

William “Bill” Emley

Damage Control Man 3rd Class

U.S. Navy

USS Hornet CVS-12

USS Ticonderoga CVS-14

Sea of Japan (East Sea)

Bill Emley was drafted into the armed forces in December of 1967. He attempted to enlist in the Air Force, but the waiting list was too long. He enlisted and entered the U.S. Navy on January 2, 1968.

Bill completed Basic Training at San Diego, California. While in Basic Training, he was chosen to participate in the Honor Guard, a special group of snappy-marching recruits. They were supposed to have performed a special parade routine at the graduation ceremony, but all that work was for naught because the ceremony was rained out. After completing Basic Training, Bill returned home for a two-week leave, during which he married his wife Pat on March 16, 1968. When he returned to Long Beach, California, he was assigned to the USS Hornet, CVS-12, an aircraft carrier which was stationed there.

While in the Navy, Bill was sent on two tours to Vietnam in 1968 and 1970, and two Apollo recovery missions, Apollo 11 and Apollo 12.

On his Vietnam tours, he visited the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Hawaii was interesting at first but after ten visits, it lost its appeal. He didn't like either the Philippines or Singapore. Japan and Hong Kong, however, were places he enjoyed immensely. He went on many sightseeing tours and spent countless hours visiting scenic and cultural sites. He put together a paper money collection from each country that he visited and assembled several trays of slides to send home to share with his family.



USS Hornet CVS-12

The end of the first tour was really interesting. The ship was ready to leave the Vietnam War Zone for the last time and was scheduled to go to Sydney, Australia. On the second day of sailing, orders were received to join a task force headed for Korea. The ship turned around and immediately went to Japan to join the task force.

The word was finally passed down that the North Koreans had shot down one of our Navy EC-121 intelligence gathering planes on April 15, 1969. An international incident was unfolding to which President Nixon wanted to respond quickly and sizably. They also recalled the battleship USS New Jersey, which had been in port at Pearl Harbor.

Then in a statement on April 16, the U.S. State Department stated that the plane had been on a reconnaissance mission in the Sea of Japan (East Sea). The plane was “unarmed and on a routine reconnaissance track over international waters.”

Task Force 71, assigned to protect the flights, began assembling in the Sea of Japan on April 21. The Naval Force consisted of 23 warships, 3 aircraft carriers with a complement of about 280 jet fighters and bombers, mostly shifted from the Vietnam War Zone.

On the first morning as the Hornet passed through the Sea of Japan, Bill went to the deck to watch the sun rise. To his amazement, as far as he could see, there were American and Canadian warships, all kinds and sizes. The Sea of Japan was filled with Naval war power. What a sight to see!

By April 28, Task Force 71 had been re-

duced to one aircraft carrier and seven destroyers, and the Hornet was allowed to leave for its scheduled departure to the United States. It sailed north along the coast of the Soviet Union, over to Alaska, then down to California. For four days, the Hornet was constantly under the watchful eye of the Soviet military. Soviet ships would try to infiltrate the perimeter of the destroyer escorts, while Soviet "Brown Bear" bombers were continually buzzing the ship at low altitude. Their jet fighters would come in low and then suddenly pull up and climb into the clouds, leaving a sonic boom that penetrated and rattled the ship. General Quarters alarms would sound like clockwork when the ship was being tormented by these flight patterns. Harassment was the ploy and the Soviets did a good job of it.

It was during the second tour of Vietnam, assigned to the USS Ticonderoga CVS-14, that Bill became closely involved in the war activity. A small gunboat from Vietnam managed to get within range of one of the escort destroyers. It fired at least one round across the bow of the destroyer but didn't hit the ship. General Quarters was sounded, planes were launched, and contact was made with the USS New Jersey. A destroyer chased the gunboat back toward the Vietnam coast, and after a while, the New Jersey sent out a volley from the big guns. Bill never did find out if they sank the gunboat.

The New Jersey was a spectacular battleship. It would sit out 15 miles or so from the coast and lob shells into the mainland of Vietnam. At night, you could see the fire belch out of the guns, then after a few seconds the sky would light up where the shells were landing. She had a purpose and she did it well.

The retrieval of the Apollo space capsules was a highlight of Bill's years in the Navy. Bill was a part of the retrievals for Apollo 11 and 12. Apollo 11 was the famous mission with the "first man on the moon." The USS Hornet was on station for the

recovery of the Columbia on July 24, 1969. The Columbia entered the Earth's atmosphere and floated down as the three parachutes deployed, splashing down at 16:52 UTC. Helicopters quickly arrived and extracted the three astronauts. They were transported to the Hornet and placed in a mobile quarantine facility on the hangar bay. President Nixon welcomed the astronauts back to Earth, stating, "as a result of what you have done, the world has never been closer together." Bill collected a book on the mission and several items of memorabilia, including a bronze medallion, several issues of envelopes and stamps, and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings. President Nixon visited the ship in Pearl Harbor.

The Apollo 12 mission was not as glamorous, but just as important, Apollo 12 was the sixth crewed flight into space and the second to land on the moon, to collect lunar materials,

Returning from his second tour, Bill was discharged from the armed forces in October of 1971. Bill liked the Navy and considered reenlisting but couldn't obtain the promises and conditions that he wanted.

He was honorably discharged with several citations: Good Conduct, Vietnam Service (first tour), Republic of Vietnam (second tour), National Defense, Presidential Unit Citation (Apollo 11), Meritorious Unit Citation (Apollo 11), Meritorious Unit Citation (Task Force 71) and Expeditionary (Task Force 71).



Clipping on Task Force 71



**Left: Retrieving The Apollo 11 Command Module
Right: USS Ticonderoga CVS-14**

