

Chico -- My Shipmate - by George W. Beal, III (50-52 – RD3)
(Provided by his wife, Ann Marie)

On October 12, 1950, I was called to active duty in the U. S. Naval Reserve. After two weeks at the receiving station in Washington, D. C., I reported aboard the destroyer Hugh Purvis DD 709 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Hugh Purvis was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner from Annapolis.) I was a member of the Combat Information Center aboard ship, and surprisingly, was assigned with a grammar school friend, George Russell, who was also from Annapolis. We operated the surface and air defense radar and handled tactical voice radio signals. It was the nerve center of the ship.

On my second day aboard, I met a new shipmate whose name was Chico. The Purvis had a loveable, unusual character of a dog as mascot. Although not authorized by the Bureau of Personnel, Chico was a real member of the crew in every way. By day he wandered through various compartments, sometimes getting into unmentionable trouble. In rough seas he stayed below, usually sleeping in the Chiefs compartment. The mess stewards fed him a healthy diet of table food.

When my ship received orders to leave New Orleans for Pensacola, Florida, I had been on board about six weeks but was sorry time was up. No more liberty in this interesting but also fun town, I thought. Right on schedule at 7 a.m., we set the special sea detail. Everyone was at his station ready to get underway. I heard someone call the bridge and say that two were not yet back aboard the ship -- Finley and Chico.

Finley was a young man who was no doubt heading for a bad conduct discharge. Chico, as I said before, was our mascot, a brown and white, male Chihuahua-mix dog, who was kidnapped, or so I was told, from Tampico, Mexico, and had been aboard for almost a year. Every day at 4:30 p.m., when we docked he would leave the ship and return about 8:00 in the morning. No one knew where he went -- and he wouldn't tell.

I heard the captain order the line handlers to hold for five minutes. Suddenly a cab pulled up and Finley ran up the gangway. The order was given to cast off; the whistle blew for backing down from the pier. Suddenly there were cheers; running down the street was our beloved Chico. As the gangway was just about pulled up, Chico hopped on. The order came to cast off all lines and take up the gangway.

This is a true story, and Chico never let his adventures ashore be revealed. Two months later we left Newport, Rhode Island, for a seven month deployment. At the end of our overseas deployment, Chico's mental health was shot. Confinement to the ship had taken its toll. We contacted a former shipmate who was on shore duty at Brooklyn Navy Yard; a collection was taken up, and Chico was transferred to his former friend in Brooklyn. We never found out, but all assumed that Chico returned to his normal happy self, and became once again a real "liberty hound."

(Editor's note – The commanding officer at the time would have been W. R. Denekas, CDR

Preceded by H. H. McCarley, CDR)