ancient history, they could pour boiling oil over the side to deter anyone from attacking the palace from seaward! I had (unconsciously I am sure) removed an IKE button from my pocket and she saw it! She had the most gorgeous silk designer suit on – probably bought on her most recent trip to Paris for at least \$3,000! She asked to see it (I certainly didn't push it on her!); she asked if she could have it (she could tell I had more than one); I gave her one and she stuck it forcefully through her gorgeous silk designer suit! Then, seconds later, who should show up with Prince Ranier? Ayyyyy! Admiral (and Mrs.) Jim Service!! From birth 'til this day, I have never seen such a glare as what I saw coming up the rampart that day! Dear Mrs. (Natalie) Service just smiled (she knew of the spat, but I am sure she was sympathetic to my most honorable feelings). Not sensing any difficulty in the air, Prince Ranier marveled at his wife's new attachment and asked if he could also have one, which I graciously delivered. The visit ended because it was time - not for any other reason – and we departed the palace. If Admiral Service said anything to me about the buttons on the way back to the ship I have conveniently forgotten!

Prologue: I departed IKE in 1984 to run the Navy Command Center in the Pentagon and Admiral Service was the President of the Naval War College in Newport, RI. I received a call from my 'friend', Jim Service, who asked me if I would be the Judge for the Naval War College "Power Button" contest! I accepted with great fervor because it meant to me that I had

survived a segment of my naval career that was steeped in pride and honor but also, at times, fraught with pending doom!