

10 December 1964

USS JOHN R. PIERCE (DD-753)  
FAMILY GRAM

It was just three months ago that I wrote to you from San Juan. Since that time much has happened, and very little of it according to any plan we might have forecast prior to that letter. As you recall we returned to Norfolk on 17 September fully prepared to enjoy a three week tender period prior to our scheduled deployment. Our motto changed to expect the unexpected, as an unpredictable hurricane blew in from the south forcing PIERCE to seek shelter in the Norfolk Naval Shipyard at Portsmouth, Virginia. After a brief, but disruptive stay in Portsmouth, we returned to the Destroyer/Submarine Piers (D/S Piers), to complete the remainder of our pre-deployment phase. In those last few hectic days, PIERCE was inspected by Rear Admiral HEINZ, Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Flotilla TWELVE, and his staff, in order to determine whether the PIERCE was ready for the forthcoming deployment. PIERCE weathered the inspection with flying colors and was pronounced "ready" for the rigors of a Mediterranean deployment. For the next few days, we crammed a lot of work into the short days, loading stores, repairing machinery and incidentally, a lot of living. On 8 October PIERCE and our sister ship, USS BARTON (DD-722), left Norfolk in company with the Fleet Oiler USS CANISTEO (AO-99) enroute for the Med.

Within a few days PIERCE developed a sudden and unaccountable feed water consumption problem of serious magnitude. Feed water is a special, pure grade of water, restricted because of its purity for use in ship's boilers. Boilers can not steam for very long on regular fresh water of normal drinking purity and for only a matter of minutes, if fed with sea water. The impurities "salt-up" a boiler causing the boiler tubes to burn up. You all remember how the old tea pot used to cake up after boiling tap water, well the same thing happens to boiler tubes when impure water is used in the generation of the steam. All naval ships carry large quantities of both feed and potable drinking water in their tanks and have distilling plants for making water, to supplement the stowed supply.

In our case, we started using feed water faster than we could make it. The end result being that sooner or later we would run out of feed water and the ship would stop (just like running out of gas) in the middle of the Atlantic.

We borrowed enough feed water from the ships in company and went directly to Naples, Italy alongside the destroyer tender SHENANDOAH.

Between PIERCE's people and those of SHENANDOAH a great amount of work was done on the feed water system. Unfortunately, the work was more comprehensive than imagined and PIERCE had to remain in Naples longer than scheduled.

It was a disappointment to us to see the BORIE sail out on a mission that we had all looked forward to with anticipation, but little else could be done because of a rigid time schedule for the Red Sea.

When the repairs were completed PIERCE steamed up to join a task group of the SIXTH FLEET, operating just south of the famed Riviera district of France; our feed water problem was history. From the 1st week of November until today PIERCE has been in the show all the way. So far we have had excellent success "sinking" the exercise submarines who constantly oppose us, while our more modern big brothers have not done nearly as well. Our GTMO training has been paying off.

We are in the Spanish port of Valencia, this week, preparing for the next at sea period. When we leave, we will see our old friends of this task group being relieved by new arrivals from the States. As you know, we will stay in the Med until the middle of January, as originally scheduled.

During the next two weeks we will operate at sea with carrier SARATOGA and the guided missile cruiser LITTLE ROCK, entering the port of Naples on the 21st.

After Christmas we will go to Genoa, Italy, for a few days including New Year and then participate in a small fleet exercise off Sardinia in early January. We will have a short stop in a southern French port, probably Marseilles. Our return date to the U.S. is still in doubt but I'm afraid it will be longer than was originally expected. I will advise you as soon as our return date is official.

Just what our schedule will include after January 20th is vague at this time and subject to the usual unforeseen changes. We are still scheduled to relieve THE SULLIVANS in New York on the 1st of April as the Naval Reserve Training ship. Incidentally, there has been no news on what the NRT home port shift will entail, although we have a schedule of operations now which will be made available to your PIERCEMAN shortly.

Just a word about mail. Mail service in the Med is erratic at best. On several occasions we have received mail post marked four days before in Norfolk, and on equally as many occasions, we have had mail take 10-12 days to make the same trip. Our people seem to be doing a great job of writing to you, based on the volume of mail being dispatched from the ship. But let me urge you to keep your letters coming as frequently as possible, even though our return mail to you may be slow in delivery. For those of us on a ship at sea, a pleasant letter from the family is just about the best thing we can ask for.

Separation during these holidays is especially difficult but we will be with you all in spirit. The PIERCE is planning a large Christmas party at an orphanage in Naples. If we can't be with our own loved ones, we want to spread the true meaning of Christmas to those who are less fortunate. There is no music sweeter than the "excitable laughter" of children who have just been given presents. Our men seem to enjoy these Childrens parties more than the kids.

It was heart warming to see the burliest of petty officers carrying a little 4 year old girl as though she were made of china and making sure she could see the cartoons or that she got more ice cream than she could eat.

As I said earlier in this letter, I will write again when I have firm information about our return date.

With my very best personal wishes for a Blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I remain

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth G. HYLIND  
Commanding Officer