

UNITED STATES SHIP CONYNGHAM (BBG-17)

SUB: CLASS BRAVO FIRE
BY: SEILER, MM2 (MMOW)

On the morning of 08 MAY 1990, two days before OPPEE, i had the 04-08 Machinist Mate Of The Watch (MMOW) in the aft engine room. At approx. 0450, the space had a light haze and smell of smoke. The watch team wanted to know what was going on. I made the following statement, " don't get excited yet, B-1 is suppose to be lighting off this morning. There probably making preps to lite fires." Four out of five times the wind direction is just right that our supply vents will suck in some stack smoke. I reached for the 2JV and asked Main Control if B-1 lite fires yet? Ten seconds passed when i repeated the same question. All of a sudden someone yelled something over the 2JV, there words could not be understood. At this time heavy black smoke was blasting out from our supply vents and coming down the main space entrance due to negative ventilation. In no time, the main space was completely filled with smoke. When the EEBD's were pulled and scattered about for dawning, GQ went down. The word was passed as a class "B" fire in Main Control, shortly after, making the correction it was in B-1.

At this time visibility was to a minimum. The only person in sight was the U/Levelman, and Throttleman. Last time i saw the Electrician he was standing between the evaps. and 2S switchboard with his head set on trying to contact IS board operator in Main. The L/Levelman was standing between the U/L & L/Level deck plates. The Messenger called out he was going topside, the people around me were trying to dawn there EEBD's from what i could hear, cause by this time all sight was lost. I found myself on the hot deck plates repeating OH MY GOD, trying to dawn my EEBD, I found it impossible, even-though training was held over & over again. Choking and gagging on the thick smoke, hyperventilating and eyes burning, i thought i was going to die! I couldn't believe this was actually happening. Finally i got one thing drilled in my head, i could do one of two things. I could die on these plates due to massive smoke inhalation or EGRESS out. "Evacuate", was the call, the U/Levelman and throttleman were right next to me, i could hear them scuffle up the ladder, and i right after them. Every couple steps up the ladder i felt above my head to ensure i wouldn't run into anyone or hit a hatch. The walk to the weather deck seemed to have taken forever, but soon i was there heading aft to the fantail, still choking trying to clear my lungs i was passing personnel by going to GQ, some thought this was a drill and seemed very upset!

Then the big question hit, did all my watch team make it out? I stepped in the Stbd. side Qtr Deck hoping to see some OBA's hanging, there was. I immediately dawned with a little help from BT2 Odum, who was passing out gear from REP 3. The canister was in and timer set, i was on my way to B-4. I know i had a good seal

when i opened the door to B-4's P-way. The smoke was so intense nothing could be seen inside. I felt around with my hands and feet trying to find the entrance to B-4. The question came to mind as i kicked the hatch knife edge before entering the space, do i really want to do this ? I was really scared. The biggest scare was not knowing the exact condition of the plant. I could only hear the sound of 2B SSTG surging due to the start up and securing of electrical equipment throughout the ship.

GQ was still being sounded. Before long i was on the deck plates feeling my way towards the ventilation controllers. The smoke was yet so thick, a mag light was used, just an inch away from the controller it was still difficult to read. I worked my way over to the throttle board and the first gauge i saw was the firemain pressure. The feeling i got when i saw "0" Psi was unexplainable. Without hesitation, i spun around and dropped to the lower level and Placed in Operation #5 Fire Pump, the whole time thinking about those guys fighting a fire without water. I returned to the U/L to notice 120 Psi F/Main pressure. My mind now knowing that some hose team at least has a chance. The space now is about 50% de-smoked as i continue to check the space for personnel. Everyone had made it out !

2B SSTG is still running strong with load varying. I monitored 2S SWBD for a minute, every thing normal, 600 amps, not bad under the circumstances. I tried to contact AFT F/ROOM (B-3) by use of the 21MC to see what there plant status was, no answer. The 2JV was also inoperative. I didn't know if they had to evacuate or not. I could only assume they were in full operation due to the supply of steam. I monitored the throttle board again and noticed the Main condenser ovbd. temp. up to 98 deg. and vacuum rising to 26" HG. I placed in operation #2 Mn Circ.pump, verified Evaps. going ovbd, aligned drains to the bilge. Dropped to the L/Level and checked Temps. & Pressures on all AUX. equipment. Verified EMERG. cooling was aligned aft. Realized the space is now 100% de-smoked.

It wasn't 5 min. later, the mn.circ. started winding down, I'm loosing 600# steam. It dropped to 300 psi when i secured Aux. Exh. to the Main then broke Vacuum. It was then i heard the elec. L/O pump come on line. I continued to secure MUF, isolated the FW drain tk., and secured #2 L/O Purifier. Back on the U/L i secured gland sealing steam to the Main. It couldn't have been 5 Min.into this and another very distinctive noise caught my ear, 2B SSTG slowing down, and lighting starting to dim. My curiosity now confirmed, B-3 had to secure and i was running out of 1200# steam. I stood by the generator watching the pressure gage drop as the lights was going dimmer. I was hoping that this brown-out would let everyone know that lights was going out temporarily before the Emerg.Diesel would come on line. I tripped the GEN. at approx. 600# before the reverse power relay got it, all went dark, within 10 seconds i heard the ABT's roll & EMERG. lighting was on ! The diesel was on-line. I continued to secure the gen. and the rest of the plant.

I found it getting difficult to breath and noticed my OBA air bags had collapsed, air had run out. I looked at my timer and only 25 Min. had elapsed. I broke the seal on the face piece in attempt to remove it, cause after all, there's no more smoke in the space. Big mistake, the air had an acidic odor that not only choked ya, but would burn your skin and eyes like a tear gas would. So i left the space knowing that i had done all i could possibly do.

I got to the fantail where REP.5 was mustered, reported to the R-5 officer on personnel and equipment status of aft. engine rm.

There was a crew taking expended obo canisters near by, I gave them mine, took five min. to breath some fresh air and see what was going on around me. I got a new canister, then back to B-4. When i got on the deck plates, i was met by two people from the Re-Man Team. I waited for my relief and gave him a complete turn over. I returned to the fantail where i rested for 2 hours. The Chief Corpsman was making rounds and stopped by to see if i was alright. He thought i was actually in the fire by how i appeared, heavy soot, from head to toe. He wanted to know if i wanted to leave early on the small boats for medical attention. (Another ship and tugs are in the area helping out.) Seating was limited, i felt there was someone else who needed it more than i, all i had was a nasty cough. So i stayed with the ship. Later i assisted the hose team overhauling the fire outside B-1, then completed my day by helping in the massive clean up in the same area. Later that evening i met up with my watch team. I found out that the L/L man had evacuated the space by using the escape trunk. The electrician left the same way as the rest of us.

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For the next month i would be treated for pneumonia, due to massive smoke inhalation before evacuating the space. Physicians at Sewels Branch Medical say that i inhaled enough smoke that would be equivalent to 90,000 pks. of cigarettes.

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Here it is October 1990, the ship is being de-commissioned and awards given out. My expectations were shot down that morning when i found out nothing was submitted for my involvement. Of all the eng.dept. on watch, i was the only one that went to there appointed GQ station and did there job, and then some. The Cheng was no where's to be found, later he was seen on the 01 level hose handling, (he got a NAM). EOOW, where was he ?, (he got a NAM). Same with the DCA,?, (he got a NAM). These individuals asked me one on one what i did at the time of fire. They all got a copy of this letter, with the exception of the last few paragraphs. I couldn't remember if it was before or after the JAG investigation, which i was chauffeured to in the XO's sedan. Due to Medical Apts. i had no idea of the sched.jag apt. Everyone was sweating the load on getting me there on time. Of these three people, i have no idea what there involvement was, i do know that mine was forgotten I

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