A journey into history

I entered the Navy in June of ’77. People thought me odd because I was the only recruit that had to fold my blanket each day. I had to sleep under it. Going from 120+ degree weather to the 90-degree weather of San Diego was quite a significant change.

I remained in the Navy for a number of years and traveled to a number of places. I was in Somalia when we were trying to cement relations long before the “Blackhawk Down” incident. I was in Hong Kong when it was a free country.

I visited “the former” Yugoslavia while Tito yet lived. It was the only example of a communist government that I can point to that actually worked. Why did it work? General Tito maintained

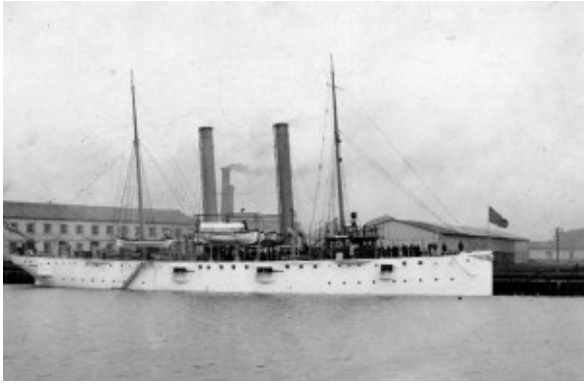
the sovereignty of his country. He ran the government without undue influence from outsiders. He actually cared about the welfare of his people.

I have even been through the Bermuda Triangle and, unless you reading this are a part of some alternate universe of which I am unaware, we came out on the other side.

It is a recent event that I wish to concentrate on. The recent 100th anniversary of the Panama Canal. It is also an example of the Imperialistic nature of the “progressive.”

European ocean explorers have dreamed of a canal across what is now called Panama since they discovered the Americas. It would cut out having to travel around the infamous “Horn.”

Fresh off of their successful building of the Suez Canal, the French attempted to build a flat canal through the isthmus controlled by the government of Columbia. Because of lack of engineering skill of the company working on the project and malaria and yellow fever, the company went bankrupt and the project was halted in May of 1879.



USS Nashville

Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901. Believing that the project was of a national security interest to the United States, he convinced Congress to purchase French owned land and tried to reach an agreement with the Colombian government. That failing, he convinced Panamanian rebels to declare independence. They did with a USS Nashville close by to prevent interference from the Colombian government. That move causes tension between the two countries to this day.
In 1904 the United States undertook the building of the canal which officially opened on August 15, 1914. In 1989, the United States invaded Panama to capture Manuel Noriega; purportedly because of drug smuggling. He was sent to France for charges of money laundering and is now in a Panamanian prison for a number of charges including murder.

I was captivated by the engineering of the canal and the operation of the locks. Because the Pacific and Atlantic are at two different levels and the terrain, a ship has to be raised or lowered depending on which ocean you are traveling to (as I understand it). Ships traveling through the canal are captured in the locks where the water is raised or lowered. I was told that it is completely accomplished by the force of the water itself. There are no pumps.

The locks have been expanded before and today the Panamanian government is widening them again. The government of Panama, in fact, is doing much more to increase the potential of the

canal than ever before.

I find it interesting as I look back that I went through the Panama Canal when it was a mere 64-years old. In March of 1978 the USS Oldendorf (DD-972) passed through the locks of Panama. This is no great page in history. It is simply a page out of my history.