

CAST OFF . . .

7 January 1969—

New York was cold on that Tuesday winter morning. Saying goodbye for ten months is not an easy thing to do, but then again, saying goodbye is never easy. But the day had come when it was time for the SPENCER to go to war. Who could forget that last kiss, and for many of us holding back the tears was not an easy thing to do. The best part about going away is coming back again, but that was the farthest thought in our mind at that moment.

We were all silent as the SPENCER glided away from the docks, not knowing what lay in store for us before we would tie up here again. The cold was biting at our faces and hands, but we all caught a glimpse of the Island before we finally passed under the Verrazano bridge.

Spirits were perking up the second day out. The sun was a little warmer now, and most of us had our sea legs. Sun tans were in order as we doffed chambray shirts and went to work, preparing the John C. for a long hard voyage. There was plenty of chipping and painting, cleaning and polishing, swearing and sweating, but it all made the days go faster.

We were happy to pass Cuba, remembering all too well our last adventure there. But "the Squids" were lucky this time . . . the John C. was on her way to lend them a hand. Before we knew it, Saturday was here, and as usual, our Happy Hour was just great. Nothing in the world can compare to a cream puff in one hand, a coke in the other, and listening to the mod sounds of the "John C. Spencer Memorial Love-In Blues Band" on the fantail.

The next morning we awoke to the sights and sounds of the Panama Canal. We would say goodbye to the Atlantic and welcome the Pacific within a few short hours. The change of scenery would be great; besides, there were only 145 days to go until Hump Day!

