

“The Norfolk Incident, Part 1”
(A True Account)
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The following document has been reformatted from its original version and partially edited.

My heart sank as I heard the ship's signal horn let out one long blast. It was followed by the Quarter Master's voice shouting over the ship's 1MC speaker system; "Underway, Shift colors." Although I had heard those words dozens of times, it never ceased to make my stomach tighten with the thought of what they meant.

We were casting off for open seas again and odd as it might seem, I had learned to both love and hate those words. The varied emotions that stirred within me, as with each man aboard the *USS Warrior*, were a mix of anxiety, dread, and uncertainty.

Anxiety, because we were bound on a new adventure. Dread, of the loneliness while at sea and the struggle not to get sea sick, (again). And the dread, of leaving the security of family, home and above all, land. Land was especially precious to this crew; Delta Crew, after almost sinking in the Persian Gulf several months before. (but that's another story).

And lastly, the uncertainty of what adversities lay ahead. Unfortunately, there were always adversities. And little did we know that this "Underway" was to be one for the records.

Delta Crew had an uncanny knack for pulling special duty when push-came-to-shove. We were the Commodore's favorite mine hunting crew and it was a surety that we would be tasked with every special operation that no other mine sweeper could do. When a task seemed impossible, Delta Crew always saved the day.

Delta Crew had a heroic history, having saved a fishing vessel and its crew, from sinking in the Gulf of Mexico and towing them back to safety. Delta Crew also battled overcoming odds while saving the *USS Dextrous* from sinking in Persian Gulf. They were also tasked with and were successful in finding the two last remaining cruise missiles missing for 2 years since ending of the Iraqi Gulf War.

The crew had won three consecutive “Battle E” awards for combat readiness, as well as the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (with Valor) and multiple Unit commendations. As a reward for our exceptional conduct in the face of adversities, we had been chosen to represent the Navy at the Navy/Rice football game held at the Naval War College in Annapolis MD. So now we were to steam up the Eastern seaboard for some PR (public relations) and a well deserved vacation. The *USS Gladiator* was also invited as escort, being our sister ship.

We had begun our journey from the Ingleside Naval Station, in Ingleside, TX. two weeks prior and had already stopped in Key West and May Port, Fla, Charleston, SC. and Norfolk, Va. for liberty and relaxation. As we traveled in convoy, during the first leg of the trip, our happy voyage was beset with trouble as our sister ship, the *USS Gladiator*, began having trouble with her machinery. One at a time she was forced to shut down and stop in order to repair her plagued engines. Finally, she lost the last 2 (of 3) main diesel engines as well as her last remaining diesel generator, causing her to go DIW (Dead in the Water).

Once again, Delta Crew was tasked with the arduous undertaking of towing our sister ship, 500 miles into the Mayport, Fla. harbor. We left her stranded for repairs in the Mayport dry docks, as we sailed on to Annapolis, MD without her.

With all that behind us, the Warrior had solely transited the eastern seaboard and was now getting underway from Norfolk, VA. The Quartermaster's cry of "Underway, Shift Colors" was just the beginning of another day at sea. The crew had begun the tedious sea-and-anchor evolution that was essential for transiting the ship out of the harbor and beyond the debarkation line into international waters.

I was in the Combat Information Center (CIC) or "Combat" as we call it, attending to my crew which was hard at work, plotting courses and giving their recommendations to the bridge. "Sea-and-anchor" detail was a grueling combination of radar, GPS and the ship's look-out information, all culminating into non-stop reports given every 3 minutes to the bridge in order to steer the ship through the narrow shipping lanes while exiting the port. "Sea-and-anchor" could last for as short as two hours or for as long as 24 hours, depending on the channel and its length.

We were now exiting the Norfolk harbor and heading into international waters in order to steam up to Annapolis, MD; the last leg of our trip.

I was now the newest Chief onboard, having been pinned only a few weeks before and was in charge of CIC. Although I was supposed to have been transferred to my new duty station in Ft. Worth, TX, before we left Ingleside, I had been extended onboard for an additional month, with

the promise that I would be able to transfer to my next assignment, as soon as we returned back home.

I had also been assigned as Fire Control Officer during General Quarters, which was my battle station. This consisted of taking command of all weapons systems, if and when our weapons status was ever upgraded to critical levels. When directly given control of all weapons systems from the captain of the ship, I would give the final order to “Release Batteries” (fire all weapons) at the designated target. Of course, since we were back in the good ole’ USA, I would NEVER have to worry about something like that ever happening on my watch. All was calm, it was a beautiful day and we were in peaceful waters, but I was soon to learn a valuable lesson. “Never say NEVER.”

To be continued.