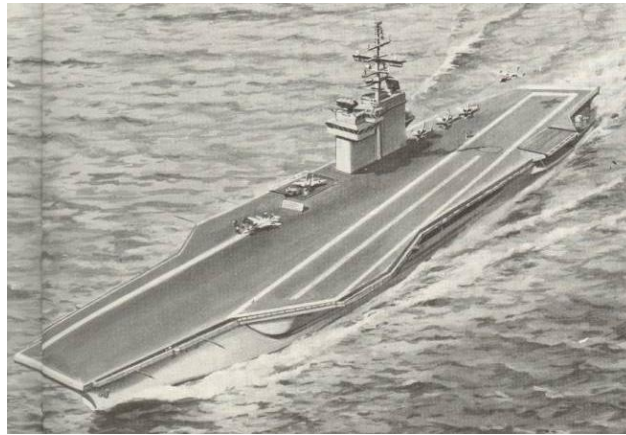


The U.S.S. *Thompson*

By W.M. Akers



A boy can have a lot of fun on an aircraft carrier. Harvey had been waiting for this trip for months, ever since his dad first asked him what he wanted to do for his birthday, and now that it was finally here he could hardly contain his excitement. He didn't even know where to start. There were plenty of planes to look at—fighter jets from the United States and Great Britain and France and Japan and Israel and everywhere else—but on a ship the size of the U.S.S. *Thompson*, there is much more to do than look at planes.

For one thing, there's a space shuttle. When NASA stopped using the great big shuttles to fly astronauts into space, the government sent one of them to live on the *Thompson*. It was the biggest attraction on board the aircraft carrier, but it also had the biggest lines, and Harvey did not have time to wait. There was too much to see!

"What do you think, Dad?" he asked. "Should we start on the deck?"

“Sure,” said Harvey’s dad. “The program said they have a Spitfire on display this summer.”

A Spitfire was an old British plane from World War II. They have a propeller, rounded wings and just one seat. Harvey knew all about spitfires. Harvey knew all about planes.

“Orrrrrrrrr,” said Harvey, consulting the map of the ship. “We could go look around the engine room. The engines on the *Thompson* are about as big as engines can get.”

“Sure. That sounds like a blast.”

“Wait wait wait! If we go to the armory, we can look at the machines they used to load the big guns.”

“Okay, let’s go to the armory.”

“Ooh! Or maybe we should go to the bridge. We can see the whole ship from there!”

“I’ve got an idea. Let’s start with the galley.”

“The mess hall! Are you crazy, dad? Why would we go to some boring old cafeteria when there are all these planes?” His dad started laughing, and Harvey realized he had been kidding. Nobody wanted to visit the mess hall.

“We can see it all, kiddo. We’ve got plenty of time.”

Two hours later, Harvey and his father had been all over the great big ship. They had seen the deck, the armory, the engine room and everything else. They went onto the bridge, and

climbed all the way up the conning tower. From there, they could see all the way down the river, to the cruise ships and freighters pulling in and out of the bay.

“Those cruise ships are pretty big,” said Harvey’s dad.

“Pfft,” said Harvey. “Not as big as the *Thompson*. And I bet they don’t even have a Spitfire.”

The Spitfire was the highlight. Its machine guns were still attached, though of course they didn’t have any ammunition in them. As he looked at the seventy year-old airplane, Harvey realized it was as old as his grandfather. It wasn’t hard to imagine himself sitting in the cockpit, flying over the English countryside, with nothing above him but bright, blue sky.

“That,” he informed his father, “is a pretty cool plane. Now where do we go?”

“I have bad news.”

“Oh no. What?”

“Look at the map. We’ve seen it all. There’s only one place left to go.”

“Oh, crud,” said Harvey. “The mess hall.”

Harvey and his dad walked silently down the massive halls of the great ship, dreading the boredom of the mess hall. Harvey had seen cafeterias before. He ate in one every day. The food was the same in every cafeteria on land and at sea. What was the point in seeing where sailors fixed their tater tots?

“Oh well,” he said as they turned into the mess. “If our only option is to leave the *Thompson*, I guess we can spend a few minutes looking at...the biggest cafeteria I’ve ever seen!”

It was gigantic, a great long hall filled with gleaming tables, all decorated in a cowboy theme. On one end was the window to the kitchen, which Harvey raced to see. How could they have possibly made enough food for this many people?

“Oh my god, dad!” he shouted. “Look at that pot! It’s the size of mom’s car!”

“That’s the biggest pot I’ve ever seen,” said Dad, undeniably impressed.

“I wonder how many potatoes you could fit in there,” said Harvey.

“About 600 pounds,” said a voice behind them. A wrinkled old man stood, looking through the glass at the gleaming kitchen equipment.

“Who are you?” asked Harvey.

“Ship’s cook, third class, Rex Phillips,” he said.

“Nice to meet you,” said Harvey’s dad. “Did you serve on the *Thompson*?”

“I did,” said Rex. “Right here. I can tell you, we didn’t always keep it so clean.”

“Do you...do you want to tell us about it?” asked Harvey.

The old man’s eyes lit up, and he smiled as he began to speak. He worked at a hamburger stand before he joined the Navy, he said, and when it came time for assignments aboard the ship, he was assigned to work in the galley.

“Mostly it was peeling potatoes,” he said. “I got so I could peel a potato inside of ten seconds, toss it in that pot, and move on to the next one. When we were going good, we could serve up to 10,000 meals a day.”

When he finished telling them about life in the galley, Rex took Harvey and his father back through the ship, telling them all sorts of things that they hadn’t learned on their tour. By the time he finished, Harvey knew everything there was to know about the U.S.S. *Thompson*. It was a perfect birthday. Not only did he get to go on an aircraft carrier—he got to tour it twice!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the U.S.S. *Thompson*?

- A a type of ship known as an aircraft carrier
- B a type of airplane with a propeller and rounded wings
- C a type of pot that can hold about 600 pounds of potatoes
- D a type of engine so big that it needs its own room

2. Where does this story take place?

- A in the English countryside
- B at an old hamburger stand
- C inside a fighter jet from World War II
- D on board the U.S.S. *Thompson*

3. There is a lot to look at on the U.S.S. *Thompson*.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A Harvey expects the mess hall on the U.S.S. *Thompson* to be a boring old cafeteria.
- B The U.S.S. *Thompson* has planes, a space shuttle, and an armory on board.
- C The machine guns attached to the Spitfire do not have any ammunition in them.
- D Rex Phillips worked at a hamburger stand before he joined the Navy.

4. How do Harvey's feelings about the galley change when he visits it?

- A He becomes more afraid of it.
- B He becomes less afraid of it.
- C He becomes more interested in it.
- D He becomes less interested in it.

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A the shuttles that NASA once used to fly astronauts into space
- B fighter jets from the United States, Great Britain, and France
- C a boy who visits an aircraft carrier with his father
- D a cook who can peel a potato in fewer than ten seconds

6. Read the following sentences: "Not only did he get to go on an aircraft carrier—he got to **tour** it twice!"

What does **tour** mean in the sentence above?

- A to travel around somewhere
- B to get lost in a new place
- C to fly in a plane for the first time
- D to move something from one place to another

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Harvey is not interested in the galley at first; _____ he becomes more interested in it.

- A for example
- B especially
- C particularly
- D later on

8. What is a Spitfire?

9. What is Harvey's opinion of the Spitfire? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

10. What does Harvey like most about his visit to the U.S.S. *Thompson*? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 710

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8. What is a Spitfire?

Suggested answer: At minimum, students should respond that a Spitfire is a British plane from World War II. They may add that it has a propeller, rounded wings, and one seat.

9. What is Harvey’s opinion of the Spitfire? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Suggested answer: Students should recognize that Harvey has a high opinion of the Spitfire. As evidence, they may note that he calls the Spitfire a “pretty cool plane” or that it is the “highlight” of his visit to the *Thompson*.

10. What does Harvey like most about his visit to the U.S.S. *Thompson*? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the story. Students may respond that Harvey likes the Spitfire most, pointing out that it is referred to as the “highlight” of his visit to the *Thompson*. However, students may also argue that getting a second tour of the *Thompson* from the cook Rex Phillips was what Harvey liked most. As evidence, they may point out that Harvey’s enthusiasm for the Spitfire came before meeting Rex Phillips and cite the final two sentences of the story: “It was a perfect birthday. Not only did he get to go on an aircraft carrier—he got to tour it twice!”