

Reunion Cruise

By Jackson Sellers
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HALF of our 10-day trip to New Orleans was spent with a bunch of old ex-sailors and their family members aboard the *Carnival Triumph* in the Gulf of Mexico. I confess: I was reluctant to swap a comfortable Omni Royal Orleans room in the French Quarter for a cramped cabin at sea, but it worked out okay, with only a modicum of grumbling from me. Yoshi positively enjoyed it, and wants another. This was the 2010 reunion of the *USS Colahan*, a workhorse destroyer active in World War II, the Korean War and the Cold War. Dressed in red, white and blue, we celebrated Veterans Day at our November 11 dinner. Earlier on the five-day cruise, at a dress-up dinner (above right), Yoshi and I



Photo by Shipmate Bob McDonald

smile for the camera of Bob McDonald of Texas, an 88-year-old *Colahan* plank-owner, the oldest among us. In regard to the *Colahan*, a plank-owner is a sailor who was aboard when the warship was commissioned in August 1943.

Below are Skip Slagle, left, and Guy Polley, both of Florida, who put the reunion together. Skip and Guy were *Colahan* radarmen in the 1950s and worked with me when I was serving as Combat Information Center watch officer. Back then, the three of us were pretty, also slim. On the very day we boarded the *Triumph*, a sister cruise ship, the *Carnival Splendor*, found itself in deep trouble off Mexico's Pacific coast. An engine-room electrical fire knocked out power and left the ship dead in the water. While we ate hot delicacies, even lobster, in pleasant surroundings, *Splendor* passengers consumed cold Spam in dark cabins with stinky toilets that wouldn't flush. This was my first "fun" sea cruise. Yoshi's, too. Oh, as a young man, I made many voyages, first in the Navy, back and forth between America and Japan, along the China coast between Japan and Hong Kong, along the



Photos by Jackson Sellers



From the Carnival Cruise Lines Website



Photo by Shipmate Jerome Liverett

California coast between San Diego and San Francisco. After leaving the Navy, I crossed the Pacific three times on Japanese merchant ships and once on the old *SS President Wilson*, which was still carrying passengers on Asian-Pacific routes in the 1960s. But those were “destination” cruises, not just-for-fun cruises. The *Carnival Triumph*, shown above, has multiple decks and offers a multitude of activities. I was most interested in its 15 bars, six of which allowed smoking. The first bar I entered, however, was unbearably loud, with musicians blasting away. I couldn’t stand it, so I went in search of a quiet smoking bar. Finally found one off the casino on the fifth deck. It was a sports bar displaying a bank of TV screens with muted audio. Now I could hear myself think on this initial night at sea, even carry on a normal con-

versation with a stranger at the bar. I happily watched Monday Night Football, while smoking cigarettes and drinking gin-and-tonics. But that was the last English I heard from those TVs. On subsequent nights, as we steamed around in the Gulf of Mexico, the TVs showed soccer in Spanish, neither of which I’m familiar with. But there was never a problem in getting a bar drink on the cruise. One smoking bar, near the swimming pool on the ninth deck, started serving at 7 a.m., breakfast time. Of course I drank too much. Of course I liked it. To hell with my nagging doctors back home. But with 2,800 passengers aboard, it was hard to avoid the noise in public places. I yelled so much, trying to communicate, that I came down with a bad case of laryngitis and could hardly talk at all on the last day. Our port-side cabin

was the quietest place on the ship. At night, as the *Triumph* steamed south, I could sit on our private balcony and stare at the phosphorescent swirls flowing along the hull, then watch the morning sun rise above the Atlantic horizon. We skipped the first port of call, Progreso on the Yucatan Peninsula. Too much walking, too much bus riding, just to see some Aztec ruins. Shipmate J.B. Talbert, a *Colahan* signalman in my C Division, stayed aboard, too. “If I wanted to see Mexicans,” he said, “I would have stayed in Georgia.” But we did go ashore at Cozumel the next day. Below, I nurse a margarita at a beachfront cantina, while Yoshi gets a chance to plunk a vibraphone. She was especially happy that day because I had shelled out \$2,000 for a diamond-studded amethyst pendant, the amethyst being her birthstone. Her 75th birthday is coming up.



Photo by Yoshi Sellers



Photo by Jackson Sellers