

The Biggest Dog-Gone WEST POINT Sea Story – Ever!

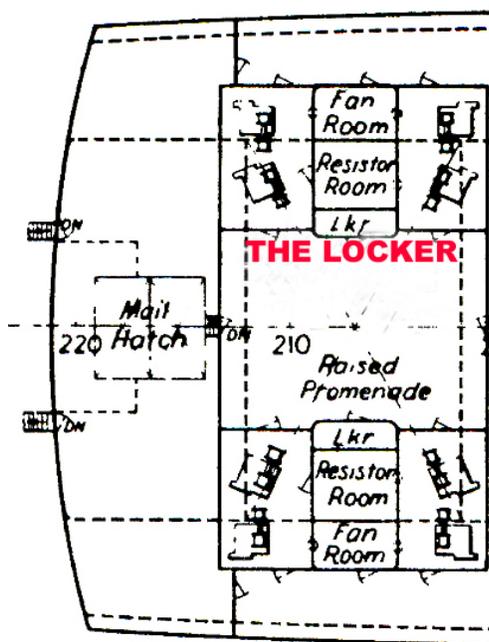
Normally, sea stories that are foisted upon the unsuspecting public by seasoned sailors have to be taken with a grain of (sea) salt. In addition, such tales also have to be discounted to some degree, depending on how many times they have been retold and whether the venue for the most recent retelling dispenses spirits.

But this is most assuredly not true for most of the sea stories spun by members of the USS WEST POINT crew, as the following tale demonstrates.



Morrel Darrough, who decades ago was a 3rd Class Petty Officer in the WEST POINT's Second Division, enjoys recounting what is arguably one of the biggest dog-gone sea stories – ever. Plus, he has pictures! Not only that, there is actually an official United States Navy verification for a large part of his story!

As he recently recalled, shortly after the ship sailed from Naples in 1945, bringing thousands of soldiers home, he opened the door to a port side deck locker well aft on Promenade Deck. Whatever his purpose was for going into that locker that day quickly became secondary when he came face-to-face with – of all things – a *Great Dane!*



Morrel closed the door most of the way, but did not dog it, which allowed him to peek through the small remaining opening. He soon determined that that the huge animal (large, even by Great Dane standards) was friendly.

Just then, one of the ship's officers happened by and naturally inquired: "What's going on?" PO Darrough replied, as he opened the door again: "Look what I found." The officer, an Ensign in the Second Division, inquired as to the ownership of the dog.

Morrel didn't know, and before he could even offer the standard sailor's response to such unanswerable queries (*Gee, Sir, maybe it fell off a truck!*), a soldier standing nearby said that he knew who the owner was, and would go get him.

Presently, another soldier arrived on the scene and admitted to bringing the dog onboard. But he didn't reveal how in the world he managed to spirit such a large stowaway past the gangway watch undetected.

Now, here's where the official record comes in play.

Following is an excerpt from an official Navy Department release, dated 9 June 1945 and entitled *Return of G.I. Joe on Board the USS WEST POINT*:

"As the G.I.'s filed across the gangway, a ship's officer kept a careful watch for dogs and other pets. They're banned. They might spread disease, and pets have an unpleasant habit of messing up the decks.

"Yet, despite the most careful check, several dogs invariably appear as soon as the ship clears the dock. Hardly had the WEST POINT left land when 17 dogs, smuggled aboard in duffel bags and knapsacks, put in an appearance. The Captain [Webb C. Hayes, USNR] would not permit them to be shot. 'It's not the dog's fault,' he commented."

The Ensign, whose name Morrel wishes he could remember, obviously knew of this kindness from on high, for he scribbled a note that authorized the ingenious soldier to go to the galley every day and get the dog a steak.



Morrel happened to have a camera with him, and he and the Ensign took turns photographing one another with the dog (whose name and gender are also lost in time).



Both of these photos were taken at the extreme aft end of the WEST POINT's Promenade Deck. During the war, two-forty foot motor launches were stowed there, augmenting the ship's normal peace-time complement of life boats and the many life rafts added by the Navy.

In both of the pictures, men and dog are shown standing in front of the #1 Motor Launch in its port side, stowed and secured position. The locker that temporarily doubled as a dog house before Morrel Darrough made his discovery was located immediately forward of this position.

All of the dogs that made that particular trip to America spent the rest of their voyage on the semi-enclosed main deck line handling area, far aft. Their owners were ordered to sleep there, and care for and clean up after the four-legged stowaways. There were no recorded gripes.

When the WEST POINT pulled into port, thousands of soldiers, and seventeen liberated dogs went ashore. No one today knows how Army Port of Embarkation officials dealt with the animals.

One can only hope they were as kind and understanding as Captain Hayes.

In any case, here's one sea story that really is a *tall tail*...

THE AT-SEA DOG HOUSE

