

## Captain Richard Kopps - Remembering Kennebec:

My principal memory of Kennebec is how hard the crew had to work on this "working" ship. Kennebec was a 1941 ship, nothing was automatic or computer controlled and a lot of manual labor was required to handle all the rigging and controls throughout the ship involved in underway replenishment. The winches, which operated the refueling rigs, were still operated by steam. They required a fine touch to maintain precise positioning of the refueling hoses while alongside another ship.

Here's an excerpt from the ship's Plan of the Day of August 26, 1969 while Kennebec was operating in the South China Sea. The POD listed the watches and outlined the following day's activities. Kennebec was scheduled to commence the first underway replenishment at 0530 the next day, taking alongside the ammunition ship, Haleakala; next, the guided missile destroyer, Stoddert; next, the helicopter carrier, Iwo Jima; next, the troopship Washburn; next, the heavy cruiser, Boston; next, the hospital ship, Repose; next, the minesweeper, Gallant; and finally, beginning at 2130, the guided missile cruiser, Oklahoma City. A typical, arduous day off Vietnam.

Another vivid memory was "mucking tanks" at sea. When orders were received in 1970 that Kennebec would be mothballed for the third time in its nearly 30 year career, the mothballing procedure required that all necessary repairs be made to the ship to ensure that the ship would be ready to quickly come out of mothballs if some national emergency required the ship to be placed back in service.

Each of the 24 fuel oil cargo tanks, some 42 feet deep, had to be emptied and thoroughly cleaned and gas free in the event that welding repairs had to be made to the tanks. The bunker fuel (black oil) that was carried in these tanks is just a step away from crude. It resembled dirty, used motor oil, only thicker, and if spilled, stained paintwork a dark brown. Clean up involved removing the oil with a solvent and repainting over the stain.

We went to sea and transferred as much of the cargo oil as possible to other ships. Then the clean up began: A mechanism for cleaning the tanks, called a Butterworth Pump, was attached to a steam line and slowly lowered into the tank. The pump was a spinning nozzle shooting live steam against the sides of the tank, washing the oil down as the pump was slowly lowered. The liquid left in the bottom of the tank was pumped overboard at sea. This was before EPA.

Next came the hard part. What was left in the bottom of the tank was a hard, crusty, oily muck that had to be scooped into buckets that were pulled up 42 feet to the deck and the contents dumped overboard. Many of the ship's crewmen had to take many turns in the tanks until the 24 hour a day job was completed. It took about four days to complete, and the weather off the Northern California coast was cold and the seas rough. After a cleaning crew spent four hours in the tanks, they came topside and removed their oily clothes, which were then destroyed. Each oncoming crew got a new set of dungarees and a pair of tennis shoes that lasted four hours. No matter how careful everyone was, black oil got on the decks and tracked into the ship. When the tanks were finally cleaned, the ship's decks and spaces had to be cleaned and repainted. This was not a morale-enhancing job.

Imagine our chagrin when we returned to port and were ordered to load up

with oil again for more operations. Tough news to break to the crew. We put to sea, refueled only one ship, off-loaded the remaining oil and mucked tanks once again.

Kennebec was decommissioned on June 29, 1970 and spent the next 12 years anchored in the mothball fleet in Suisun Bay north of San Francisco. In 1982 Kennebec met an ignoble end when she was sold to a scrap metals company for \$180,157.

Posted May 2011

Comment from Russell Burnard - May 2011:

I think the reason for the stack extension was to prevent soot from coming down on the ship during blow down of the boilers. Scupper extensions may have been done to prevent spilled oil from staining the side of the ship. Shep , I think your distinguished helper's name was Morris.

Comment From John S. Shepherd, DC-3 - May 2011:

Earl, The 4 foot stack extension came about when we were in Japan. The day before we were to sail back to San Francisco we got orders up at the ship fitters shop that the ship had to have a 4 foot extension put on and all of the ships scuppers had to be extended before we sailed the next morning. It was decided that John Fee myself John Shepherd and a guy by the name of Morson would work on the stack. Russ Burnard and others were on the scupper detail. John and I did not get the material until after dark to start on the stack as we had to wait for a crane. When we got the medal sheets it was dark seems like around 7:30 PM. Up on the stack we were to safety in ( snap in ) with a safety line in case we fell. Well about 2/3's of the time as I recall we had to work without being snaped in because we were limited with reaching around while working. Morson wouldn't work up there with out being snaped in so he was just about worthless to John and I. I think he was afraid one of us might give him a little push. We worked most of the night putting that 4 foot stack extension on. Morsion was latter kicked of the Navy with a dishonorable discharge and he was so pleased as he was going home to Phillie.