

XIII. 1956 ~ Changes & the First Missile Destroyer

1956: *The Gyatt was not in commission through the first eleven months of 1956 and consequently a deck log was not written or required during this period.*

The year continued with many changes on the Gyatt, the after weaponry was removed and replaced by guided missiles and three-inch guns. The after weaponry was everything aft of the number one stack and included all depth charges, the number three five-inch gun mount, the three quad 40mm guns and the two twin 40 mm guns aft of the bridge and the torpedoes. The Terrier Missile Battery consisted of two missiles, each approximately 27 feet in length, 13.5 inches in diameter and weighing 2,760 pounds. The magazine that stored fourteen additional missiles was located directly forward of the missile battery. The missiles had a speed in excess of Mach 2 and a range in the order of 20 miles. The missiles had an altitude sufficient enough to engage jet aircraft and the warhead was of sufficient size that it could destroy other planes flying in the same formation. The missiles guidance system was called "Radar Beamride." Missile targets were tracked by a modified Mark 25 Model 8 gun fire-control radar located atop the original gun battery director forward; the Mark 72 weapons control system provided only a single fire-control channel for both the missile system and 5-inch gun mounts. The ship retained the two forward 5-inch twin gun mounts. Four 3-inch 50-caliber twin mounts replaced the 40-millimeter guns and the five-tube torpedo spread was replaced by two stacked triple tube groupings. The Mark 56 fire-control system was setup abaft the stacks for the 3-inch weapons. In addition, there were radar improvements to the SPS-6 air search and the SPS-10 surface search radars. The radar at high altitude had a range of 220 miles and at low altitude the range was twenty miles.

The AN/SPS-6C radar handled the location of aerial targets; there was no height finding radar, and given the constant changes and alterations in the earlier Terrier system, only the most cooperative targets were in danger. Two Mark 2 Hedgehog Spigot Mortars and two Mark 2 Torpedo Launchers were available to deal with submarines.

The ship was also the first warship in the Navy to have a stabilization system added to the hull. The Denny-Brown Stabilization System, pioneered in Great Britain, had been installed to eliminate much of the rolling that is characteristic of destroyers and other small ships. The system had two retractable fins, each with an area of approximately 45 square feet, the fins extended amidships and were well below the waterline. In addition to all this hi-tech equipment the Gyatt was one of the first Navy ships to use solar power when the after emergency diesel generator was replaced with a Solar Gas Turbine Generator. On many occasions, especially in rough weather, this stabilization allowed the Gyatt to stay on station during plane guard detail and refueling operations.

Finally - with the replacement and resulting reduction of weapons, albeit that the weaponry was more powerful, the complement of the ship was reduced from 360 officers and enlisted men to 272 officers and enlisted men.

On the 1st day of December 1956 the classification of the Gyatt was changed to the DDG-712 and the ship became the first guided missile destroyer in the Navy. Two days later on the 3rd day of December the Gyatt was recommissioned at the Boston Naval Shipyard and placed under the command of Commander Charles F. Helme, Jr., USN (3 December 1956 to 5 April 1958). Commander Helme's first duty aboard a destroyer came in 1942 when he went aboard the USS Quick (DD-490) as an ensign out of the academy. For two years Commander Helme served in the North Atlantic, North Africa and Sicily providing support as needed. In 1944 Commander Helme went aboard the USS J. R. Pierce (DD-753) as a plank owner and Lieutenant and served in the Pacific Theater and also with the Japanese occupation force. Prior to taking command of the Gyatt, Commander Helme served aboard the battleship USS Iowa (BB-61). Post Gyatt duty saw a promotion to Captain and service with the Atlantic Fleet as Commander Destroyer Division 12 and with the Pacific Fleet as Commander Destroyer Squadron Nine. On two different occasions, after leaving the Gyatt, Commander Helme served with the Bureau of Weapons.

Back to the missiles on the Gyatt, the Terrier missile was one of the original "T" missiles of the Bumblebee program, sometimes called the "3-Ts" or "Terrible Ts," which also included the Talos and Tartar. It was anticipated that the Terrier system could be mounted in destroyers and the Gyatt, a long hulled Gearing class destroyer, was selected.

Although the installation of the Terrier system was considered successful its size proved too large for destroyer use. A more practical solution came with the installation of the Terrier's successor, the Tartar, in the Charles F. Adams (DDG-2) class destroyer. The Adams was almost 47 feet longer than the Gyatt, approximately seven feet wider and more 1100 tons heavier, when fully loaded.

In 1973 the Navy came out with the Spruance class destroyer with a length of 563 feet, a beam of 55 feet, a draft of 29 feet and a full load displacement of 7,810 tons. In between the Adams and the Spruance class were the Sherman class, Mitscher class, Coontz class and the Kidd class. The latest in the destroyer line is the Arleigh Burke class, which supersedes the Spruance class. The Arleigh Burke class is shorter but heavier than the Spruance class destroyers with a length of 509 feet, a beam of 67 feet and a draught of 31 feet. The Arleigh Burke class destroyer, the latest being the USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG-81), displaces 9,217 tons when fully loaded. The Spruance class remains the leading ASW destroyer, but it is an aging vessel, with the last being built in 1983 – the first in 1975. The hull for the Spruance class destroyer has become the hull for the Ticonderoga type cruiser. The Ticonderoga cruiser displaces 278 tons more than the Arleigh Burke class destroyer and at 80,000 horsepower generates 20,000 horsepower less than the Arleigh Burke destroyers. Even the frigates of today are larger than the Gyatt, achieving lengths in excess of 450 feet and full load displacements of more than 4,000 tons. It should be noted, that in Jane's American Fighting Ships of the Twentieth Century, that the frigate carries either an "FF" or "DE" designation. Anyway – back to 1956.

It was December and as usual Boston was cold. The non-petty officers, both seamen and firemen, were required to stand watches, around the clock, at the pier and the warehouses housing the missile equipment. Those on watch were issued 12-gauge sawed off pump shotguns and a bandoleer with 20 12-gauge riot shells. It was Sunday morning and the relief watch went to relieve the man who had been on station during the previous watch. In a few minutes the relief watch returned to the quarterdeck and informed the Officer of the Deck that he could not relieve the on watch at the end of the pier because he didn't have any ammunition. The OOD somewhat aggravated said he would see what was going on – that there were no reports of activity by the previous OOD. The OOD and the relief watch went to the watch station at the end of the pier and queried the sentry at the end of the pier – as to activity and loss of ammunition. The watch, with downcast eyes, said he had exhausted the ammunition shooting seagulls – as he pointed to the feathers that lay on the water in front of the pier.

Other events occurring in 1956 included the reelection of President Eisenhower; the overrunning of Hungary by Russia and the subsequent death of 20,000 Hungarians; the sinking of the Italian liner Andrea Doria after a collision with the Swedish liner Stockholm; the making of a princess with the marriage of actress Grace Kelly to Prince Ranier II of Monaco. The Princess and her husband were to walk the decks of the Gyatt in 1960.

Rocky Marciano retired as the Heavyweight Boxing Champion with a record of 46 wins and no losses; this record included 43 knockouts. The Yankees beating the Dodgers in seven games to win the World Series and Don Larsen, a somewhat average pitcher, had all of his “stuff” as he pitched the World Series only perfect game. The New York Giants were champions of the NFL and the Philadelphia Warriors, later to become the San Francisco Warriors, were NBA champions.

“Around the World in 80 Days” won the Academy Award and there was a host of great movies in 1956, including; “Giant, The King and I, Anastasia, Lust for Life, The Ten Commandments, The Man With the Golden Arm, Written on the Wind and War & Peace.”