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Vern retired from Boeing in the year 2000, a respected Telephone Engineer, as a Registered Communication Distribution Designer. Upon completing his tour with the Navy in 1955, Vern was hired to work with telephone plant rebuilding and it became his career. In 45 years he has designed and served as resident engineer for the building of many hundreds of miles of telephone line, aerial, buried, underground, station wiring and data room design. This was accomplished first in Michigan, then Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Arkansas, Arizona, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Alaska, Virginia and Hawaii, in that order. His specialty became telephone plant record keeping. His work was all in the Independent Telephone Industry, and he visited Bell companies to learn their proven procedures. Currently he hosts the web site “navy.memorieshop.com” for Navy Tankers and supports the USS Kawishiwi AO-146 Reunion Association as a Plank Owner. SN 1953-1955. Vern is in photos on pages 4 and 7.

Cover Photo Provided
by John J. Morrison

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Preface

Vern has written this book for the more than 18,000 Navy crew members who served on the six large Neosho class fleet oilers, (tankers) built during the cold war of the 1950's and described herein. He wants to show each crew member's wife, mother, dad, sons, daughters, nephews, grandchildren, where he was when he served aboard these ships, what the parts of the ship looked like, and in some cases what he had to do.

These tankers were large and coming within 50 feet of a ship it was refueling (replenishing) in the middle of the sea, made it a dangerous job, especially to those who had to handle the hoses and lines.

The concept of replenishment at sea is an old one, first used on a large scale by the Romans before the birth of Christ. But it has evolved into an operation of such magnitude and complexity in today's modern Navy that the job of preparation is seemingly endless. Weeks before the tankers deploy for replenishment operations, fuel and oil requirements are determined, schedules are planned, and every department aboard ship gears its activities to meet the demands.

During their deployments, the tankers were a part of our powerful Naval fleets representing U.S. National Policies. The fleets strength, readiness, and mobility has been the major deterrent to aggression. The cost of such a fleet is high. The personal sacrifices of the men who man it are great. The family separations, the long work days which end or start in darkness, the interrupted meals and sleep, the high temperatures, the cold and wet were personal sacrifices. Few Americans can say that they have so contributed to their country's freedom.

Operations such as these greatly increase the operation capabilities of ships in the Worlds Oceans. Some of the fastest and largest fleet oilers in the Navy, they are capable of underway replenishment under all weather conditions for extended periods of time, one of the major requisites for today's modern support ships. The highly specialized evolution of Underway Replenishment (UNREP) can be carried out during the daylight hours or under the cover of night.

Naval oil tankers support all other naval ships to keep them moving through their assigned tasks. They are hardly ever recognized by the public or appear in the news, they are just there. The six Super Tankers described here are now moored in the National Defense Reserve Fleet. Three are in the James River, Virginia and three in Suisun Bay, up river from San Francisco.

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Look at an ordinary day of one of these tankers steaming between commitments. During one 24 hour period at sea, a sailor had more to do than you could imagine: up at six in the morning, breakfast, quarters, start to work at 0800 sharp (sometimes); a noon meal, a half hour break before 1300, and plenty to keep him busy until "knock off ship's work" is passed at 1600. In addition to a full work day, add 8 hours of watch to be stood on the bridge - always ready for the surprise UNREP - and you get an idea of life at sea.

But it wasn't just that, during those few hours a day that a man had to himself, he could choose from a hundred and one activities, innumerable past times and hobbies such as reading, writing home, leather craft, building models, games, listening to any one of a dozen phonographs (take your pick of any type of music, they're all playing at once), and of course "flick" shown at 2000hours/8:00 p.m. on the mess decks or, in good weather, the 02 level aft.

Making preparations for that next UNREP, sprucing up bright work, chipping, painting, and just keeping the ship's appearance up to par were enough to keep all hands busy. But life quickly fell into a routine at sea.

In time, a development between each man and his ship became a kind of rapport. A feeling came in each man's heart that his ship is a good ship, that she can do her job. And through all the rough times and hard work, she is HIS ship - a ship he can be proud of. Since many naval ships were required to stay at sea for thirty days or more patrolling off the coast of Vietnam or Lebanon, they relied heavily on service force ships like the six Neosho class tankers for fuel and supplies.

Typically steaming alongside one, and sometimes two other ships, the tankers had transferred dry cargo, mail, passengers, food provisions and even ammunition. In one 256 day deployment, the *Kawishiwi* and her crew had steamed 47,700 miles, UNREPED 234 ships and transferred 46 million gallons of fuel, 225 tons of fleet freight and 31 tons of mail. These deployment statistics varied with each ships years of service.

The Super Tankers never fired its guns at an enemy but they have sunk boats unwillingly. Their crews have personally provided help to many villages or organizations in countries they have visited and the United States. Crew members who enjoyed the comforts of these huge ships, may have only served on there one ship while others have gone on to serve on much smaller ships, larger ships or experienced the tragedies of war in Vietnam. At least one of the crew members was murdered. *Hassayampa*, *Kawishiwi*, and *Ponchatoula* ran continuous support in the Taiwan Straits while the United States was supporting Taiwan's major conflict with China. *Kawishiwi* picked up hundreds of Vietnam refugees from their Vietcong escape. It even picked up persons on boats lost in the China Sea and in the Pacific close to the U.S. main land. The super tankers have had several collisions while refueling other ships and have even doused these ships with black oil when the 7 inch hoses were broken. The crews were trained in the recovery of space capsules and participated in the recovery of Apollo and Gemini space capsules. Visits to such ports as Singapore, Hong Kong, Sasebo, Yokosuka, Manila, Subic Bay, Guam and Pearl Harbor in the Pacific or Ascension Island, and Bermuda in the Atlantic or St.Thomas, Roosevelt Roads, and Guantanamo in the Caribbean or Oslo, Copenhagen, Kiel, Rotterdam, Greenock, and Portsmouth in the North Sea or Rota on the way to the Mediterranean or Malaga, Valencia, Ibiza, Palma, Barcelona, Cannas, Citivavecchia, Naples, Augusta, Malta, Athens, Istanbul, and Beirut in the Mediterranean have given the super tanker crews the chance to view the great changes of these cities over 25 years. That's just some of the ports.

All information included in this book has been obtained from *USS Kawishiwi AO-146* crew members, their cruise books, from U.S. Government files and crew members of the *USS Neosho AO-143*, *USS Mississinewa AO-144*, *USS Hassayampa AO-145*, *USS Truckee AO-147* and the *USS Ponchatoula AO-148*.