

## Losing the Load on the USS Basilone

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I survived bad storms at sea in the Atlantic, Caribbean and Mediterranean aboard the [USS BASILONE \(DD824\)](#), a WWII destroyer homeported in Newport RI. The ship was named for Marine Corps Medal of Honor winner Sgt. John Basilone, a hero of Guadalcanal. For those who might have seen the bookend series to *Band of Brothers*, Sgt Basilone was featured in "The Pacific".

We made two deployments to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean between 1968-70, between the two Arab-Israeli wars. The Russians were trying to establish a presence and a base in the Med during that period and tensions were high in the Sixth Fleet. The Israelis attacked a US Communications ship the USS Liberty and killed 33 sailors aboard. A brand new Russian cruiser, the Moskva, entered the Med from the Black Sea, and we were assigned to shadow her every move, day and night. We offloaded our drone helicopter and boarded a number of civilians and strange looking fiberglass huts. These were anechoic chambers where the "hut people" listened to every move made by the Moskva. We played cat and mouse games where our ship's engines would go from idle to flank speed and back to idle in the middle of the night. On Sundays, though, we and the Russians rested. And the crew soon learned that the Moskva had women onboard, and they sunbathed in bikinis. The competition was desperate among the crew to get time on the limited number of binoculars aboard.

During one of the fiercest storms we faced, the ship arrived at a very tense situation one night. The seas were so dangerous and high that waves crashed over our stacks, and water ran down the stacks and extinguished our boilers. The ship suddenly went black and then we "lost the load", meaning that we lost all electrical power aboard, and the ship could not be steered. In short order, we were at the mercy of the storm, and the destroyer broached in the huge waves, meaning she was not riding the waves but caught sideways in between them. This is what led to sinking of several destroyers in the Pacific during a typhoon near the end of WWII.

All aboard were holding their breath in the weak glow of emergency lighting. After what seemed too long, the snipes(engineers) worked their magic, got the boilers dried and re-lit, and power was back, with rudder and steering. In the officers staterooms, as the ship rolled to starboard there would be a crashing from all the loose, unsecured gear smashing against the starboard bulkhead. Then, as we rolled to port, the same gear would smash and crash against the port bulkhead. Not music to the ears. Gradually headway was re-stored and we headed up with our bow into the waves. We were then pitching severely as we plowed into the huge waves, but the dangerous rolling was over. Relief was sweet when that storm ended.