

Looking Back at Lira

After leaving Ankara, Turkey, our next port of call was once again, Naples, Italy. The Suez Canal was in turmoil and the area around it had to be carefully watched.

The girls of Naples were always happy to see the U.S. Navy ships pull in and tie up. Naples is a very old city dating back to ancient times. Naples, like all big cities, has a very high crime rate.

The U.S.S. Bordelon and her sister ship, the U.S.S. Furse, would be tied up here for about four days.

Naples, like New York, was a fun city, with something going on all the time. I remember going to a cameo studio, a place where some of the most beautiful cameos in the world are produced.

Cameos are very expensive, due to the fact that they are all hand carved from the heart of stone. It takes weeks and weeks to produce just one cameo and there are none exactly alike. I purchased one and gave it to my mother when I got home...she treasured it.

After a day of sightseeing, shopping and carousing around, I ran into three guys from the ship. They were all broke and wanted to go back to the ship. Payday was a couple of days off and nobody had much money.

When I left the ship I didn't have much money either, however, I did have four cartons of cigarettes, two on each leg under my bell-bottoms. American cigarettes were better than money in Europe. At 90 cents a carton at the ships store, on credit, I had plenty of money.

The monetary unit in Turkey was the Turkish Lira. The monetary unit in Italy was the Italian Lira, however....

We hailed a taxi to go back to the ship, the four of us piled into the taxi, a 1929 Ford Model A that looked like it just came off the showroom floor. Upon arriving at the pier, the cab driver, an elderly man, told us the fare. It didn't make much difference how much it was, we were all broke. I told the guys to go ahead and get up the gangway. I remembered that I had a large Turkish Lira in my wallet. I fumbled through my wallet, making sure the guys were on the ship. The Turkish Lira was folded up very tight. I handed it to the old man and said, "Keep the change".

He took the money and began unfolding it as I took off on the run up the gangway. Just as I reached the top of the gangway, I heard him yell, "HEY, come back, son-a-beech, eeese no good!" The young officer on the quarterdeck asked, "What did he say?" I said, "It sounded like he said Sunday, he was going to the beach."

When the old man saw me talking to the officer of the deck, who was wearing a pistol belt with a loaded 45 colt, he backed off down the gangway.

The old man just stood there for a moment and then threw his hands up in the air and kept muttering son-a-beech, son-a-beech. He then turned and left in his 1929 Model A. Once again, I was a scoundrel.

Another tale-Another time.