

February 2 - Thursday

Title: Jimmy T

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(U) From the late 1950s through the 1960s, the Naval Security Group, the navy's cryptologic organization, operated a fleet of former cargo ships that served as floating collection platforms. Following the 1967 attack on the USS *Liberty* and the 1968 hijacking of the USS *Pueblo*, the navy ended the program of using these specially configured ships for intercept work.

(U) Two veterans who served on one of these collection platforms as its years of service ended have left accounts about their experiences aboard.



(U) USS *Jamestown*

(U) The USS *Jamestown*, a refitted World War II Liberty-class ship, had been activated as a “technical research ship” in 1964, and had had an initial cruise down the west coast of Africa. After 1965, its assignments had been in the Pacific area and Southeast Asia.

(U) In June 1966, Wayne Hood, who had been working as senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) at NSA's message center, got orders for San Miguel in the Philippines. But these were soon changed: he was ordered to the USS *Jamestown* as communications chief. He did get to the Philippines, but it was a stop on his way to rendezvous with the ship, which was serving off the coast of Vietnam. From San Miguel, Hood sailed aboard an oiler to Dixie Station, near the Cambodian border.

(U) The "Jimmy T," as the ship's complement often called it, operated near Phu Quoc Island, an enemy (Viet Cong) stronghold. The *Jamestown* was surrounded by other ships at night to discourage enemy sappers.

(U) Hood was in charge of about 25 men. A few of them were experienced with intercept operations, but many were reservists who lacked training. He remembered that they learned quickly, and the communications men later received commendations for their work.

(U) As the ship's crew trained, Hood perceived that they had never drilled to repel boarders. Therefore, he took his men to the fantail for practice, shooting at number 10 tomato cans. The only personal weapons they had were .45 pistols, so they seldom hit anything.

(U) The ship also operated off Chu Lai, where they were to locate enemy units and pass the information to US Marines on shore. In this, they were largely unsuccessful due to the complicated communications environment. Also, during this time on station, the ship weathered two typhoons and a tropical storm.

(U) The *Jamestown* usually had supply problems. At one point, the intercept room ran out of teletype paper and ribbons. Hood prepared a high priority request for the supplies and presented it to the captain, who was not pleased with this. As Hood recalled, he told the captain that his office was the eyes and ears of the ship, and if he did not get the supplies, "you can pour concrete around the ship and call it a lighthouse." (Ironically, a supply ship with all the *Jamestown's* back requisitions arrived the next day, and Hood recalled, "we had boxes hanging from the rafters!")

(U) Bruce Ames was assigned to the *Jamestown* in 1969 as a CT (Communications Technician) third class. He flew from Travis Air Force Base to Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital, with intermediate stops, and deplaned at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base—to find that his orders had been improperly written and he was about to be transferred by helicopter to a unit near the demilitarized zone. Fortunately, since he had no weapons training, the navy liaison officer straightened things out and he was taken by aircraft and helicopter to Phu Quoc Island.

(U) At that time, the *Jamestown* alternated time on station with the USS *Oxford*. Ames noted that one or the other of the ships would often be in port, frequently for repairs to the 1920s-era steam-powered engine. While underway off the coast of Vietnam, the ship typically ran at 3 knots; the joke among the ship's crew was that the *Jamestown* was the only ship that could tie up at a pier going full speed. Later in the year, the *Jamestown* encountered a typhoon and even at flank or emergency speed the ship made minus five miles progress.

(U) The *Jamestown* conducted long-distance communications with its companion collection ships by bouncing encrypted signals off the moon.

(U) One night when the *Jamestown* was anchored in Cam Ranh Bay, the alarm went off at 2300 hours, and all hands were ordered to general quarters, that is, battle stations. A sharp-eyed sentry had spotted Viet Cong swimmers who were seeking to attach limpet mines to the ship's hull. A couple of Swift Boats came out and promptly dispatched the enemy swimmers.

(U) In October 1969, in reaction to the *Liberty* and *Pueblo* incidents, the *Jamestown* was sent to Yokosuka, Japan, to be scrapped. The *Oxford* soon joined it, although its engines died in the middle of the channel and the ship required tugs to tow it into the pier. In December, the ship was formally decommissioned and turned over to the shipyard.

(U) This *History Today* is based on two articles in the *NCVA Cryptolog*:

Wayne K. Hood, "Comms Chief on USS Jamestown, a dangerous business," summer 2005, page 26.

Bruce Ames, "USS Jamestown ('s a GTR-three)'s Vietnam – 1969," summer 2005, page 7.

(U) The *NCVA Cryptolog* is the quarterly newsletter of the Naval Cryptologic Veterans' Association.

(U) For an account of the navy's collection ships, read George Howe's book, *Technical Research Ships*.

(U) 508 caption: the USS *Jamestown*