

Things moved pretty quickly as I got preliminary orders to the USS Barbour County in San Diego. I still wasn't cleared on the trumped up disciplinary charges on the Vreeland and didn't know what happened to the appeal I put in on the case. I knew it was just plain unfair, and it was a setup. I wanted to have it put to the authorities because I worked hard to make petty officer, which meant money I needed to survive, and pay my note on my motorhome. I had no place to go in that regards with the new command. I couldn't watch over the beneficial suggestion, and my chances of applying my university degree in the service were totally shot. All my dreams were shattered by a bunch of paranoid drug users.

My duties on the Forrestal were miniscule. I worked about two hours a day while Temporary Active Duty assigned with the personnel division. This left me hour after hour to finish the Data Systems course. I got enough sleep but felt tired because I had nothing to apply myself to. I utilized the ship's gym and walked around the ship peering into the aircraft under repair. The remains of the one jet crash I knew of were still on the hangar deck. It was a twisted half fragment of the fuselage. You could see the construction was aluminum sheet and pop rivets real well, as well if you were in the plant assembling one. The Vreeland was in one of that search and recovered a piece of bulkhead. A square yard of airplane bulkhead weighs only ten or fifteen pounds. When you see the construction it is a real marvel that they hold up under the terrific forces they are exposed to. I got to operate the port side spotlight on the Vreeland the night it crashed. The seas were eight or ten foot, and our whale boats bobbed like corks in the search. I stood on the spot light watch until I was mesmerized by the beam which started to look solid working its way into the fog. We needed to take turns on the light as it was hypnotic looking at nothing but the gray sea in the beam. I picked up a signal buoy dropped by a destroyer off our port side ahead in the search line. The whale boat picked up the bulkhead a hundred yards off the port side. The buckle in the flight deck was still visible where one man lost his life a week before when I checked it out on the USS Forrestal. The second occupant of the crashed jet bailed out in time.

When flight ops were not going on you could walk the flight deck. Many of the men liked to jog. One day the ship had to get in 50 call drill and about a dozen of the darn things were broken out and fired for an hour. It was something to see the slugs hit the water and listen to the cartridges popping. The gunner's mate eventually was rolling around above the deck on the spent cartridges. All but a couple of the machine gun stations jammed continually. This was practice for doing the ditch.

When I arrived on the Forrestal the daily newsletter informed me a second, third, boatload of marines now has disembarked in Beirut. So things were still pretty hot since we moved the PLO. Remember there are no newspapers of T.V., or radio at sea. We were there to do what was ordered so speculation triumphed over information. We all knew something was going on, but didn't know what we all had to do with it, other than the fact we were standing ready, or as the Vreeland escorting hostiles.

I was stuck with the damn old car I bought in Florida. First I wrote my one buddy on the Vreeland and offered it to him for what I paid for it. He knew it ran, and he always had car trouble and could use mine until he got his to run right. I wrote and never heard from him. But - I found a guy who was out of the service when he hit Mayport, and he snapped it up for fifty bucks less than I paid for it. Not a total loss, and the authorities would give me no trouble. I told him to get a battery and drive it away as we got the title notarized by the ship's legal officer.