



Stephen Henry (AGR-7, 1959-1962)

When I reported aboard the USS Picket (AGR 7) in April 1959, "Turn To" was one of the first of the crew to greet me on the quarterdeck. He was a portly little guy who was greatly favored by our gruff, mustang C.O., LCDR Hoskinson. "Turn" as he was called for short, could be found anywhere on the ship. At sea, he liked the warmth of the engine room on cold days and most afternoons he enjoyed short naps in the dark calm of CIC. During heavy weather he swaggered the decks like an old salt on his sea legs, unfazed by the rolling and pitching of the ship. Dinner always found him in the wardroom, next to the captain.

Turn To was the ship's dog, a four year old beagle. During our time at sea on station, Turn was a calm, friendly dog, well liked by everyone, even the deck crew who had extra cleanup because of him. But Turn To changed when we were relieved by a sister ship after a month on station. Heading home, the engineers would fine tune the big three-cylinder reciprocating steam engine to produce maximum revolutions of the screw. Everybody's attitude would change at the anticipation of returning to our home port, Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. But it was Turn To who became most excited. When he felt the ship's vibration as the bridge ordered full speed ahead, he would whine and run around in circles. With a bone in her teeth, the Picket raced along at 11 knots. Days later, as we approached the Golden Gate, long before we could see land, Turn could smell it, which heightened his canine frenzy.

But, alas, Turn was not allowed shore leave. He had made himself a pest on T.I. before. It was something involving the Admiral's flower garden and Turn's rakish, seaman's ways with all the little bitch doggies who lived on the island. Yet, keeping Turn To away from the gangplank for 24 hours a day when he was anxious for liberty proved impossible. Then, ashore on the island, we would not see him for several days until he returned, tired, dirty and happy.

The junior Ensign aboard was assigned the collateral duty of officer of the motor whaleboat. That was me for almost a year. We used it for man overboard drills and for ship-to-ship transfers. On the occasion of relieving our sister ship (I think it was the Interceptor, but someone may have to correct me on that) in the late Summer of 1959, I launched my little command at the order of Captain Hoskinson. The seas were choppy, but the boat crew was experienced and we made the traverse easily. We smartly secured the sea painter to our bow on their lee side, then we began to off-load our mail and movies and receive their movies in trade. Large waterproof canvas bags were used to protect the contents. We completed the exchange quickly and cast off to return to the Picket; but as we did, we could hear peculiar noises coming from one of the bags we had received. Puppies! Avast there, mates! I directed the cox'n to go back, and yelled to the deck officer to lay out the painter and send over a line to return a package. Everyone on deck was laughing and waving as their ship increased speed to leave us behind.

Well, their ship had a mascot, too. She had delivered 6 puppies at sea, and they looked a whole lot like Turn To. Now they were ours for the next 5 weeks.