

I pulled into the Jacksonville in the middle of the morning with plenty of time to get checked on board the USS Veeland. The bus station had the fundamentalist Christian feel most definitely. The south may have more of the bag people class than up north due to the weather, and the bus did not seem to be the favored mode of travel for your average person. The down and outer feeling was intense there. The bus ran to the base but I was quickly suffering from the heat with my gear and all and found out it was a \$20.00 trip to the base. At least I found the airport was a bit farther so I had picked the economy tour and got an out the window look at America rolling south. Having once lived in Colorado the landscapes were interesting to me. The flora and fauna were different but due to the immediate urban area did not provide that striking an atmosphere. The waterways in the area are striking to me as a foreigner in that area, and I was amazed at the expenditures needed for bridges in the area. Jacksonville apparently never had the old urban growth my home town did so it looked like a giant suburb to me. There was a little core, mostly black, and suburbs seemed to gravitate into two marked classes, the mobile home and crackerbox developments and the exclusive \$100,000 sort of subdivision.

Going over the bow was quite an experience. The Vree is a striking looking ship, an FF or fast frigate, originally designated as a destroyer escort., and something over fifteen years old. Built rather cheaply and efficiently, the details were similar to a road grader. I don't know if it was the Chief Engineer but the ship never seemed to hold a even keel. It was always ballasted wrong or had a huge major defect. You always felt the darn thing was listing a degree or two one way or the other. Anyway, confusion reigns as you board a ship the first time. You know absolutely nothing. You feel like an abstract Picasso. You are excited, and stuck in a maze. It's almost impossible to orient yourself immediately, and it takes a number of days before you can normally walk up to the quarterdeck or mess hall. It was a good thing I berthed near the mess decks or I could have starved the first couple of days.

I checked in pretty well and organized my gear. Onboard I was off the watchbill and basically could duck out of a lot of things the first week. I enjoyed the base facilities and used the weight room and ran a little, still heeding the messages from my separated foot which was mending by this time. I found the offices on the ship and base less adequate than at boot, but still fooled around trying to change my rate to the directed energy program if possible, as the people in the boiler tech rate were in the large part rather fucked up individuals, and I had a hard time socializing with them. I did not have a grasp on the concept the Navy had towards it's personnel at this time yet. I tried to do the physical plant training like anyone else, but the division was large and the hands on things took forever, so it seems, to advance in.

Within a short time I was qualifying as a cold iron watch stander on duty days. We had to do little more than that as snipes (engineering personnel) and muster once and a while. The command had more than enough people to go around. In the fireroom I learned plenty as a help and truly got into my work as the fireroom was in a minor overhaul and firesides had to be done. Huge doors were lifted off, burners were removed and in you went hundreds of square feet of tube. Most clean as the firing was light distillate and a mere powder formed, and we only had to get a little off to check for stress and cacks.