

# After Battery Tales Continued

When Ray "Ol Goat" Stone passed away, his After Battery web page has been shut down. To keep the stories told by his friends and fellow submariners from ending up in the trash heap of time, I decided to copy all those stories and post them here for all to enjoy and not be lost forever. Dan Martini 2/8/2020

The following 72 tales are from Mike Hemming MM1(SS), AKA 'Boy Throttleman'.

## A Stink of Submarines by Mike Hemming

Her publisher told a friend of mine, who writes mystery stories that all of her titles must include the word 'ghost' in the future. As she had tentatively titled her latest work 'A \_\_\_\_\_ of Ghosts', she needed a word for a group of ghosts. She started looking and couldn't find such a word. You know like a 'gaggle of geese', a 'mob of crows' or a 'pod of whales', this got me to wondering if there was such a word that is used for a group of submarines or submarine sailors.

A quick look in the dictionary showed no such word or words. Further exhaustive research consisting of several minutes surfing the web site WebstersDirtyWords.Com shed no further light on this subject. At which point my fertile and slightly warped brain lurched into high gear and said that I would create such a list of words. The following list may be changed, added to or ignored by anyone who cares to, but its creator will not be subject to any slings and arrows cast by anyone who didn't think of it first.

The first, a 'stink of submarines' is the one that came to mind right away and hangs in there over all other attempts. Others like a 'downangle of planesmen' quickly gives way to the more poetic a 'plunge of planesmen'. Which frees the word for a 'downangle of diving officers', a much better choice than the original, a 'lost bubble of diving officers. But a 'grouch of COBs' won't be argued over. Neither will a 'useless of nonquals', a 'peel of messcooks', a 'target of tankers', a 'crash of aviators' or a 'stare of lookouts. However, a 'lost of quartermasters', an 'arc of senior controllerman', a 'smoke of engineman', a 'privilege of stewards mates' or a 'swish of sonarmen' may cause some argument from the wounded parties. So be it, I think a 'ping of sonarmen' sounds better anyway.

To counteract the whining caused by a 'glow of nukes', which should be saved for the Russkys, I give you a 'nostalgia of DBFers'. Some others that are non-controversial are a 'freeze of topside watches', an 'eternity of equalizer charges' and a 'wander of below decks watches. Others could be a 'snakewake of helmsman', a 'crowd of conning officers', a 'swimout of torpedeomen' and a 'short of electricans'. From nuke boats would come a 'launch of missile techs', a 'scram of nukes', a 'familygram of divorcees', a 'speed of fast attacks' and a 'quiet of boomers. On

either type, a 'burn and serve of cooks', a 'salty of ensigns', a 'toady of XO's', a 'radiation of radarmen', and a 'dance of deck apes would serve the purpose. From the goat locker would come a 'sleep of chiefs, a 'belly of E7s' or maybe better a 'coffee of chiefs.

From the wardroom would be the ones already mentioned plus a 'grease of engineers', a 'salad of commissary officers', or a 'bean' of them, an 'importance of captains', a 'nuisance of admirals' and an 'antacid of Lt. JGs'. Of course these days with the new navy's top heavy rank structure you could say an 'abundance of admirals', a 'covey of captains', but the last has been used to describe a bunch of birds. Hmmmmm, nah too easy a target. If you had midshipmen aboard would it be a 'degradation of dolphins'? From my line of work we would use a 'sweat of still operators', a 'bilge of oilers', a 'comshaw of spare parts PO's' and a 'contortion of engine overhaulers'. From the shipyard we would get an 'idiocy of designers',

## **Bidet Abuse** by Mike Hemming

When Carp was in the Med. In 65 one of our stops was Nice, France. After spending 3 weeks crossing the Atlantic to spend a few days in one of the world's liberty ports from hell, Rota Spain. Then back to sea for another 2 weeks of group grope with the skimmers and airdales. The captain knowing it was time for some serious liberty said if we had an address we could be reached at, we could stay over until quarters the next morning. When liberty went down for the previous day's duty section, 6 of us went off to find a place to stay for the night. Of course that didn't stop us from stopping to quaff some frog booze, a particular vino struck the fancy of our palates and wallets. It did take us several tries to understand that wine in France comes with a cork and not a screw top. After visiting several watering holes on the way toward the inexpensive hotels, life was fine.

A local was asked where a reasonably priced hotel was, he said, "just follow me I know just ze place".

So off we went... Up a street, over a few, down one, and up another couple. Having arrived at a hotel that looked reasonable, Shaft and I went in to find out the price, we being the 2 most sober. The price was really cheap, I was surprised... Danger signal #1. I in my 'fuzzy 3 bottles shared with Shaft' condition, I did notice the lobby was almost devoid of furnishings... Danger signal #2. The agreed price was paid in frogs as we called them.

We were shown to our rooms... Shaft and I in one, with Terry the Animal and Asseyes in the one next door. You laugh at the name Asseyes? If you ever saw Frank drunk he was the poster child for eyes that looked like piss holes in the snow. Anyway, it was decided that we would finish our wine and decide who would go back to the boat to check our address in with the Duty Officer. At this point Shaft has to take a leak and goes into the head to accomplish same. Being a West-by-

God Virginia boy, he is unaware of Europe's full complement of bathroom appliances. He is standing there doing #1 in the first porcelain fixture he comes to. In comes the maid to do whatever maids do when she sees Shaft whizzing in the bidet, she lets out with a shriek that would wake up the ATR watch at sea. And down the hall she goes babbling and hollering, Terry and Asseyes hearing the commotion try to open the connecting door into our room. The trouble is the door opens into our room and there is a humongus wardrobe in front of the door, being drunk when the door doesn't open they just shove harder. Which causes the wardrobe to start toppling to the floor. Which I catch, it was either that or become a pancake. I am also laughing my butt off at Shaft who comes out of the head wondering "what the hell was she yelling about" while buttoning his pants up. The wardrobe has fallen far enough to break one of the front legs off and in our happy condition we can't get the damn thing back on. I am still laughing too hard to suggest anything worthwhile, so the ever-resourceful Shaft breaks the remaining legs off and throws them under the bed. The last leg is thrown too hard and it goes all the way under the bed to bounce off the wall as the female owner comes in the room. This lights off a stream of frog invective punctuated with the English words, "Get out!" and "I give money back."

Less than 2 minutes later, all 6 of us are standing in the street, with the other four going WTF happened. Shaft and I start to explain, when I burst into laughter again because coming from all directions is a stream of beautiful young women. They are all going into the "hotel" with no luggage we were just evicted from. In between laughs I explain to our companions that we have just been thrown out of a house of horizontal refreshment after less than 5 minutes on site. This fact has been submitted and confirmed by Guinness as a Sublant record.

Authors Note. When this story was first told I received some questions whether the maid was actually a maid and how ugly she was. In the next installment I will explain just how ugly she was.

## **Explanation of How Ugly the Maid Was** by Mike Hemming

This information is for sailors who understand how the derivation of horizontal refreshment can turn the brain into something resembling pureed broccoli. We all know that the longer one goes without companionship of the female kind can reduce one to the state in which one will attempt to form a sexual union with a cord of combustible cellulose, if he assumes a reptile resides within. Rates at which this will happen differ from sailor to sailor, we all remember the TM3 who would cross pollinate with Godzilla's sister 12 minutes after release with Norfolk's prettiest bar maid, which is a relative description at best. No this description is for those of us with the normal hormone levels and morals of the average smoke boat sailor.

As a base line, figure a sailor that has had companionship in the last 5 days, who would not seriously attempt the act with a female who was of less than average looks. I.E. That means 2 eyes and most of her teeth, over 90 but under 180 lbs. in

weight. Providing her body odor would not be noticeable in Hogan's alley and her breath would not set off the hydrogen detectors. If after a 4-week snorkel run to the Azores and back turns this average woman into Miss America, then no harm is done. If however time at sea and consumption of alcohol turns something that is 'coyote-ugly' into average or beautiful then that is bad. And of course if you realize the object of your affections is 'coyote-ugly' to start with, then that is okay. I am sure most of you do not realize there are 3 levels to 'coyote-ugly'. The one every one remembers is actually level 2. You know if she is asleep on your arm the next morning you will chew it off to keep from waking her. Level 1 is when as you leave you put your foot in the commode and piss down your leg to keep from the noise waking her. Level 3 is the ugliest, in theory she would be so ugly that if you sobered up while in the act you would cut off your priceless appendage because you wouldn't want it back! There have been no known cases of this happening, but it remains a possibility as long as sub sailors roam the earth. However if we held a short arm inspection on the denizens of this BBS we might well find that it has already happened.

Any guesses on likely candidates. Any way this has been a long attempt to tell Dex, Olgoat and Shaft that the maid in the Bidet Abuse story was ugly. How ugly? Well, put simply, after 49 days without orgasmic companionship and enough frog booze to fill WRT, I could still see she was coyote level 3. Too ugly to give it to a non-qual mess cook. And this was from a sailor who had returned from liberty not once but twice with bits of bark in his socks and splinters in a most painful area.

## **The Invention of ??** by Mike Hemming

It seems that 2 smokeboat sailors, who shall be called Moe and Joe for this story, hit the beach after a long North Atlantic slap and tickle with planes and cans off Iceland. You know one of those ops so boring you could hear your nose hair grow, if the cold hadn't made it go into hibernation. So cold, foul weather jackets were worn to bed, and close friends almost fought over a blanket.

Well Moe and Joe are in definite need of a cold beer and a warm companion of the feminine persuasion. So off they go drinking and looking. The drinking works fine, I mean after all, they have plenty on money. However, the search for a soft sweet-smelling bed partner doesn't go as well. After numerous rebuffs from females they could see were less than gorgeous, taking into account their consumption of beer, they arrived at a bar known for its older and even uglier women. After looking over the prospects, our Horny Heros spy 2 ladies that are not too bad looking at all. No where near any level of coyote ugly.

The truth is however, that these ladies are just plain old, with a capital O, as in older than Bushnell's father's mistress. But with the hour being late and nothing to lose, they saunter over and ask the ladies to dance. Surprise, surprise, the offer is accepted and things progress in an average fashion for a while. You know the

standard my name is, smiles and weak jokes from both sides. Both Moe and Joe have decided it don't matter how old these broads are if they are willing, it will be horizontal refreshment time. At last, the moment of truth... Closing time, the time where you find out if 4 hours of beer, food and maybe cab rides are going to be worth it. Wonder of wonders, the offer is accepted and," We can go to our place if you want..." gets tossed out. Whew! No motel bills added on!

Things continue to progress in an orderly fashion until actual sleeping arrangements are mentioned. It seems the apartment has only 1 bedroom with twin beds in it, and the ladies are not up for anything kinky... No sort of 'group gropes' for them.

Sweating bullets, Moe and Joe convince them that it won't be perverted if the lights are out and each couple stays in their own bed. Each couple undresses and slips into bed, whereupon the noises emanating from each bed signify that nature is taking its course. Moe hears parts of the conversation from the bed beside him and perceives that Joe's companion Jean has what is kindly put as a 'dryness problem' in an 'important area'. As Moe climbs in the saddle he hears Joe rummaging through the bedside table for a 'lubricant', which he finds and applies to the proper appendage.

Moe being a young man far too long denied the release of love, fini shes before long... But not in such a short time to offend Mary, his companion. Snuggling up to Mary, time passes and Moe is soon ready for round 2. It is starting to filter into his mind that Joe and Jean are still in round 1, but pays no more attention to the others as he and Mary join in a second horizontal cha cha.

Afterwards, as Moe's brains return to inside his head, he realizes all is not well in the next bed. Joe has not completed his end of the act and Jean has at least twice, but is now getting sore. Finally he asks Joe, "What the heck is goin on?"

Joe, sweat-covered and panting, says, "I dunno.. Can't feel a damn thing!" Whereupon Jean being insulted, shoves Joe off onto the hard cold floor.

After some flailing and yelling the lights are turned on, Joe still erect and red in more than his face stomps out of the room. Jean embarrassed and sore runs to hide in the bathroom. As Moe is asking, "What the heck?" Mary starts to giggle and says, "Look!!"

Showing the tube of 'lubricant' clearly labeled *Solarcaine*. The next morning Joe and Moe leave, Joe is hardly able to walk and Moe can't stop laughing but swears he will never tell a soul. Well he lied... He did tell me and I've kept the secret long enough.

Joe, well he got the last laugh, if you ever buy a product called Prolong or Delay creme, you're buyin' his product... After all, he invented it and suffered through its test phase!

# **The Evil Men Do** by Mike Hemming

"The evil men do." Caesar said that. If Shakespeare had been a bubblehead, he would have said, "The stupidity men do, lives after them."

A Requin topside watch on the mid watch one summer night let brain-softening boredom overtake him and committed a sin that admirals John Paul and Dewey would have stood in line to spit on his grave for.

Watching a pier 22 rat go about his nocturnal business, he decided it would be a great trophy to add to his conquests. Leaving his post he followed the rat down the pier, stalking it so as not to scare it in to running away at full tilt. With care, he backed this large cat-sized rat into a corner behind the dumpster. Wisely deciding that his .45 would make too much noise to dispatch this monster rodent, he ops for the billy club... Not really the weapon of choice but what the heck, its 0200. Whereupon, in fierce battle to the death, the enemy is overcome... Truth, Justice and the American way triumph once again.

After seeing his bloody conquest in the light he decides that a stuffed rat, no matter how big would not win him any popularity contests aboard. So the carcass is disposed of in the dumpster, and our conquering hero returns to his post.

As we were moored at the end of the pier alone, no one is the wiser at this point. It is at this point though, that late night idiocy totally overwhelms him and he details his actions in the Deck Log. If I remember correctly it went something like this,

0158 - Sighted Commie Rat on pier

0201 - Followed rat down pier to a restricted area

0206 - Cornered rat behind dumpster

0208 - Mounted attack on rat with billy club for spying

0210 - Killed rat with 10 blows to head and body

0211 - Estimated weight 3 Lbs., age and sex unknown

0213 - Disposed of body in dumpster

0214 - Cleaned weapon

0215 - Returned to post, conditions normal

Well as you can imagine every guy on watch read this over and laughed. Not long after this, a cartoon shows up in the mess hall showing him holding this tiny mouse up by the tail, while behind him looms this monster rat ready to smash him on the head with a billy club. The COB and the wardroom see it and want to know what in the hell it's all about. "I dunno Chief, just a cartoon, I guess."

Time passes and the incident fades except for every new guy aboard reads the log, causing it to fall open to that page any time its opened. By this time our Rat Dispatcher RDSN(SS) has departed for civilian life once again, and a damn good thing too. For now its ORI time... You know, the USN's answer to the Spanish Inquisition, fingernails on the blackboard and the dunking stool combined, during which an inspector, a commander as I remember, decides to check the log book. Onlookers say near rage and mirth combined on his face, making him speechless for several minutes. There follows a parade of brass past the logbook that looked like the halls of the Pentagon at coffee time.

Needless to say Requin did not win the coveted E that year, or any other for the rest of her career.

## **Chief Ray Bloomer** by Mike Hemming

I don't know if Ray was the first black Chief of the Boat in our submarine force, and I really don't care too much. What I care about is that I was privileged to have served under him. COB's can make or break a crew, Ray made one. I know little of his predecessor, but I understand he was not very good. The one that came after him had favorites. I first saw Ray in action when on the Requin, before going to the Carp. Another boat (maybe Cutlass) had changed 2 letters around on the Carp's name board. Not hard to do, just sneak aboard at night and swap 2 letters by removing the screws and replacing them. This 'crime' had just been 'discovered' one morning after quarters by the Cutlass crew pointing and laughing. Ray was not happy, embarrassed more likely, by having his boat and crew held up to ridicule. It showed in his face and tone of voice, but not by yelling and cursing. His words were, "Fix that right now." and "Was the topside watch asleep last night?"

He also knew that the guilty topside watch couldn't be found. Because no one would ever be sure which watch it had happened on, and a witch-hunt would only make things worse.

After my mercifully short tenure at Nuke Power School, I was disappointed not to return to Requin. But not disappointed enough to try real hard to get a swap back to her. Carp would be my new home and the crew seemed to be a good one. I reported aboard and after doing those things you do in that situation, found the COB to get my bunk assigned and so forth. Ray was sitting in the mess hall, I introduced myself and we chatted a moment about the things we both needed to know about each other. Then he said, "You want to bunk in the After Battery?"

I said that I liked the after room better. He thought a second and said, "OK, not too many enginemen back there right now." This was not any sort of prejudice but knowing that you don't put all the same rates in one sleeping compartment in case of a casualty. Just one of the many things a COB has to keep in mind running a sub full of somewhat unruly bubbleheads.

The only other time I saw Ray truly disgusted is when he lectured the crew after someone made a thoroughly revolting remark in the mess hall about the food one day. Again, no yelling... He just let it be known that the line had been crossed on that one. I don't know what church he attended but he was a good God-fearing gentleman, and I think some of the language used aboard pained him. But he never tried to clean up the talk because he knew it wouldn't work. As when an XO tried to outlaw a certain word and promptly the word "hacksaw" (I kid you not) replaced it. Until the idea became a laughing stock with "hacksaw this" and "hacksaw that".

I am sure that because of his race, Ray had to walk a narrow line sometimes. But I never noticed anything but fairness from him; we were all Carp sailors and would be treated as such. No one ever saw him treat anyone unfairly or more harshly than needed.

Ray attended our first Carp reunion in '96 and was invited to be our guest speaker. His talk was pure Ray giving credit to us for making the Carp such a good boat. I don't think he realized until the reunion how much we loved and admired him for what he had done for us. Unfortunately, 3 months after the reunion, Ray passed away. He will be missed as long as one of his crew still lives.

The Navy says that you salute officers as a sign of respect and that you had to do it. Well its been 33 years now and I don't "have" to salute anyone any more. But to Raymond C. Bloomer EMCM (SS)... Hand Salute ..... Two.

## **Terry the Animal's Tee Shirt of Many Holes** by Mike Hemming

The all-time scroungiest of all tee shirts belonged to Terry P. TM3 of the after torpedo room of Carp. And they say snipes wear rotten clothes. This thing left Norfolk for the Med. cruise in sad shape. About 3 days out, Terry decided that he would wear this shirt at sea for the entire cruise. But don't think this shirt started out clean, it had a torpedo loading and a couple of duty nights under its frayed collar before #1 line was cast off. So this Fruit of the Loom had a patina to start with. What it became was beyond the mere thoughts of mortal man, the human mind cannot conceive of this level of filth.

It was a standard T-shirt. What it became was first grayer and grayer, then by some magic, shifted toward brown. Becoming about the same shade of brown as a paper grocery sack. The color, grease streaks and all, was not its most outstanding feature, nor even its smell. Terry had a habit of rubbing his stomach with a circular motion. This caused the shirt to wear out in the form of holes. Holes that slowly



became larger, until its front became an obscene tattered smelly lace. Imagine if you can, crochet caused by rot and wear.

The shirt became noticed forward of the after room about 3 weeks into the cruise. Its whole countenance of filth, smell and ragged edges caused its owner to be banned from the mess hall by the COB. The COB, an engineman, had the misfortune to sit next to it during a noon meal, after sniffing twice, he took a closer look. Declaring it 'shirt non- grata' for the rest of the cruise, actually he said, "Change that gahdam shirt!"

Terry didn't change it and so was effectively banished to the ATR while wearing it. For the rest of the trip he never ventured forward again at sea, over 3 months, his relief bringing coffee and sandwiches for sustenance. The 'Animal' showered and shaved and went on the beach with the rest of us. Going ashore as spiffed up as a smoke boat bubblehead gets on a Med. cruise. True to form, he went too far on our first liberty in Rota Spain. Off base was off limits there at that time, so the 'Animal' and 'Asseyes' get drunk in the EM Club. Later they catch a cab, which somehow gets them off base. Of course they get caught getting back on after Cinderella liberty is up, and are written up. So at captain's mast, Terry wears the shirt under his dress jumper, being at sea. He and 'Asseyes' are given restriction after babbling some story of being shanghaied off base by Russian spies, hidden in a pumpkin. The Old Man didn't believe a word of it, and would have been disappointed by anything even verging on the truth. As they were leaving the wardroom the Captain was heard to remark, " What's that gahdam smell, do we need to snorkel already?"

The fact that he put this shirt back on for maneuvering watch caused him to leapfrog the rest of us in the BO department by almost a week. A clean Terry, fresh from a shower became a sort of instant reek of Russian army sweaty jock strap. At the  $\frac{3}{4}$  point of the cruise he was told to stand his watches between the tubes, curses and shoes were thrown at him. None of which fazed him in the least, mostly because he knew we were secretly proud of him and hoping it would actually survive the trip.

It's existence changed lives up forward as well. A certain faithfully married chief, known to the ATR denizens as 'Chief Wacker', stopped his weekly visits to our head. Stomping forward again, Playboy rolled under his arm saying, "It stinks back here!" Followed by calls of "You wanna borrow some French perfume next week Chief?" It was his last visit for 3 weeks. Our return home through The Straits of Gibraltar were punctuated by radio messages in 14 different languages that freely translated into, "What's that gahdam smell?"

It was about this time that a photograph was taken of the shirt and its disgusting owner, I wish I knew what happened to it, but alas, 30 years later it's long gone, I guess. Its survival wasn't in too much danger from being ripped from his body to be fired out the GDU, nobody was quite brave enough to bring themselves to actually touch it. Decay, rot and oxidation just short of spontaneous combustion were its major enemies.

One day heading home a few days out of Norfolk (which is a story in itself) I went back to rack out and saw a strange looking thing on the deck. It looked like a cross between a scab and a spider. After I pointed to it, an EM said, "It's the armpit out of Animal's shirt. We are waiting to see if it can walk by itself." The TM1 had placed money on it's being able to eat its way through the deck plates. Not wanting to see such a thing I went forward until my next watch.

Animal's Shirt of Many Holes did make it back to the states, the last evidence I saw of it was a yellowish fog over the ATR hatch. And the words from every quarterdeck at D&S Piers, "What's that gahdam smell?"

## **Torsk Work Weekend** by Mike Hemming

The smell, sounds and sights haven't changed much in 33 years, so they won't keep me awake for much longer. Besides its been a long day, working part of it at my regular job, driving 2 hours, then chipping paint for a couple more. After dinner when the public tours of the USS Torsk were over, 10 of us moved 2 1000-lb torpedo skids around, in preparation for the loading of a Mk 14 torpedo for display. We have not done this kind of work for from 20 to 40 years, and it shows, we are tired.

These submarine sailors and others have traveled from Arizona to Maine and Florida at their own expense to volunteer to work on the Torsk in Baltimore, MD. We do this to help keep in shape one of the last WW II submarines, to remind others the sacrifices that over 4,000 submarine sailors have given, in the last 100 years. To point out the conditions we lived, fought and died under during our country's wars both hot and cold. It is history without revisionism or sugar coating.

You will notice nowhere will I say ex-submarine sailors. We are and always will be submarine sailors. "None of us has ever seen a pair of dolphins with an expiration date on the back", to quote a friend.

For ours is a brotherhood that transcends all else except patriotism. A brotherhood of shared training, close living conditions and danger. The whole crew participates in training all new men, because we will depend on him to do the right thing at the right time. Close living conditions that hardly ever allow any privacy and only minimal sleeping and eating space. Danger in that, all other vessels may be the enemy, even by mistake our own, and from the surrounding pressing ocean.

Not all of us are sub sailors. Some are surface sailors or civilians that are interested in what we do, or just want to help keep these old boats alive for a while longer. One man from Canada is the grandson of the famous "Fearless" Freddie Warder of WW II fame. His grandfather never talked to him much about the war or submarines. Because of the obvious respect "Gramps" had for sub sailors, he wants to learn about subs and their crews. As Capt. Warder is one of my heroes, I am glad to talk to him and look at all the pictures he has. We both give each other insights to our

shared histories. One of things I learn from the photos is Capt. Warder lost a great deal of weight during his patrols, from the strain of command in combat.

In the meantime I find I can't get to sleep, the snores are too much. Remembering a bunk in the ATR, I go there. With no one else in the compartment I can get to sleep here, in a snoreless place. The bunk of my intentions however is a typical sub bunk, no space for a normal sized human. Once in, and it takes several minutes to get in, a piece of machinery and a bracket allow only an 18-inch triangle of space for movement, just below my butt. Any turning over in this bunk will be done in place, but now sleep quickly comes. And turning over is done in my sleep, is done without waking up, some things are never forgotten, I guess.

On Saturday after breakfast, not wanting to chip paint anymore due to yesterday's blisters, I help 2 others replace a section of decking aft. It's a daylong job, hard and dirty. But it looks wonderful when finished, a coat of black paint and it will look good as new. The volunteers finish many other jobs that day and you can see and feel the pride in what's been accomplished.

That evening after a cook-out on deck, the crew sits around telling new and old sea stories. Playing the "Remember Terry the Animal" and who was the guy that ran the motor scooter through the lawn party. Laughing, joking, teasing like many a warm night topside with beer or no beer in ports from Naples to Pearl to Perth. It makes you remember what was the best part of this life was, a crew. A crew, we have joined once again for minutes, hours or the weekend. For a short period of time, these men are Torsk Bandits, crewmembers of USS Torsk, regaining the one thing they miss the most. Belonging to a group of men that have done something and lived like most men can't, won't or are afraid to do.

## **Engine Sounds** by Mike Hemming

As Dex will tell you, I am an unreconstructed snipe of the MM variety. He will also lie and call me many other things, but he can call me a snipe any day, all day. Why? Because I loved it and still do. Not the grease, bloody knuckles, heat and cold, but the sounds. Sounds... A smokeboat engine room was the first stereophonic, surround sound, pound your eardrums to cracked putty, sounds. All American boys and men love engine sounds. They start making them as soon as they hear their first engine. Six months old and they will push a block around going 'rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr' and 'mmmmmmmmmmmm'. Smokeboat snipes live 4 or 6 hours at a time inside the noisiest place in the world, outside of standing under the space shuttle at blast off. But that beautiful racket has a 100 different components. Valves, pistons, injectors, and pumps all sing their song differently. In time, you learn which cylinders are running hottest from the sounds it makes, the ones that the valves are going to burn soon. To the outsider it's a cacophony of clattering pounding parts; to a snipes ear it's the music of power. There is no power sound like a big FM or GM engine cranked up to 'goin home turns'. Pounding out those

sea miles by squirting those mega amps and volts back to maneuvering. Heating the cubicle to add that hot insulation smell to our insane little world. As the whole ass end of your boat quivers and shakes under the violent application of 6,400 horsepower. Horsepower created by sucking in a whirlwind of air mixing it with hundreds of gallons of diesel per hour, compressing it and burning it in a crashing mixture of sound.

One sound I always hated was the scream of the airbox covers when lighting off for snorkel. The sumbitch Dutch guy that invented it should rot in hell forever. It ain't natural for an engine to run 60 feet down. Other sounds I liked were the rush of air going in the blower intakes, the injectors and the valves clattering and whine of cooling water pumps.

A motorcycle dude once tried to tell me how great it was to have a gasoline engine between your legs cranking out a 100 or so horsepower. "It is such a rush" he said. I smiled, nodded and said, "Sounds like it." Too bad he missed sitting on the coffin cover of a Fairbanks Morse with 20 pistons each bigger than his whole engine, pounding out some serious power.

The downside to all this sound was what it does to your ears. You know at a reunion, all the engine room snipes sit around saying "Huh?" and "What was that agin?". I knew partial deafness was coming and wore the earplugs and 'mickey ears', but it came anyway. Once some sound engineers came aboard the Carp. Just one of the monster GM's running at idle set their meter needles off the scale. "You guys shouldn't be subjected to this much noise!". "Sure tell COMSUBWHATEVER to let us go home then... Or maybe some nice shore duty chasing Waves through the EM Club", Shaft and I laugh.

Right now as I sit here in the quiet my ears 'hear' a constant faint high-pitched whine. Aw hell, it was a small price to pay, for the sweetest sounds of all. Spin the header drain valve shut, stomp the air start valve, hear the 500-pound air roll that big engine over. As the oiler madly spins the inboard exhaust valve, you reach for and pull up the throttle to the start position. Adding fuel, the turning cylinders starts the shuddering shaking roar of a big engine starting. Just as the engine hits 200- 300 rpms, you reach for the outboard exhaust valve, pulling it open allows the engine to come smoothly and noisily up to speed. As smoothly as a diesel ever starts that is. "Just once more, just once more" I have heard many an engineer say, "Just once more".

If hell is snorkeling, then heaven is sitting topside late on a warm night, listening. Listening to that sound that two smokeboat rockcrushers make that aren't quite synchronized, sound that rises and falls as they go in and out of synch. Sitting there, a cold cup of coffee and one last cigarette with your oiler before going below for some racktime. Sitting, listening, thinking, not saying much, like men do. In that way that women can never understand. Listening to sound of cooling water rushing

over the side, swishing over the low rumble of engines on the finishing rate. Yeah, just once more, just one more time.

## **Ralph** by Mike Hemming

Looking for 'Ralph', as in seasick. Ah yes, and all the others we use. Puking, blowing lunch, worshiping the porcelain god, commode kissing. All of us remember guys that sea legs were an unknown possibility, the ones that lived with a bucket at hand anytime we were on the surface.

My reputation as a wise ass was set on my first cruise, for some reason it had been decided that I was a candidate for Ralph. No mercy was given telling me about how rough it would be and how I would barf my brains out. We surfaced one morning and it was rougher than a cob, Requin was definitely trying to kick landlubber butt that day. After my 4 to 8 I went forward for breakfast, not many people in the chow hall that day, but the ones that were, thought this is the day for Hemming. Even the messcook was on me. As not many had eaten that morning there were several bowls of bacon left over, I said to the cook just hand me one of them bowls. I made 4 slices of toast buttered them and made 2 huge bacon sandwiches and ate them. Then I sat and finished off the bowl just eating it straight one slice after the other. All this while holding myself down with one hand eating with the other. A second bowl followed then a third, all told it was around 4 pounds of bacon. About this time I noticed a faint green tinge on the messcook's gills. As I got up to leave, I wiped my finger around the bowl with it coming up dripping with grease. Handing him the bowl and sucking the grease off noisily had the effect I wanted. I left to the tune of a messcook bobbing for Ralph in a shit can.

Requin after her after tubal ligation was left with a stern room that was used only for a sleeping compartment. It was great even non-quals had their own bunks. In the after end of what became the Stern Room about where the mine tables would be was a head 2 sinks facing forward. To the right was a shower aft of that was a crapper that also faced forward with a sliding door. One rough day at sea I was leaning against the signal gun talking quals with the man on watch, he was sitting on the aforementioned crapper with the door open. You get so used to no privacy that this bothered neither one of us. Anyway from out of maneuvering comes a junior controllerman hand over mouth with his lunch halfway up heading for the crapper. Head down running full tilt he doesn't see Fritz who sees him and reacts by sliding the door shut! Wham! The guy hits the door then slides down it like a cartoon character, leaving a smear of Ralph on it.

One morning just after light on topside watch, I see Smitty a TM1 heading down the pier obviously under the influence of alcohol, in this case it was always the fruit of the grape. Before payday, Sly Fox would always seem for a while, more full bodied, robust and flavorful squeezing of the grape. However this was the 'fox' schedule part of the pay cycle and being as Smitty could be an unpleasant persona on screw-

top vino, I moved halfway down the sail area. Coming down the pier with a cross between a stagger and a saunter he reaches the brow, hesitates and starts across. At the halfway point he stops leans over the safety line facing me open his mouth, and from it issues a solid stream of purple. Not a chunk or anything solid anywhere in the stream, I am amazed at its size and duration. Finishing and wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his whites, He looks at me and says "don't you hate it when that happens". Dumfounded at this display at 18 years old I can only nod and say "yes".

One day at sea (rough of course) an ET standing at the gyro table in control loses control and barfs. The fact that he inexpertly slapped his hand over his mouth causes the Ralph to shoot straight upwards. With most of it going behind his glasses, when the torrent subsides, a corn kernel stuck behind each lens looked like sick yellow eyes peering out. Then there were the 2 mess cooks that bumped noggins trying to Ralph in the same GDU-size shit can at the same time. Then arguing about who had to clean it up "because he made me miss."

## **Eternal Resting Places** by Mike Hemming

I was thinking on what happens to our boats. A few are sunk as targets or given away to be fishing reefs, but most are scrapped. A shipmate was saying goodbye to a boat in Bremerton waiting to be scrapped. It was his home for 6 years. In my case, Carp 338 was mine for 4 years, longer than some guys spend in the navy. She and I went through 3 skippers and 2 COBs and how many shipmates? 300 or so in those years. Most I liked, some I loved, 1 I hated, but I'll not think about him. He was not worthy to call himself a Carp sailor. Four years of hot-cold, smooth-rough, dull-scary, boring-quiet, far from land inside her... In other words, shipboard life. Sure, it's the shipmates that make the boat mostly, but as men come and go, it's the vessel that gets the love too.

Any boat that takes you out and brings you back is a good one, some brought us back from places and events that a lesser boat would have failed to. We trained each other and took care of them so they would take care of us. So in the end, the 1300 or so men that rode 338 go their separate ways, and she goes to the scrapper for a lousy \$98,000. A spit in the coffers of the navy budget, for a fine Lady, an ignoble end. The rest of forever as a Buick bumper or some rebar in a glitzy building. My other boat Requin 481, I qualled on her, and rode her for 10 months. I became more of a man than the twerp 18-year old that first went aboard, ended up as a museum boat in Pittsburgh. That's great for now but someday when it's no longer economical or PC or whatever to keep her, she will go to a scrap yard somewhere.

No one will push or spend the money to send her where they all belong, in the sea with her sisters. Resting there as one of her new sisters passes overhead to protect our grand-children and their children. A finally silent hull resting quietly to honor those that never made it home, with all those forever young aboard.

## **Why Submarines Are Better Than Women** by Mike Hemming

- 1. A submarine will kill you quickly. A woman takes her time.**
- 2. Submarines like it done at all angles.**
- 3. Submarines can be turned on easily anytime.**
- 4. A submarine doesn't mind if you smoke, drink, tell dirty jokes or cuss.**
- 5. A submarine does not object to being rigged for dive.**
- 6. Submarines come with manuals.**
- 7. A submarine is built for going down**
- 8. A submarine once down is quite willing to say there as long as you want.**
- 9. Submarines are always in trim.**
- 10. You can dive a submarine any time of the month.**
- 11. Submarines don't whine unless something is really wrong.**
- 12. Submarines don't care how many other subs you have sailed on.**
- 13. Submarines don't come with in-laws.**
- 14. When sailing, you and your submarine arrive at the same time.**
- 15. Submarines don't mind if you look at other submarines or if you buy books and magazines about them.**
- 16. Submarines don't complain if you sleep somewhere else.**
- 17. Submarines don't mind if you stop off for a few beers on the way back.**
- 18. It's OK to tie up a submarine**
- 19. You can leave your submarine but it will never leave you.**
- 20. You get paid extra money for riding on a submarine.**
- 21. Submarines don't mind if you sit up all night eating and talking loud with your friends.**
- 22. Submarines always smell the same all month long.**
- 23. A submarine doesn't get mad if you fart, belch or scratch in public.**

## **Warm Nights In Port** by Mike Hemming

One of the sweet times in a smokeboat sailor's memory banks, is a warm night in port. The day is done, the movie sucks and a crowd gathers topside. Coffee, iced tea and Coke are the beverages imbibed; sometimes some gilly or a case of beer arrives, if in a foreign land. The booze isn't important, though sometimes, it makes the new stories funnier and the old ones not so stale.

Men that live together under difficult conditions, whom you would think couldn't stand each other by now, spend some more time together. Drawing reinforcement from each other, knowing that they understand the life they live like no one else ever can. Talking, joking, lying followed by the long silences that are a form of communication among men that share something.

Harbors the world over are not silent. Homeports are active, men on the tender move around, doing whatever they do. Cars, taxis and buses deliver drunks in singles, doubles and by the load to the nearby piers. Some quiet, some loud and obnoxious but all are delivered to their respective quarterdecks to drop below for sleep. Silence or the stories return, it does not matter, men listen to the music of a Fairbanks Morse in the after nest on the finishing rate. Memories return and are spoken out loud, the words agreed with or dismissed with, "Choo Choo, you are so full of shit your eyes are brown."

Again it does not matter, a Zippo snaps open flaring the end of another sea store, a finished butt sails in a dim fiery arch to hiss unheard into another greasy harbor. One man walks to the forward capstan sits and smokes a cigarette far from home missing those he loves, staring out over the water and lonely to him, land. If anyone comes near they are silent too. Allowing the man his privacy in public the only kind you get in this strange sardine can existence.

After a bit, he goes below for sleep. Others come and go too, to get some fresh air, to think, to not think. A long involved story holds their attention to be laughed at, then quickly topped by another. Who knows or cares if any of it is true. The stories will last longer than the steel hulls of their ships or their lives.

The duty chief comes up for one last turn before sacking out, seeing the men there he speaks to some, some to him. He does not join the men, some of his memories from a war long ago, include men like these and he doesn't want the pain of those memories right now. Dropping down the hatch, he takes his young men's ghosts with him, hoping they will let him sleep soundly.

But the young men see ghosts too, 129 men recently rest in the cold, deep waters off the New England coast. The spirits they see are faceless. They knew them not, but are brothers to them. But with the resiliency of the young, their thoughts soon turn to the things that surround them. Jokes and stories return, the men are made



of the steel and rubber of youth. By ones and twos they drift below until only 2 are talking quietly smoking and drinking cold coffee. As the Fairbanks in the after nest finishes its charge and is shut down, they too give up and go below for sleep. The magic of a warm night in port broken at last, they all will sleep with their dreams and memories as we do now in our later years.

## **Topside Watch** by Mike Hemming

Its whatever AM, and it's time to go on your topside watch.

Aw crap, I just finished a battery charge 3 hours ago. Well at least its summer now, not like last winter in New London when it was 10 below with a 30 knot wind. Couldn't keep warm for 4 hours, no matter what. Coffee froze before you could drink it. Whites tonight on this 4 to 8, but still no sleep... This qual stuff sucks, but it's almost over. A week to go maybe. Then its below decks watches and going to bed after battery charges.

Jesus, this coffee looks like mud. Below decks watch goofing off until 0630 before making a new pot... Cripes. Taking the cup in one hand with two of yesterday's rock-hard Krispy Kremes balanced on top. It's out the AB hatch, sliding my back up the CRS, just using my legs to propel upwards. At the top, I set the cup and its doughnuts on deck to finish my climb into the cool night air.

Walking along the sail to the quarterdeck, eyes with no night vision, watch intently for open hatches or things on deck. 'Always walk lookin' down on the' boat' that old chief said, often enough. Don't wanna bust my ass tonight or ever. I seen a guy fall thru an open deck hatch... OW!! But it was funny, too. Watch where you put yo feets, dumb ass.

Same old boring stuff assuming the watch, not much going on... Take the gun belt put it on... Check the .45... Some butt-brain may have put a round in. Grew up with guns, not like some of these city kids. Probably the most squared away thing I'll do all watch is check to make sure I don't shoot my nuts off.

OK I got it, don't drink the damn coffee, it sucks. But I need this cup... Tell the new below decks watch to send up a cup that's fit to drink, when he makes it.

"Yeah, only got a week to go till final quals. Yeah well, get your ass in gear then... Aint no gimmes on Requin. In 2 weeks, I'll be signing you off in the forward engine room, and I'll make sure you know your shit. Tough babe, do your quals just like we all do." Jerk thinks he's gonna slide through to his fish... Kids.

Eyes seeing better now... Lights from the cans and Mother Onion make it bright. Wonder where that can's going tomorrow? Wonder if they just go out and bore holes in the ocean like us. Probably they can't see the big picture like us, either.

Checking the draught reading - looks the same as always. This doughnut is only fit for seagulls... The KK truck will be here later, I'll get some fresh ones then. Maybe drop a box down the hatch for the guys. Nah, let 'em get their own.

MMMMMMMMMM... Paddy wagon coming... Hope they aren't my drunks, or even have to cross my deck. Ahhh, its coming to the after nest... If that Smitty is pukin drunk again, I'll dump his ass in the water. Whew! it's stopped on the other side of the pier... No drunk's tonight, maybe.

Check the draught again, same as usual. Gawd, this is boring! Well, in a hour or so, things will pick up. Morning in port when it's warm can be interesting.

Lets see, the forward room is loading fish this morning. Torpeckermen got it easy, only work about half the time. But then they wrassle those fish around here 'n there. And then they get to pull them out of the water after firing them... Too cold for me. Staying in the engine room, good bunch of guys there.

Ike is gonna take on fuel today. Glad I'm missing that 'standing on deck, pickin your nose, watching water go over the side for 2-3 hours, great fun'. Darn, I bet they make me fuel king as soon as I qualify.

"Hey Runner! That clown McGarity still back aft? Went to sub school with that idiot." " Yeah? Well tell him I'm qualed in 2 weeks." " He did? That clown can't have done it yet... Shit! Yeah, I know I owe him a beer now." Damn all these guys beating me to their fish.

"Good morning Mr. Schilling, your early this morning... Yes sir, Stewy and I finished the injectors last night before the charge." " Okay, I'll tell him we can have off... I mean, Yes Sir."

" Yes Sir, I know my mouth is gonna get me in the soup if I don't watch it. I'm sorry Sir... Sir, thanks for the lift back to the barracks the other night."

"Hey, below decks! The Krispy Kreme truck is on the pier... Yeah, I'll get 'em but how about a blonde and sweet that's doesn't taste like yer old socks? You ain't got nothing to do, make some coffee fer crissakes! Okay, thanks... Yeah yeah, I knew you was kiddin."

" That's better... Tastes like new hydraulic oil, not yesterdays. Well, if you aux gangers ever worked, it wouldn't leak into the pot." "Heres your doughnuts... Jellies are in the top box... Yup I left ya some."

Suns comin up... Pretty, even over Shit City. Damn, I hope I got the bread to get home this weekend, need some lovin bad. But probably wont get it. How come I never meet these hot chicks like the other guys do? They probably don't either, except 'Lover Boy'... For a sonar girl he sure gets them. Gotta line, he does...

Watching him that night in Virginia Beach with the girl from the wedding party... Now that took balls to say that to her, but it sure worked. Him coming back to the boat the next morning, lipstick everywhere, even on his skivvey shorts.

"Morning Stew... Yeah, pretty morning isn't it? Schilling said we are getting off after quarters. Yeah, he's aboard. Okay, see ya later. Wanna ride to J-50? Okay."

*"Requin Arriving, Requin Arriving."* "Good morning Captain. No Sir, XO's still not aboard." Ha Ha, XO's gonna get it now... Old man beat him aboard.

"Morning COB... Yeah, pretty morning. Yeah, I'm about ready for my walk through... Got to get signed off on maneuvering. Then a couple of things and get my drawings together and you can take me through the boat."

" Yes chief, I think I got it. You can trip me I'm sure, but I got it now." " Yeah, I know I took too long. But it only hurts me, right? Well yes, it hurts the boat... Your right."

"Hey COB, you think there is any way of gittin' out of nuke school? I'd like to stay here... Yeah, I know... It was a hope. Requin's a good boat... I'd like to stay. Yeah, well maybe I'll make it back."

"Okay, nothing special, Old man's aboard, XO ain't... Wonder where 'Baldy' is. Here's the .45... Its empty. You going to th' barracks after quarters? Okay, if you're topside, I'll take you... Me and Stew will stop at Bells first. Breakfast of Champions... Slim Jims and a pitcher."

"Hey Lover Boy, yur clap cured yet? Well, it does prove that you're at least gettin' some every now and again, doesn't it?"

"Yes Chief, Attention to quarters, Aye." Dismissed. " Damn Stew, it's a beautiful morning, let's go get a beer."

## **White Gloves, Chic Snipes and the Fickle Finger** by Mike Hemming

A bunch of us ended up in a hotel bar one Saturday night, sitting around drinking with nothing else to do. After a while some ladies our age came in, obviously from a wedding, all dressed to the nines. Gloves, heels, the works. We invited them to sit with us and they all wanted to, except one. But eventually they convince her to do it. So we do the 'where are you from' bit and such initial sparing. It does become obvious that these ladies will not succumb to our charms in any carnal way, but that's okay with us. You know how it is, sometimes it's nice just to sit and talk to the female gender after too long at sea. So we are doing just that, having a good time talking except for the one, she is just plain rude, so all of us are ignoring her. Well after a bit, in comes 'Loverboy', the sonarman who seems to score at will with any female he sets his sights on. So one of us says, "Why don't you make a run on her (meaning the rude one)?"

Well, she *IS* pretty and so Loverboy makes his move. For quite some time all his advances are rebuffed. The rest of us are having a good time knowing that this is a nice interlude with some nice ladies, and nothing will happen. But in the meantime we are pinging lightly on Loverboy asking "What's the matter, something wrong? Can't handle the pressure?" And so on.

Well the other girls having heard his nickname start needling him too. At this point, where he knew all was lost, his reputation and pride won't let him quit. So on he goes, getting cold looks and put downs right and left. Finally wounded to the core, he gives up saying, "Aw hell, I didn't want to eat your pussy anyway."

Well, it was like a switch had been thrown from the 'Ice Princess' position to 'Hotter Than A Firecracker' and she is now all over him. The rest of us including her friends, are aghast at what he said and dumbfounded at her reaction. It doesn't take long before they are off to get a room. Her friends can't believe it, one saying they will be back soon, with her being as nasty as ever. So we wait and chat, with the girls looking at their watches not believing how late its getting. Finally, when the bar closes and the pair are nowhere to be found, the girls go to their rooms and we head back to the boat. On the way, we figure Loverboy and the girl were playing a joke, and he is back aboard and she's alone in her hotel room. But back aboard, he's not there and hasn't been seen. Oh well, hit the sack and sleep.

Daybreak, I go topside to drink my first cup, standing there with the watch, I look down the pier and say, "Holy crap, look at that!"

Down the pier comes Loverboy. His whites are a wreck... Neckerchief missing, lipstick smeared everywhere, hat, jumper, trousers... They said in the After Battery, even on his skivvey shorts. Hickeys on his body in very interesting places and on his left hand and arm are a lady's long white glove. Dropping down the hatch, he throws the glove on a mess table saying, "Loverboy wins again!" And exhausted, staggers to his bunk.

Well the 'Love Glove' makes the rounds of the boat, shown off and joked about. The day we pulled out for sea, it was in the AER and was thrown into the rag bin. Some days later, I am heading aft after chow to sack out and Jake the EN1 in charge of the AER is wearing the glove.

Now, to say that Jake was old, fat, bald, sweaty and ugly is only telling part of the truth, he was worse than that. But he looks chic with his elbow-length white glove on and smoking his cigar, I must admit.

When I come to take the watch, Percy, Jake's relief is wearing the glove now. Percy a big bellied black man is also looking chic now. Not to be left out, I don the glove on my skinny, sweaty arm, so I too can have some class. The donning of the glove becomes a ritual of assuming the AER watch. This goes on for the rest of that cruise. With the stills down, and no showers in the heat of Gulf Stream waters, the

glove goes yellow, brown then to almost black. And it stinks... With the sweat of three smokeboat snipes soaking into it 24 hours a day. But it is faithfully worn until the maneuvering watch is secured. Finally, off comes the glove, and unable to throw it away, it's tossed again into the rag bin.

Fast forward to the next 'let's go bore holes in the ocean again' cruise... Well, this one is going okay until the AER has a run of bad luck. Cold snorkel starts, blown air box covers, high vac and low RPM shutdowns, you name it and it happens every 'commence snorkeling'. Jake in particular had the worst time of it. So finding the 'Love Glove' in the bin again, I set to work on its last incarnation. Stuffed with rags itself and taped to an overhead pipe, with the middle finger extended in the 'Hawaiian Good Luck' sign, with its own little sign that read: 'THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE WATCHES OVER YOU'. Because it's aimed at all of us it stays up, to be seen and laughed at even by the Old Man. In fact, one day he stops and asks, "is that the 'Love Glove'... The one and only?"

I answer. He just shook his head and went forward. Soon after, one day I looked up and 'The Love Glove' was gone, no one would admit taking it, but it was gone. I have two theories what happened to it.

One, Loverboy who left about that time, took it, and it's now laying bronzed in the bottom of his closet.

Or Two, somewhere at sea, a snipe is looking very chic in his long 'white' elbow-length glove.

## **The Legacy Lives On** by Mike Hemming

It is because it was more than a silly slogan like *'It's not just a job, it's an adventure'*. Submarines are a life, or to use a somewhat maligned term, a lifestyle.

On a submarine, you are *in it*, surrounded by *it* for days and weeks for us DBFers, and months for nukes. Inside a steel tube with men that you must live, work, laugh and every so often despite our best efforts, to die with. Your very survival depends on these men. You train them well, because it does mean so much to all aboard. Sure, you don't love them all, you can't... But you respect them because you know they are the best boat sailors. After all, they trained you and you trained them.

I think one of the things that ties sub sailors together, is that we are all connected by qualification. Not that we all did it, but that it really *does* connect us, all the way back to the olland.

Recently, I have talked to two shipmates, one that I turned into a throttleman and one that qualled the man that trained me. Digging through our collective pasts there would be an unbroken line back to the Holland's 1 and 2-way trash dumpers and

bilge wipers. I am proud to think that I'm connected in a small way to men that took their lives in their hands every time they threw off #1 line. Men on boats that knew it was time to try to surface when the canary was belly up on the bottom of its cage from gasoline fumes. We are their legacy, like the nukes of today are ours.

## **Percy Turner, Engineman** by Mike Hemming

If this was Readers Digest's *'My Most Unforgettable Character'*, I would have to take the \$250 they give you and spend it all buying beers in a submarine bar somewhere. There are some things you just don't take money for and my memories of Percy are one of them. So you get some of them for free.

He was many things to many people on Carp... Friend, enemy if you needed one, joker, nick-name giver, but most of all he was an engineman. He knew them, how to fix them and make them run like tops. A big man from Harlem, I saw him break cylinder liner nuts loose with a ratchet when we had to hurry a repair at sea a couple of times. He could lift heads off outboard by himself. He knew engines and was willing to pass it on if you wanted the info... Listen, and he would teach you about engines and being a good sailor.

I had the good fortune to be in the engine room he was assigned to when he came aboard. Percy was a 2 hash mark second class... Me, a slick-arm 3rd. He rapidly became the saving grace back there, helping us through two rather poor 1st class bosses, in the next 2 years. The first one knew his work but was lacking in any social graces, even in an animal pit of a smokeboat engine room. Percy as second in command acted as a buffer, kept our morale up, and got the work done on time and right. He kept the 1st class from over exercising his power over his peons and things running smoothly.

Later when 'Z', who was pathologically mean and stupid, replaced that first class, Percy kept us going under trying conditions. Even though it meant making 'Z' look good to pull his chestnuts out of the fire to protect us from the meanness, Percy did it. Which of course meant that 'Z's career sailed along somewhat smoothly before even the forward battery began to notice things were not well in engineland.

Percy personally saved me from a possible trip to Leavenworth one night in San Juan. When after whispering to Percy, "Watch, I'm gonna push that shit in front of this next bus..." As I maneuvered behind 'Z', at the last second, a strong black hand pulled my jumper collar just enough to make me lose my balance.

I don't know to this day if I was going to really give him a shove. The incident was only mentioned between us once. The next day, He said, "You were really going to push him, weren't you? I said, "Dunno..." "What about now?" "Nope, won't happen again. "He was somewhat pissed and said, "I hope not, 'cause I'll have you transferred."

Even today I am shamed by the incident only because Percy was unhappy with me. But finally, the devil got his due and 'Z' was sent packing.

I saw many leave the boats I was on in my 6 years, but only once did men come topside to cheer as a man crossed the brow for the last time. It happened for 'Z' and deservedly so. As there was no other first class around, Percy got the nod to be in charge of the AER. In one minute, it went from a hell to work in, to one of the happiest places I ever worked. We busted our butts when needed, loafed when possible and laughed and joked all the time. Nothing got us down, from swallowed valves to busted spring packs, we would fix them and have a laugh while doing it. It was the happiest year of my career.

The one thing you noticed first, last and always about Percy was his belly, it was big, no question. But it was different than most, it rode high above his belt. His most famous act was to walk into a bar and lift this belly and set it on the edge of the bar and with a flourish point to it and say to the wide-eyed bartender, "Fill 'er up."

Percy was the Carp's name-giver... At reunions, his creations live on. *Grits, Elli Mae, Shaft, Nubs* and *Loins*. Now old men, but forever tagged by him, are reborn every two years at every Carp reunion in his honor.

All of us have our heroes, the big ones we don't often know personally; the holders of Silver Stars, Navy Crosses and Medals of Honor. But we must remember the little heroes in our lives, the ones that do the right thing, even when it hurts. This is why Percy is one of mine. After that wonderful year with him in charge, I made first class. On Monday, I came to work with my new crow perched above my 1 hash mark, nervous how would he react to this, as he was still a 2nd class. After quarters, I dawdled in the ATR for as long as possible, so when I got to the engine room he was waiting there with the whole gang. As I stepped through from maneuvering he handed me the big pitcher that we all drank his great lemonade from, and said, "What's up for today, boss?" Taking a swig I said "Let's finish that head outboard #4 and get that leak stopped on the fuel oil line."

Those 5 words of his were the words of a great man and made my next few months in the AER go easy. When a 1st class senior to me came aboard I was moved to the FER for the rest of my time aboard. I took Percy's engine knowledge and his example of how to run a smokeboat engine room and keeping its inhabitants in line with humor and example with me.

A few years after I got out, I heard he had died while working at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, of a heart attack. I hope that whenever I get to where I end up for eternity, Percy is there with that big pitcher of lemonade, still giving out nicknames.

Percival Alexander Turner... Engineman and friend. *Hand Salute.....Two.*

# Rum Raison Ice Cream

by Mike Hemming

On my first Caribbean cruise, the Requin stopped in Jamaica and with no naval presence there we got food from the local economy. One of the foodstuffs brought aboard was two 5-gallon containers of rum raisin ice cream. The 1st class cook took one look at it and said, "That crap is terrible... I oughta heave it into the Dumpster."

Taken at his word, it was stowed in the back of the freeze box and forgotten. Some time later, I went in search of something to eat in the freeze box and found the ice cream. I scooped up a big bowl because I wanted something cold, not because I was hungry. Sitting in the mess hall, I ate it while doing a qual drawing. Sometime later after finishing the bowl, I noticed that the world felt pleasantly different.

Pleasantly high, I finally realized, the ice cream was made with real alcoholic rum. Dropping back down into the cool box, I got another bowl and made sure the container was hidden better. After finishing it, I finally went aft to my bunk for sleep... Smiling a good deal more than a non-qual fireman should in the tropic seas.

The next night, realizing I needed help in concealing my find from indiscriminate consumption I said to the night mess cook, "This ice cream has REAL rum in it! Lets keep it to ourselves." He agreed to work on keeping it hidden, knowing that if the word leaked out, it would disappear in minutes.

We evolved a pattern... I would arrive in the 0200 to 0300 time slot when few were around usually, and we would have a large bowl of ice cream. Then I would go to bed with a pleasant buzz in my ears and he would stand the rest of his duty in the same condition.

Just about the time the first five-gallon container was emptying, I went to the mess hall to find a late-night movie going on. Walking through, I see a shipmate eating a bowl of ice cream. I know that there is only one kind left... The good kind. Going back between reels I grab this guy and tell him what's what. From seeing his half-silly grin, it's pretty gahdam clear he knows anyway. But under threats of having to drink the forward engine room bilge and common sense, he realizes it's smart to keep his mouth shut.

The next night, the three of us arrive in the mess hall for our nightly ice cream tipple, to find 2 others eating a bowl of it and talking louder and louder and louder. Until one exclaims, "HEY!! This stuff has real booze in it! I'm half drunk!"

With real tears, we watched the '*Real Rum Ice Cream*' disappear before our very eyes.



# **The Center of the World** by Mike Hemming

Today, the center of my world is too large. At one time, it was 15 x 20 ft and in it we would pack almost 30 men for a movie. Or 24 men sitting in contact with each other for a meal, 6 each at 4 tables. From the coffeepot to the airtight door leading to the AB berthing area, the mess hall was the center of our world.

It was where an enlisted man went for everything; recreation, knowledge, food, entertainment and believe it not, solitude. Solitude in an area often filled with other men, but when a shipmate got a certain faraway look, he was usually left alone. Unless someone thought he needed some cheering up and then his "cheering up" was liable to be at his expense. Abuse about almost anything would be heaped upon the victim until he had to laugh along with the crowd knowing it was the only way out. A little cruel maybe, but nobody ever cracked up in my times aboard either, so I guess our psychiatrist's couch was there too... Right along with 80 other crazed, self-appointed psychiatrists ready to harpoon your self-esteem in the butt until you were as happily loony as they were.

Long discussions on all subjects would evolve through many men coming and going, the length was limited only by the need to set up for the next meal. Day and night, which is a useless measure of time aboard a submarine anyway. Men cycle through to go about their lives. On watch, off watch, eat, hit the rack and study quals, a constant churning of men.

It was our doctor's office too. Doc Rohre would set up to do paperwork in one corner with his pipe lit and you knew he had his shingle out. Not that you couldn't stop him or wake him anytime, if you had a serious concern.

Once I was studying quals in the mess hall late one night at sea. Doc was in his corner when a sonarman, we called "Lover" came in and sat down. Lover waited a bit, I think now, hoping I would leave, and then started talking to Doc in a low voice. I paid no attention until I heard Doc say in his gravel-voiced not so low tones, "Well, when were you *exposed*?". It was then I realized that you never had any privacy on board. Lover mumbled an answer that I interpreted as 5 days ago, which sounded about right to me. After all, I had seen all those flicks warning us about trying to spread our pollen among the "bad" ladies. After 3-5 days your willy goes AWOL and you die or something horrid like that. Well after some more consultation, off they go to give "Lover" his cure.

His quiet questions became useless when an after-battery rat awoke to see Lover's hairy butt being injected with the requisite amount of medication next to his head. That must have been a real eye popper.

At the next meal the guy comes in and announces for all to hear, "Hey, Lover's got the clap!" Less than 3 minutes later, the whole boat knew. For the rest of that cruise "Lover's" arrival in the mess hall would be announced by the sound of applause.

Movies are best shown in the mess hall. I never liked watching a movie in the forward room... Too much room, I guess. Plus the fact at sea, the up and down motion on the surface added an extra little something for those disposed to looking for 'Ralph'. The junior men got to hold down the projector and the screen. Sitting close enough to a movie screen to hold it down makes for crossed eyeballs trying to focus on the picture.

Mess hall movies had their own extra added attractions and additions, like the hairy-backed EM1 that always got in the picture at the wrong time, while looking for a clean coffee cup. Even Ursula Andress's lovely breasts lose a lot when projected on a hairy, sweaty back.

Then there was the duty foul butt that would ease out a silent but deadly stinker in the middle of a reel. The Carp had a guy that had apparently invented the stealth fart; it oozed to the far side of the compartment before it started exploding in everyone's nasal passages. Causing them to place the blame for it on everyone else in the mess hall. Added to the body odors of 20 other men far too long away from any sorts of hygiene other than brushing their teeth, it was amazing any of us survived.

I remember once after a reel was over and the lights turned on, it was discovered that there was no film on the take up reel. 1200 feet of 16-mm film in the waterways in a tangled soggy, oily mess. It took some time to straighten that one out.

Between reels, the coke machine was hit. Actually *hit*, for if it were done at the right time it would stick and dispense coke until hit again. The ship 's party fund never made much from the coke machine. Sometimes popcorn was made and ice cream dished out. If you wanted ice cream you always tried to not be the guy to drop down into the freeze box to get it. If you did, you missed half the next reel dishing out ice cream for the rest of the audience.

The mess hall was our game room for acey duecy, bridge, canasta, cribbage and poker. Carp was a poker boat... At sea, the table behind the 'pass-through' was the poker table. The metal rim pulled up, a blanket put over the top and rim pushed back down and voila!! A poker table for 6. Seven, if the junior man wanted to stand at the end.

Games ran from clean up from chow to set up for it. Rules were simple... Bring cash, no borrowing, fifty cent limit, no kiddy games that took any explanation, cards spoke for themselves. The COB who often played or just sat and watched, enforced the rules. I never saw anyone that went away from the table busted too bad, just a mite broke. But our main form of recreation was verbal; talking, joking, teasing,

lying to or about someone was easy. It took no equipment except a brain and a mouth. Some however seemed to leave their brains in another compartment, even then. These verbal jousting tournaments were not for the faint-hearted or thin-skinned. If you couldn't take it, stay in your bunk and out of the 'arena of death'.

You could always take heart in the fact that no one won these verbal "to the death" battles all the time. If it was decided it was your turn in the barrel, it was best to grin and bear it, and then leave for your next watch, bloody but unbowed.

Every once in a while, I miss that tiny center of what was once my world. A 15x20 foot world almost always filled with men. Men that tried to hide the fact they cared with rough, crude language. A world now only remembered by some crusty old men, tied together by a silver emblem of their belonging, fading slowly away. One by one.

## **A Full Power Run** by Mike Hemming

We all remember these... We were actually supposed to do them every so often. The good skippers combined them with a run home if possible or just did them anyway. 'Goin' Home Turns' we called them. When everything was right, it was great.

This is about one of those times... A long time spent one Springboard that became too long for all of us. The skipper, Charley Baldwin knew it because, he wanted to get back too. One of the better captains of my career, he had a way of letting the engineer know that he wanted max effort from the snipes and their gear when it was time to go. I think it was the way he said, "I'd like to go back standard on four..."

*Meaning I will ring up Standard on four and anything more you can get out of them will make me a happy skipper.* This time it was said 2 days before we left Port Canaveral for NorVa. Giving us 2 days warning meant that this was serious, the engineer asked us what we wanted. Thinking a few moments, I said in the AER we would change a few injectors, check and gap a few sets of valves, change all fuel filters, and we were good. Planning ahead for some serious fuel consumption, I asked the oil king where his cleanest fuel was. He said, "Probably #6 NFO."

I asked and got permission to switch to that tank so we wouldn't be having to clean the purifiers as often. At full or more loads, they have to run almost continuously, and why take a chance on slowing down if a purifier was slow in being cleaned.

The morning we left was beautiful and Carp was ready to run. Out of the harbor and at sea '*standard on four*' was rung up and away we went. I was standing in maneuvering when it was rung up and the electricians put on the necessary turns and then added some more... Then a couple more, just in case the tachometer was a little off... Just in case, it's better to err on the high side, I guess. It was not then that the real tweaking for speed came, it was at the beginning of each watch. The

oncoming controllerman would bump the rheostat just a couple more turns. Just to "balance" them out.

The aux gang played their part requesting to run the low-pressure blower as often as possible, keeping the ballast tanks nice and dry. Plus those bubbles made the hull slick and we gained a touch there too.

By the end of the 3rd watch, Carp was really rolling, faster than she had ever gone except when brand new from the builder's yards. 21 knots was being flirted with. Those Jimmy's were singing their noisy tune, with just a little smoke to show they were working.

The Old Man had left orders that speeding up was better than slowing down to avoid another ship. When a ship was deemed to have too close of a CPA, the OOD rang up '*All Ahead Full*'. The controllerman, thinking that an honest bell was needed, backed off the turns to the requested bell and Carp slowed down about half a knot.

After some minor "who struck John," the turns were eagerly replaced. Flooded down aft and blown dry forward, we were hauling. If flank is at 110 %, those last 8 hours were some kind of super flank bell, figuring out to almost 120%. With them, Carp was traveling at over 21 knots, adding in the Gulf Stream and we were flying.

This was my dream... A book I read in high school was called '*Speed*'. In it were stories of different machines and making them go fast. One chapter was about the Archerfish chasing the Shinano. Greasy snipes making their boat go fast... I loved it.

No sinking a ship for us at the end of our run, just home. Almost a 1,000 miles transit covered in 48 hours. From #1 line off to #1 line on. Those old Jimmy's may have leaked oil everywhere but they sure could put the power to the cubicle when asked. Only thing necessary at the end was an extra 5 minutes cool down.

We finished with a smile and a "Way to go guys" from the Old Man. It beat the hell out of any ribbon or piece of chest candy they give out too easily these days. It was sweet.

## **Culinary Delights** by Mike Hemming

Our cooks were great... Of course, we never let them know it. We heaped abuse on them as they heaped delicious chow onto our plates.

Among the crew were also some good cooks or ones that knew local delights. One of them was learning that real chili could be good to eat. Made by a TexMex shipmate that had his own peppers and used chunks of beef, not ground. Yeah, yeah I know, but it wasn't '*Oh God, I have molten lava in my mouth!*' stuff. But a

light, guilty pleasure dancing across the tongue followed by only small beads of sweat in the brow. And the results the next day didn't require asbestos toilet paper. I loved the man's chili so much because he refused to put beans in it. "Only poor people put beans in Chili," he'd say with disdain.

One evening after the movie, three of us Maryland boys started discussing our local foods. We disagreed on some but were unanimous on the beauty of the fried tomato. These are not the ones that are fried green, but full red ripe ones.

Not the ones you see in the south, eaten by people who can't wait for perfection. Like in the movie *'Fried Green Tomatoes'*, proving that people who eat green tomatoes are cannibals and will eat anything and enjoy it. I mean, I couldn't eat Carolina pork barbecue for two whole days after seeing that movie. Anyway, one of us said, "Lets cook some up... There is a case of beautiful local tomatoes in the reefer."

So a pound of bacon was cooked on the grill... It's the only proper grease to use, nothing else will do. We sliced up a dozen tomatoes and dredged them in flour, seasoned with just a little too much salt and pepper. Laid lovingly on the hot grill, the aroma brought crewmembers to the galley in droves. Whereupon seeing the results the reaction was, "What's that stuff, it looks terrible."

Admittedly, by the time fried tomatoes are done they are a bit of a hash. Browned and slightly burnt flour, the softened meat of the tomatoes falling apart, often held together only by the skin.

"Its fried tomatoes, you idiot, there good, try some". "I dunno... Oh, okay." "Damn these are good! Gimme a few more... Well, make it a plateful".

Well for the next hour John, Vos and I sliced, floured and fried tomatoes feeding platefuls to guys that had been revolted by the first sighting. By the time we were done, a whole case was gone.

The rules aboard a sub are you can cook anything in port you want as long as you clean up and tell the head cook if you use anything up.

So the next morning I reported to him, "We used up a case of tomatoes last night".

"You did WHAT?" "A case... We fried them". "You idiots did WHAT?" "Yup, fried um." "Jeezus! you guys will eat anything." "Well Boof, we eat your shit, don't we?"

Two days later, after guys had passed the word around it was, "Hey Hemming..."

What Boof?" "What's the recipe for your fried tomatoes?"

## **Snipes** by Mike Hemming

Snipes, the ones that made the boat go, helped to put the pedal to the metal. On smokeboats they were the EN's, MM's, EM's, and IC men. The ones that took fuel and turned it into power that moved the boat. They crawled in bilges and battery wells, sweating, joking and cursing, making it go. Tearing clothes and skin off knuckles, burnt by heat and battery acid, in the cold North Atlantic to the hot tropic seas, the boat kept moving. Not all were gorillas carrying tools as big as they were, some were small and slight. Some brighter than most ending up as doctors and college professors. Jokers and grouches, clowns and serious, white, black, red, yellow and brown. Snipes, because they wanted to be.

They tended their hot noisy machines, crawled through small nasty places, shocked and pinched and thrown about. Wet and cold, wet and hot, wet and oily, humidity always at 100%.

They worked 20 or more hours straight sometimes to get something fixed. Living on cold coffee and jelly sandwiches eaten with greasy hands. Cigarettes were smoked only halfway down before being forgotten or becoming too nasty to smoke from the oil on their fingers.

Sometimes, things would be done with delicate skill and other times with the force of large hammers and pry bars. Outboard or down below, they lifted heavy weights in spaces too small for the two men needed to do the job easily. Stuck their hands in places where electrons might wait to kill. Bent over in awkward positions, they toiled, fixing things placed in strange positions by sadistic designers and evil yard birds.

Their badge of office... Torn or acid-eaten dungarees and their hands always black with grease in the pores and cracks of their skin.

## **Fueling and Lubing Around** by Mike Hemming

Smokeboat engines suck fuel like thirsty sailors suck booze after 3 months at sea. And if you put going home turns on, look out for serious consumption of petroleum products.

Our boats were good for about 11,000 miles on about 110,000 gallons of fuel. Definitely not EPA standards for MPG in our new touchy-feeley world. But hell, ours was not a touchy-feeley job. We were tasked with being ready to go out and break ships and kill people. So getting about a tenth of a mile per gallon to get there didn't matter to us. That mileage was at a standard bell on two engines. Crank up those big GM's or FM's to full on four, and you start using some serious juice. Seems to me about 800 gallons per hour to hit 20 miles per hour.

The downside of all this consumption was that it had to be put back aboard. Enter that magical snipe called 'The Fuel King'. It was the only crown I ever wore, except for "That skinny MM in the AER".

Fuel king is a rite of passage for any snipe that moves up the ladder in the engine rooms. Kind of like being Spare Parts P.O. except that it's thankless, dirty, cold and you can't steal anything. Going home with buckets of dirty diesel oil will not win you any 'sugar' on the home front. Anyway, the fuel king was any 3rd class snipe that could count to 110,000 without using every toe in the navy.

Fuel consumption figures had to be kept and also kept correct, so the officers knew how much the boat weighed. Once a trim officer ignored or 'lost' the fact that #1NFO tank was 'empty', i.e. now filled with seawater and that's heavier than fuel. The boat dove about 30,000 pounds heavy... Talk about a down express. We were in Long Island Sound on school boat ops and stuck our nose in the mud at 125 feet. From the bugged-out eyes of those students in the engine room, I wonder how many went ashore and off to skimmers. After a short discussion with the skipper and the aforementioned officer showing my numbers were there and correct, I headed aft to the sound of a serious chewing out.

Our fuel, before it could be used had to be run through a centrifugal purifier to spin out all the dirt and water in it. The purifier had a cylinder that rotated at 25,000 rpm to do this. The water flowed out the end and to the bilge, but the dirt stuck to the sides and had to be cleaned out. With relatively clean fuel at lower speeds the oiler might not have to do it all on a particular watch. But at high speeds with dirty fuel it might be done 2 times a watch. It was a knuckle-busting and dirty job, even worse in any kind of sea. If you put this monster back together unbalanced or with a bad bearing, it would do a shuddering fandango about the time it hit 25,000 rpm, scaring a newbie oiler's socks off. Me, after hitting the stop button, I waited in maneuvering for things to quiet down.

Fuel from Navy sources was usually pretty good, but if gotten from locals, look out. Carp once fueled in the Azores... Any hoses in that place should be inserted in a different orifice and carry a different liquid. Anyway, I don't know what was in that diesel but it was the hottest burning stuff I ever saw. Percy Turner said it was jet fuel, it burned exhaust valves out at a fast rate. We were replacing a set on a cylinder at least once a day. I couldn't get the engineer to let us shift tanks, the lazy jerk wanted to use fuel from amidships to make his compensation easier to figure. Finally, the Old Man said shift to another tank because we were running out of spare valves. That damn fuel sat in that tank until we off-loaded it in the yards.

Fueling was a simple process. Snipes hauled aboard and hooked up black greasy hoses and the station pumped it aboard. All the oil king had to do was line up the right tanks and make sure they weren't over filled. If they were, oil went into the water making them troubled waters. Stories abound of oil kings who learn that sleeping while fueling can cause you to spend days breaking rocks and nights

fending off a big bosun's mate named Bubba in Leavenworth. So this one never slept or read skin books while fueling.

Defueling was a little harder and took much longer. The fuel in the tanks was blown ashore with 15 psi air. The problem came after finishing that some tanks were full of seawater. This can't be sent to fuel tanks, so must be blown into a 'doughnut' to separate the oil and water. Trouble was, no doughnut... All night long and it hadn't showed. Its 5 AM and liberty is drawing close. Ah, hell! let's blow it over the side. At 15 psi, it ain't going fast enough to beat the sun and the oil smell which is getting stronger and stronger. What seemed to be such a good idea to a sleepy mind, now isn't at all. Inching up the pressure to 17psi and a strong outgoing tide saved the day.

One of the most idiotic things that ever happened about fueling concerned some admiral who was coming to the Orion. Somewhere, some moron LCDR decrees whites will be worn on Pier 22 that day. Great if you are some clean fingernailed QM wandering down the pier to get your frilly undies from the laundry truck. Not so good if you are an E-3 wrestling a fuel hose from the pier across another boat. Try as I might, nothing could be done about allowing my men to wear dungarees. Admiral Pantywaist might have the vapors if he saw sailors in 'gasp' dungarees! I finally got an extra clothing allowance for my men whose whites were ruined by someone's stupidity. You know, it probably wasn't the Admiral's idea but some ass-kissing subordinate... At least, I hope so.

Taking on lube oil was easy here in the states and places like that. But in ports with no naval presence it was a little more difficult. Before Carp left for the Med, the COB, an old time ENCS, calls me up to the messhall, hands me a note and says,

"Take this to shop so-n-so and see Chief Smith, he'll tell you what to do". "What's this for?" "An air-powered barrel pump, 'n you'll thank me in the Med."

So off I go, entering the shop, I ask for Chief Smith. I am grilled as to what I want and why I want to see the chief. Sensing the object of my search is within earshot, I say, "Chief Zeigler sent me to see Chief Smith."

Then from out of a nearby office a voice says, "Come in here sailor, and tell me why Shorty Zeigler hasn't been shot for impersonating a chief by now."

I go in the office to see the world's oldest ENC... His ribbons look like a billboard on his chest capped off by twin fish and a war patrol pin with a galaxy of stars across the bottom. "Sit down boy, how's Shorty?"

Being called 'boy' by this guy was no insult because from the looks of him he had paid his dues when the collection committee was a serious group. Then he proceeds to tell me that Shorty was his hardest case to get squared away back in 40 something, when he came aboard. While talking about what a useless non qual



Shorty was, he reads the note, hands it too a hovering 3rd class, who scoots out like mouse on a cheese run. Once the chief tells me how hard it was to get the COB qualified, he goes on for some time about the stunts they both pulled on liberty in Pearl and other places. One of which was remarkably similar to one that the COB had recently chastised me for, involving alcohol and returning to the boat not quite on time and in the proper uniform. I am thinking hmmm, this is worth while info. After some time listening to a machinegun delivery of Shorty's numerous crimes and faults, a barrel pump appears beside me like magic. Finishing up, he sends me on my way with,

"Say 'Hi' to Shorty for me, and by the way don't believe a word that sumbitch ever says about me."

At this point its 1000 hours and I do know enough not to return to Carp too soon. So until about ½ hour before liberty goes down, I hole up in Bells for the day, to drink some brews and wonder if Thelma really does belong to the human race. After several, I decide she does, and that story they told about her and Dex in the phone booth is probably not true. Anyway, I can't quite envision the required position as it was described to me.

Returning down the pier, I meet the COB, show him the pump, and say Chief Smith says 'Hi'. The COB kind of grins and says, "See you tomorrow." As I walk away the COB says, "By the way, you can thank me by not believing a word that sumbitch said about me." "Sure Chief, Sure."

So its off to the Med and along about Naples, we need some lube oil. When we pull in, a barge pulls up along side of us and sets 10 barrels of lube oil on deck. I got a below decks watch to stand, so its midnight before I can pump the lube aboard. I did have my oiler line everything up, so we are ready to go as soon as I'm off watch. Inserting the barrel pump into a barrel and crack the 225 air to it and *Kachunk, Kachunk*, it's a-pumping. Speeding up the pump to as fast as is reasonable, Bill and I watch it go. As it is midnight and warm in Napoli, crewmembers are coming back now. "How's the beer?" I ask Secor. "Not bad, I liked the Peroni," he says, "Well, Bill and I could use a couple... Take this money and go get us a six-pack". Off he goes, but by the time he reaches the brow he has enough money for a case.

Returning with a case of Peroni's, Bill and I each crack one open... Ahhhh! *Kerchunk Kerchunk* goes the pump, stopping only to move it from one barrel to another. Beers are quaffed by a bunch of snipes, on and off duty. Its taking about ½ hour per barrel, and two barrels for a case of beer. There always is a non-qual to hand money to for another beer run and life is good. Stories and jokes are told, shipmates are harassed, empty barrels beat on, and oil is pumped. The Torsk's oil king stops by, seeing the barrel pump, wants to borrow it. In unison, six Carp snipes say, "Two cases of beer and um, make it Peroni. "Or go see Chief Smith and don't believe a word he says about Shorty." *Kachunk, Kachunk, Kachunk*.

## **First Time** by Mike Hemming

None of us ever forget much of our first time aboard, at least we think so until we try to put it into words. My first time on Requin was different because I had my orders to her but was still in Sub School. Requin was not long out of the yards and was in New London for tank training and such. My class had gotten their orders with several weeks to go before graduation. When I mentioned that I was going to her a classmate said, "I think I saw her at pier so and so yesterday." Having duty that weekend, I got permission to go down to the piers to look.

I did this for several reasons. One of course, was to see my new home. With all my desire to be a sub sailor, I had never been on one except school boat ops. You know, the 16 dives every class went out for in sub school. I figured that I might as well go look around and learn some things. Little did I know how much I had to learn.

Also, this was during the Cuban Missile Crisis time and guys were being pulled from classes and sent to sea. It happened to a TM3 that sat next to me. In an hour he was gotten from class, his gear packed and down to the piers, lines thrown off and he was gone. I figured if Requin was going somewhere, it would be best if I was on her and not ending up in some transient barracks in Norfolk waiting for her to reappear. So if possible, I'd find out if she were leaving anytime soon.

Walking down the pier, Requin looked good. To me, she looked better than the other boats nearby. Fresh from the yards, she really shined. But something more than pride of new ownership told me this was a good boat and I would be happy on her. I was right, she was a good boat, in good shape with a good crew of happy lunatics.

Trying to look my salty best but probably only succeeding to look like an idiot, I went aboard to explain what I was about to the topside watch. I don't remember now who the watch was but he passed me off to a TM2 named MacGowen, aka 'Mr. Magoo' or just 'Magoo'. He said he would take me to the duty officer who was the Engineering Officer, a Mr. Schilling. It was just as well that it was he. As I in my half scared attempts to be as cool as possible, managed to answer several questions with an "Okay" instead of "Yes Sir" or "No Sir". Any other officer would probably have sent me back to boot camp to start over.

As we headed aft, Magoo fixes me with a stare and asked if I am really that stupid or just trying to be. "Okay to Mr. Schilling and you aren't even here yet."

Chastised, I slunk aft to the forward engine room to be introduced to the duty ENs, a second class named Ike Spears and his oiler, Wes. Trying to stay out of the way, I watched them work on some injectors and learn something. They were both nice but unimpressed, especially after finding out that I wouldn't report aboard for a month if I took a leave after sub school. The boat was short-handed and needed

men now in the engine rooms. I stayed there and talked, asked dumb questions and I suppose, generally got in the way. But I didn't get too much grief from them, probably because they didn't want to scare the idiot until he was locked in, so to speak.

After the injectors were reinstalled, the engine had to be test run. Asking if I could help, they soon had me opening and closing valves. With a grin, Wes pointed to the inboard exhaust valve, you know that 32-turn bastard of an oiler killer, saying its all yours. Well, wanting to impress them, I spun it open as fast as possible, then spent a minute gasping for air while they snickered at me.

The engine still wasn't running right somehow. Ike and Wes did some adjustments, but a hour or more passed before it was shut down. Then the workday at an end, they sat and talked, and answered some more questions and told me a little of shipboard life. During this time I noticed a strange sensation in my ears, like a faint high-pitched hum. Oh well I thought, its nothing.

After a bit, chow went down and I was invited to stay for chow, so wanting to be one of the guys as much as possible, I did. As we sat down, Wes (who later became a good running mate) whispered, "Best keep your mouth shut as much as possible."

So I mostly sat and watched the dynamics of the mess hall, and learned it was a lot like a fox hole... lif you stuck your ass up it was gonna get shot off.

After chow, a discussion was had finally deciding that I could stay for the movie, because I was a guest. "But don't think you will ever see another on board until your qualified."

So I stayed and watched a stupid shit kicker... The only good parts were when the female lead got her buckskin shirt wet.

After a good dinner and a movie with popcorn and coke, it was back to the barracks for the night. On the way, I thought on what I had seen and learned. It was best to keep you mouth closed (which everyone that knows me, knows just how hard that is for me to do), work hard on what was called 'quals' and do your job as best you could. And that I would probably enjoy my time as a boat sailor if I did those things.

The other thing I learned was, my clothes were gonna smell funny for the next 5 years and my ears were gonna ring for rest of my life.

## **What's in a Name** by Mike Hemming

I consider myself a child of the '50's. Born in '43, I remember nothing of WW II, and only little bits of the Korean war. And I thank God I wasn't of the later '60's generation, peopled as it was with some of the most useless, selfish and cowardly

trash to be brought forth in this country. Not all of them of course, but the scum sure did float to the surface and get all the airplay. But anyway, with the books available to me and later TV, I had learned that evil forces of Germany and Japan had to be smashed before they had enslaved the world. And the US Navy's Submarines did no small part of this.

Submarines with great names like *Wahoo*, *Archerfish*, *Scorpion*, and *Shark*, things in the ocean that would take a big bite out of your butt if you messed with them. And that's what they did... They took huge bites out of everything that the Japanese sent out until the home islands were starving and short of everything.. Unable to fly enough training missions to even replace the pilots lost in places like the Marianas.

Not only did these boats have great names, they had great ship patches... Emblems showing that you had better fear the sailors within because if you didn't, your butt was gonna walk home from this voyage. Patches showing fierce denizens of the deep firing torpedoes and in general busting up anything with a meatball emblem on it. Sometimes, a bare-breasted mermaid, riding or holding a torpedo was used, or something like that.

After the war, it was a reasonable idea to remove meatball emblems and Japanese flags from patches. After all, they were now as Dex says, our 'soapy shower pals' and had decided to conquer us economically instead of militarily. And so patches kept their aggressive nature and boats built into the 60's kept their undersea names. Also a lot of patches had some Latin on them that freely translated to "Mess with me and I will make you drink 5 of the 7 seas". In fact, the names of some boats that had done well in the war were recycled and honored their predecessors for a job well done.

Unfortunately, the beginnings of PC was rearing its ugly head and the bare-breasted mermaid type of patch was discouraged if not banned. This was especially true if a boat moved to the east coast. *Carp's* mermaid and torpedo patch was changed after she came to Norfolk in the late '50's, what had been a unique patch, became a goldfish with a trident in its mouth. Not bad, but kind of a sad ending for a boat that had a good record in spite of being built late in the war.

The *Requin's* patch when she was a radar picket was really kind of nondescript... Two sharks alongside a boat. Much better was the WW II patch with a fearsome looking shark and a torpedo. The final one after her radar picket days was also good, with again, a shark emblem designed to instill confidence in its crew and possibly fear in its enemies.

Of course, the real sad times were yet to come, because until the early boomers, the good traditional names continued. Yes, you can make a case for naming them after famous people, but not a very good one, in my opinion. The advent of the Los Angeles class was the real end. And here was Rickover at his most evil or vindictive, when asked why he named them after cities and he said, "Because fish don't vote."

Did he really think that some dufus in LA, with a switchblade in one hand and a slim jim for boosting cars in the other, gave a crap about how a sub was named? Or did Joe Blow, suburbanite, sitting in his backyard, beer can in fist watching his grass grow, really care? I doubt it... It was just Rickover's way of showing he controlled things and that was that.

The sad final chapter was when at the commissioning of the USS Maryland SSBN 738, I saw that the ships patch consisted of mostly the Maryland flag. I noted the same to the skipper by saying you got a good boat here and from what I see a great crew, but this patch is a wimpy nothing. He said, sadly I noted, "Yeah, but we can't have 'aggressive' patches or sayings on them anymore".

So even the saying "I'll kick your keel up your packing gland" in Latin was out.

This was still the Cold War, and it was still a good idea to remind the Russians, that messing with us would have them end up on the short end of the stick. Even today, it's best to remind possible enemies of what might pop out of the ocean and hurt them. It's also not a bad idea to have our undersea warriors reminded that they are part of a long line of aggressive ass-kickers.

So I say, bring back the traditional, honored, aggressive names, and patches of our submarine force and stop naming submarines for states, cities, politicians, chemists, and even rebel generals.

## **Silver Dolphin Crews** by Mike Hemming

For the uninformed, a '*Silver Dolphin Crew*' occurs when each and every man on board has completed all of his qualification requirements, passes all of his tests and is finally designated '*Qualified in Submarines*'. Only during these rare occasions can the boat fly her Silver Dolphin Pennant for all to see.

The crew worked for months on a long cruise to reach that status, to be proud of themselves. And then when you returned to homeport and a new man reported aboard, it was over. It was kind of like an orgasm... It felt great but didn't last near long enough. It was all timing... A Med or West Pac cruise, 4 or more months and you came home proud, a Silver Dolphin crew. Obviously, not something that happened very often.

We drove the non-quals hard, "Get your fish, boy." But there were no gimmes either, we knew better... A man, sloppily qualed, might kill you. The Carp in the Med in 65 took 3 ½ months to do it, but we made it. We flew our Silver Dolphin Pennant, came home proud and looking good, walking tall in Subron 6.

But the pleasure was short and sweet. Three days back, a new man reports aboard and its over. Haul the pennant down, you are no longer 100% qualified.

Today, I read about a skimmer back from overseas, that gets to fly a pennant because 80% of the crew is Surface Warfare qualified. You know, they get to wear those wannabe pins that look like Dolphins but aren't. 80 percent, not 100 percent and get this, they get to fly their silly 80% pennant for 6 months. Six months! Not 3 lousy days!

More touchy feeley bushwa, to allow the unwashed feel like they are some kind of elite. Lower the standards so the ones that haven't got what it takes can wear some silly pin. A pin and a pennant that degrades the value of what we worked so hard to earn... Chest candy

## **Arriving and Leaving** by Mike Hemming

"Watch this one," Wes said, "Green as grass with hayseeds in his hair, but they never look back." Yes, as we went down the pier to our new boat, sea bags on our shoulders, boot camp blues with E-2 stripes on, we never looked back. There was nothing behind us and everything was in front of us. A new boat, a new life, qualification, living and learning was ahead. We wanted the boats and we got them, now to prove we deserved it.

We walked toward black submarines, to supposed adventure, to learning, to growing up. Not ever knowing why we wanted to but doing it anyway. We did grow and learn, the adventure came too sometimes, and most times we survived it.

We made friendships that defy explanation, city boy and country kid, bonded even today by the Dolphins they wore. Made brothers somehow inside a submarine, a brotherhood that lasts to the grave and beyond.

A cold December wind whips my bell-bottomed gabardines, sea bag on my shoulder above an E-6 crow, walking down the pier. Behind me the COB says to the watch, "They always look back. They move on, having a new life to live, but they will always look back at this one."

At the sea wall, I turn and look back... The nest of subs looks the same as the first time I saw it. It has not changed, but it will. I have changed and its time to move on. That life changed me; I am forever a submariner. Today as I look forward, I also look back, to friends and a life like no other.

Shivering in the cold, I turn, passing a young sailor heading down the pier, orders in hand, I watch until he reaches the brow. He never looked back, I smile, they never do. Until later.

## **Eyes of a Hundred Years** by Mike Hemming

**My own eyes looked in vain over the cold Atlantic waters for a sign. Against all hope I looked and looked, but they were no longer there. The Thresher was gone and would only be seen again in the hearts and minds of those left behind. No future eyes would see her again.**

**For 100 years, the eyes of submariners have seen many things, good and bad. Many brave men have seen their last on submarines. Cromwell on Growler as he said "Take her down," last saw the green sea close over his eyes. A controllerman on Tang saw the hull opened by a torpedo blast as his last sight. A shipmate on lookout that day saw the cruelty of a Japanese prison camp. An oiler on Puffer watched the hull pounded almost to the coffin covers in the forward engine room by Japanese depth charges and lived to see another day. Age-fading eyes of combat pin owners see 3,500 young men's ghosts that they will soon rejoin. But thousands of those that followed will see that none will be forgotten.**

**A funny little man with a bowler hat, walrus moustache and glasses saw the future and built a submarine. Fifty-four years later another unfunny little man added a power plant that fulfilled the submarine's potential; If they both could see the latest version of their creation.**

**Eyes of wives, mothers, sons and daughters have seen their loved ones come home from the deep sea for over 100 years now. Now and then, their eyes see only wave tops and empty slips, the sailors will not return. A baby sister's eyes will see only tears this time.**

**Laughing eyes see the beautiful sea and wondrous sunsets; Worried ones see angry waves and windblown spray from the shears. From the Pillars of Hercules to the Sea of Japan, the sea's many moods have been watched by those men that wear Dolphins.**

**A missile tech sees with eyes that look into the fiery gates of Hell as he spins up his deadly birds, wanting this to be just another drill. A sonarman's eyes watch his scopes for signs of change in the game of blind man's bluff, lest 2 adversaries go bump in the dark. For weeks, skippers and crews see with sleep-deprived eyes as they trail a heard but unseen enemy. Many young men have seen the pure white of the North Pole from the black decks of submarines. Others have seen only the boredom of long Cold War cruises watching gauges and dials, sometimes not even sure of where they are.**

**Yesterday, a young sailor's eager eyes saw his first boat and an old sad pair saluted the ensign for the last time. Today proud eyes see Silver Dolphins pinned on the owner's jumper for the first time, to soon see the whirl of sky and water as they are wet down for luck. Tomorrow, a boy's young eyes will see the spark of the spirit that leads men to what very few can do or even comprehend.**

Tonight, my grandson sleeps safe. Thanks in part for eyes that have watched over and protected this country's freedom for 100 years now. Tomorrow he will see the flag of this great country and know of the men of the submarine force that have seen too much or see no more to help protect our freedoms.

## **Bells** by Mike Hemming

*Bells, Crazy Kat, Horse and Cow.* There were many, they were worldwide, they were our homes and they are gone now. Evil progress takes away the haunts of our youth. City fathers and planners see only dens of inequity to be scourged for progress and safety. Safety? Moving them away from the base so drunken car travel is required to get back to the boat. This is progress and safety???

In truth we were safe in them surrounded by our shipmates and others like us. Only when outsiders came was trouble a real possibility. These seemingly unfriendly places finished cementing shipmates together into crews.

That's why they are so important in our memories. They were our homes and families, for young men far from homes and the rest of the world. As your family accepts you, kinda warts and all, so do shipmates and these places were where the warts sometimes showed.

Learning how to be a crewmember is taught there. Thinking back to my introduction to *Bells*, I realize now crew dynamics was a lesson taught in that place. Lessons that can't be taught onboard. Yeah, subs are free and easygoing in some ways, but a bar allows you to relax and a chief will impart some wisdom that might not be connected to the boat. But it can be something that will help an 18-year-old move toward real adulthood.

Your new shipmates will both test you and tease you in these places. They want to know how you will react to all kinds of surprises, from the possibility of a fight, to Thelma grabbing your crotch and asking in not too polite terms what you have in there. Of course, the crew sicked her on you... It was good for a laugh for them and to find out a little how you handled stuff. Because submarines ARE about learning how to handle stuff. Your shipmates want to learn how unflappable you are, so they know if you can be depended on. We all wanted to know if a guy was dependable when the crap started to fly. Which, as we all learned, can happen at any moment.

Sure, places like *Bells* were nasty, dirty and smelly and most of us wouldn't go into a place like it today. Of course, it wouldn't be full of our friends either, or at least men like us. We humans like to be among our own kind, whatever the distinction might be. Subs, skimmers, air dales, whatever, want to be with those that they consider friends, or at least not enemies. When a place like *Bells* became a sub sailor bar, it made it safer for us.



I miss those places... *Bells*, the *Big 'O'* and when you were in Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth VA., the *Jet Lounge*.

*Bells*... I miss the stink, noise, the jar of pickled pigs feet on the bar. You know, the one that the number of things in there never changed during your entire enlistment. The night a TM off the Redfin threw an ear of corn in the door at Dixie's feet, yelling, "Soooui, pig, pig, pig." Old drunk Buster wanting to shine your shoes for a dime and having them look worse when he was done, but you let him do it anyway. Hogjowls throwing his false teeth into his beer to keep Thelma from drinking it while he shot pool. The lopsided pool tables that made the game a challenge, like shooting pool on a diamond deck plate. The hamburgers that weren't too bad, or was I that drunk every time I ate one? Going from an 18-year-old that couldn't stay sober on one beer, to a 19-year-old that could drink a dozen before midnight and find his way back to J-50 and his bunk without puking. Hey, another one of life's little lessons that needs learning.

But the beer was cold and we were among friends and shipmates... It was home for a while. Gone now, but I'm sure they have been replaced, somewhere, at least I hope so.

## **Submarine Wives** by Mike Hemming

Like us, they come in all sizes and shapes, and like us they must be a little 'off the wall' also. I mean, why else would they put up with boat sailors for 20, 30, 40 or more years. Are they a little nuts too, to take under their wings men that will never quite be considered normal by most of the rest of the world? I don't understand it either, but I am glad they do. They listen to our old sea stories for the thousandth time, laugh, smile or wish we wouldn't use quite such foul words in public, but never really say, "Shut up, idiot". Of course, some of us have wives or girlfriends in our past that do those things, but that is probably why they are past tense.

Think of what they have put up with in the past... Long separations, lousy pay to do a sometime thankless job, poor living conditions and watching their high school friend's mates make more money and get ahead. While their husbands mark time financially, boring holes in God knows what cold ocean for a strategy that wasn't always clear.

My bride Flo realized early on that things were no longer the same as the civilian world. After about a month of bliss it was time for sailorman to go to sea once more. The evening before my departure into the briny deep, I asked Flo, who was in the kitchen,

"Honey did you wash my fart sacks?" "Your what?"

(Louder) "Did you wash my fart sacks?" "Your what??"

**(Even louder) "DID YOU WASH MY FART SACKS?"**

**(Silence.....) (Jesus, I married a deaf woman.)**

**But as she stuck her head out of the kitchen with a very strange look on her face, and said, "YOUR WHAT?"**

**I realized that my 19-year-old small town bride might not be up on smokeboat slang quite yet. "Uh, mattress covers, did you wash them?" "Oh those, yes." She was a fast learner, 'Douche kit' didn't throw her nearly as far!**

**Submarine wives fall into two main categories... Those that married us while we were on active duty and those that came after. I learned the big difference between the two at a Sub Vets, Inc convention in Norfolk a few years back. At the banquet, Flo and I sat at a table with three ex-smoke boat sailors, two with the new-type wives. These guys had obviously done pretty well. Gone to college and were in some big corporation, doing something, not sure what. Well, the third guy goes on all through dinner about the stuff that the 3 of them used to get into. It was nothing spectacular, just typical bubblehead stuff, racing to NY for a weekend, drinking, dancing on tables with or without their pants and getting back to the boat one step ahead of the shore patrol. As the dinner progressed, it became noticeable that these wives were not in the loop during the old days, but they said nothing. As we left, I held the door for them and heard one of the wives say, "Well, I don't believe what he said about you." I was just high enough to blurt out,**

**"Lady, you don't know the fucking half of it." While the wives gave me a shocked look, the two husbands roared with laughter and said, "Fucking A!" My wife just grinned as we walked away.**

**I am forever grateful that Flo shared three of those years with me. Getting to know some of the best shipmates a guy could ever have. Getting to know some of the best wives in the world, that stuck by their men through thick and thin and there was a lot of thin sometimes.**

**Today at reunions, I see in the wives that instant friendship that we have when we meet a crewmember that served before or after us. Kindred spirits, otherwise how could they live with us.**

**They all waited for men that were doing something for their country that needed doing. Helping us win the wars hot and cold for the last 100 years. Today they are still there, while their men, different than most, go to sea in submarines.**

**This ladies, is my love note and thank you for doing something that few recognize. Your men get parades and a day in their honor, while you get little credit.**

**Thanks, we couldn't have done it without you.**

# **First Time Back** by Mike Hemming

It's been almost 25 years now. A cold December day then, a warm September one now. Walking slowly aboard, the memories come back... Every part of her bring a story and a face into my mind. A jumble of them race through my brain... Funny, sad, exciting and scary.

By the sail, I stop and touch the three white painted numbers on the gray fiberglass. Three numbers imprinted on my very soul. My passport, for if I say them in response to the question, "What boat?", the questioner will know I've 'been there, done that', as we say. We will share little bits of our histories, to find if we sailed with others that we both know. Even if we don't, we know and understand what we have done. We are not like others who can never fully realize what it was like.

Through the sail door I climb to the bridge, not quite ready to drop below into the past that I've been away from for so long. Almost afraid that it was a dream, not reality. No, it was real, because from the bridge I can remember my first sight of the real ocean blue. The vastness of it that I will sail over and into for those next years. The calm beauty, the deadly cold anger of the North Atlantic with its howling winds and giant waves, the pressure of its depths always outside waiting. I think of lying to in the tropics after the day's ops, charging batteries in the warm night air. The fleet off in the distance doing whatever they do at night.

Going forward, I drop down into the Forward Room. The smell is still there and now memories stampede forward in my mind. The smell, like no other, separates us from all others.

The reload party sweating and hauling a Mk 14 into its tube for firing, I step to reach a line and miss a deck plate. The gouge it took from my shin still shows. John laughing slaps a piece of tape on it as I haul the line, cursing. "You ain't gonna bleed to death from that little nick." No it wasn't little but I didn't.

Walking aft through the Forward Battery, not too many memories here, didn't spend much time with tablecloths and silverware. But that's okay, it wasn't my place. At the Yeo's shack though, I remember the little bird that landed on the bridge far at sea. Yeo took it below and fed it and kept it in the shack until we came near land again. I think of that little bird sitting on the carriage of the typewriter as he typed papers. With Yeo only fussing with his tiny friend when it crapped on his paperwork.

In the Control Room as the non-priority engine room oiler, I manned the trim manifold submerged. Under Lt. Noel Schilling's tutelage, I got good enough for it to be my battle station. The man was a trim wizard, somehow attached to the deck feeling changes almost before they happened. He was not one you could mess around with by moving men around the boat to screw up his trim. He could be

pumping the right weight of water from forward trim to after trim before the projector was turned off. His perfection was hard to master but once learned, you could flood in only 100 pounds at 300 feet! I once reported, "Flooded 101 pounds from sea to forward trim." To which his answer was, "Pump 1 pound from forward trim to sea," before saying, "Belay my last." with a grin.

We once had a TM nicknamed 'Hogjowls' (for obvious reasons) who was a great joker. One of his tricks was to pull the pin on an imaginary hand grenade and hand it to you saying, "Here, hold this," if you screwed something up.

One day, Hogjowls screwed up big time on the planes and sent us toward a visit to Ol' Davey Jones. With much blowing tanks and angles on the planes, we just missed Davey's mailbox, so we didn't have to stay for chow. After the dust settled, it got real quiet as the skipper came down from the conn. He first turned toward the forward battery, then back and tapped Hogjowls on the shoulder saying, "Here, hold this."

Climbing into the Conn, I remember periscope liberties and a few helm watches. But qualifying on the radar stands out because the night I was finishing up on the scope, we surfaced about 2000 hours. It was a big submarine dance with 6 of us all after the fleet. We were first up, so I got to report the others coming up, Sierra 1, Sierra 2 and so on giving range and bearings, it was great practice and showed I knew my stuff. I reported Sierra 5 bearing 157, range 8000 yards. On the next sweep a new contact appears, I quickly report it Sierra 6 bearing 147, range 6000 yards. After the bridge acknowledged it, I get from the bridge,

"Where did Sierra 6 come from?"

Having seen 5 other boats surface on the scope in the previous 15 minutes I answer,

"Sierra 6 surfaced, Sir."

Asked twice to "Repeat your last", I do. By this time there is much radio traffic asking, "Who the hell is Sierra 6?" When Sierra 5 starts to close on her, Sierra 6 dives. Later to resurface at a greater range and lights off radar that the ECM reports as a Whiskey class radar.

The mess hall in the After Battery is quiet, not like it always was when she was in commission. In the background, I hear the bulkheads whisper the million sea stories they heard in her 23 years of life. Some true, some half true and a few 100% pure BS. A true one from a WW II veteran told of being held down for hours by a particularly nasty Jap destroyer. As he finished, I could see in his eyes the pain of the loss of this boat and crew after he was transferred off before its next patrol. He later sat talking quietly with me after the Thresher went down, not far from us. I don't remember all he said now, but as he got up to go on watch he said, "Remember them. We are the only ones that will."

Hogan's alley is almost gone with some of the bunks that made it, removed. The crowded dark stink that made it is banished by time and light. Men milling around, climbing in and out of racks, living shoulder to shoulder or sleeping feet by head. Today, prisoners have more space and privacy to call their own.

With almost eagerness, I now step into my realm, a kingdom of power, noise and heat... The Forward Engine Room. So many hours spent here immersed in a racket nearly beyond comprehension, sound that enters your bones. Damn! I miss it sometimes, the heat and noise.

Now it's cool and quiet, but no cleaner. A point of pride with the snipes on this boat was the upper level was always clean. The lower level was never shabby either. Our dungarees were filthy, but our rock crushers were clean and shiny. For my first job, I was handed a can of paste wax and told to shine the already gleaming coffin covers. Spray painted with a refrigerator white enamel, they shone trying to hurt your eyes. Now sadly, they are painted gray and showing brush streaks.

Grinning to myself, I stand by the throttles and run through the procedure in my mind to start #1 main engine. Without realizing it, my hand curls around the start lever and the other grasps the fuel rack. Yup, it's all there, my mind hears once more the shuddering shaking roar of a big diesel lighting off. My mind's eye sees the blast of gray diesel smoke erupt from the big exhaust pipe topside followed by the rush of cooling water. The smoke dissipates as the engine warms and settles into its smooth, throaty rumble. Sometimes we used to get all 4 engines ready then fire them up in sequence 1,2,3,4... One after the other, with resulting smoke cloud aimed for Mother Onion's quarterdeck.

In the After Engine Room, I remember working 30 hours straight to replace a vertical drive on #3 main engine at sea. A back-breaking long, hard job for 3 men... The 3 of us breaking only for chow. We didn't have to do it there, but this boat always went out and came back with all engines on the line. No limping home for this boat if we could help it, while I rode her.

Maneuvering Room, where the electricians took all the juice we gave them and moved the boat. It could be a world of heat here too, but the main motors were much quieter. I liked this place and often sat here shooting the bull with the controllermen. They often let me 'throw sticks' on a dive, changing the power source from the main engines as they were shut down to the batteries. One of the great things about sub duty is that we all know each other's jobs for qualification. So if you want to sit in maneuvering, sonar or anywhere and help out, you are welcomed. I used to love going down in sonar and listening to the noisy ocean around us. Hearing whales singing, shrimp clicking and ships screws thrashing across the surface above us. I even heard planes swooping low over the surface while hunting us.

Below in the motor room my deep submergence station was tightening the main shaft packing glands as we went down. This stemmed the flow of water which lubricated and cooled the shaft as it turned. However it required me to lean over the spinning shaft to tighten the nuts. It's a good thing OSHA never saw this procedure. On the way back up the procedure was reversed, to allow more water to leak in along the shiny, spinning shaft.

The After Room, where I learned to love the motion back here... That 'figure 8' put me right to sleep. She was a good boat with all this extra room, even non-quals had racks. My bunk gone now, my wall locker locked up, that skin book I left tucked up under the frame is gone. I'm sure.

The signal gun still there, remembering the Fourth of July in Jamaica, trying to put cherry bombs in beer cans and shoot them out before they blew. Didn't work, but we had to try. We would open the door and pull out the shredded can and try again. It finally dawning that it just wasn't enough time. Sure did impress the ORI inspector on the next ORI with our speed in firing a real flare. If he only knew how we practiced.

Going topside, my wife there, waiting. I'm thankful she gave me some time alone with the 'other woman' in my life. I'll introduce her to where I lived and sailed on now. I'll share some of the memories with her from another time, another life, and another world. And she will understand some of what ties me to this ship and the men that manned her.

## **The Grey Lady and the Sailor** by Mike Hemming

Standing there, he hears the voice again that came from so far away after all these years, "You came." It is the same voice that called him to this deck when he was young. "Yes I came, I heard your call. I didn't realize it was you at first. Why did you call me?"

"I called all of you. You came as some of the others will too. I called because my time is at an end now... I will be cut up for scrap. I was hoping to be sunk in the sea with the others, but it is not to be."

"Yes, but why me? Why not one of those brave men that fought the Japanese with you from your days of glorious battles. My time with you was just long training and cruises to nowhere. We had fun... But there was no glory in our Cold War."

"You're wrong. There was no glory in their war, either. Just sinking ships by gun and torpedo or being sunk by depth charge, mine or gun. Until the war was over, our story couldn't be told. Then it was lost, in atom bombs, nuclear power and aviation."

**"I called you because you men kept me alive. I was built to last 7 years, to defeat the Japanese war machine. But because we were needed and you and men like you sailed on me, I lasted over 28 years. Good years, they were... Filled with young men, that cared for each other and me. Men that worked, played and sailed hard, and we won that war too, in the end. Not for glory, just for our country."**

**The sailor thinking, smiles and answers, "Yes, they were good times, weren't they? The world was our oyster on 100 bucks every 2 weeks." Then frowning, he says, "We lost our share too Cochino, Stickleback and men in ones, twos and threes to fire, drowning and accidents. Men that lost fingers, hearing, chunks of time and marriages doing what we did."**

**"Yes, you did. Nobody ever said submarining was a safe business. But you men did well, training each other to do the job right, all the time. You should be proud of yourselves."**

**"You should also think of the things they asked us to do, changes and things added to our jobs. Radar Picket boats... Now there was a program well named, Migraine, and Regulus, firing rockets from our decks. And the guidance boats... For them having to get even closer to the enemy coast was dangerous too."**

**The sailor thinking says, "Yeah, and making boats into troop carriers like the Sealion. Then adding snorkels and learning how to use them, always in danger of hydrogen gas and flooding the engine rooms."**

**"Then came the Guppy conversions, our finest hour, with beginning to learn all about high speeds submerged and what can go wrong there."**

**The sailor says, "We were always ready. Cuban Missile crisis... Patrols off Russia, Korea and Vietnam even... Following the bad guys, we did it all. Until the nukes were built in sufficient numbers, we were the workhorses of the undersea fleet."**

**"Yes, you men should be proud of yourselves, I'm proud of you."**

**"Look across the harbor... Those young men on that new boat, they are you. My kind has changed... Faster, deeper, quieter, longer times submerged... But don't think those men are different. Whatever lives in you, lives on in them and the men that will follow them."**

**Then the sailor knows he will never hear her voice softly call to him again. He hunches his shoulders in the cold... Stuffs his hands into the pockets of the foul weather jacket with its shabby collar, stains and faded ship's patches. The jacket, smelling strangely of mothballs and an odor like no other, is his armor and shield that protects his memories from floating away.**

Turning inland, back to where he came from, so long ago... Remembering the first time he heard her call, he smiles softly thinking of her last words. "Remember to honor those among you that didn't return. Memories of them carried in the heart, will last longer than stone or bronze monuments." "For when there is no need for us any more, there will be no more man."

## **A Cold Wind Blows** by Mike Hemming

There they are, hanging side by side... Warmth and some memories. One is almost new, the other old, stained, with its faded patches and frayed edges. Back then, foul weather jackets came in 2 styles... The medium green ones with the high unlined collar and a green lining. It's warm and nice. The other style is the light dull gray green with the shorter collar lined with that brown kinda itchy fake fur stuff. Turned inside out it's great to play Viking in and it's really warm.

The newer of the two but still aged 30 some years, was issued to me not long before I got out. When he heard I was getting out the COB said, "Turn that jacket in when you leave."

My other jacket had a busted zipper and was marked with 5 years of smokeboat snipe living and working. I didn't want to give up the new one. So when the day came a squeeze and a slight twist with 2 pairs of pliers on the new ones zipper.

"Hey COB, this jacket's got a screwed-up zipper." Giving me that look that is issued to all COBs on the boats when confronted with a lying bubblehead, he opens his mouth to say, "Give me the jacket, idiot." But maybe seeing the look on my face, his voice says, "Okay, keep it... You'll be back."

Sorry COB, it never happened... It didn't even come close. But I wish you hadn't died not long before our first reunion, so I could have thanked you for the jacket with its quickly repaired zipper and well... A few other things too.

The other jacket with its truly worn out zipper and patina of grease and stink went with me. The wife never said a word about it. In fact, once before we had it cleaned and rezippered, I caught her standing at the open closet door with her eyes closed and inhaling. She is a true smokeboat sailor's wife.

The dry cleaners however, didn't have the same appreciation for such olfactory stimulation. The lady looked at the jacket laying on the counter like it was made of leper's bandages and I swear, would have picked it up with tongs if they had been handy. But a week later there it was... My jacket faded more now but with just enough black grease stains left. The artwork on the back, my name in red, white and blue inks with the screw drawn under it, is still visible. Even the lines indicating motion show. The lines that show a screw backing down, so when asked about it, the answer was, "Damn straight! I'm backing out of this navy as fast as possible."



The lady said, "That the best we could do with the stains, and the odor'" "Well. that's fine", I said, "It's perfect, just like that." A raised eyebrow was her only answer. Some will never understand, I guess.

So now when a cold wind blows and I reach for warmth and memories, the old jacket is my first choice. When I walk in it, hands deep in those fuzzy pockets, shoulders hunched to bring the too-short collar up nearer my ears, every once in a while, my nose catches a scent of salt tinged air and my feet are on a slotted walking deck.

## **Permission to Come Up** by Mike Hemming

"Permission to come up?" Asking so I can emerge from a cramped smelly world into the clear night sea air of the one above it. The OOD must always know how many are on the bridge in case we dive, hence asking permission to do so. It's the other world of smokeboat submarining, one I don't see often. On some trips, I cope with the sea time by never going forward of the coffeepot. . . Submerging myself in a tiny world of engines, mess hall and after torpedo room sleep. Never acknowledging the outside world at all for that cruise. Not this time. . . A beautiful tropic sea night, sweet salt air laced only with the single engine ahead 1/3 diesel aroma.

Moving to one corner of the tiny bridge, I hand the OOD and lookouts the steaming coffee cups and fresh cinnamon rolls I balanced in one hand on the way up. My offering to spend some time here is not necessary, but its 0300 and it's been a while since they had the comfort of a cup. Except for the soft rumble aft, it's silent and clear. . . Light breeze, no moon but zillions of stars. The kind of time that makes a man glad to be a sailor.

The OOD Mr. Moyle, knowing that all is clear all around, allows some banter and talking to go on between us. Even though the lookouts must keep scanning the horizon at all times. After the usual greasy snipe, deck ape stuff, the talk turns to the beautiful night before us for a bit, before we fall silent again. It's a good time to be alive and at sea. A few others come up for a bit of chat about nothing, fall silent and then lay below.

Mr. Moyle and I talk of engineer things, as he is the engineering officer, but it's mostly time-passing chitchat, for the night is too beautiful to really intrude upon. Wanting to grab a smoke, I ask permission and its granted, so the lookouts can shield their eyes - That's so they don't lose their night vision. Even I close both eyes too, so I will not have to readjust and lose the beauty of this night.

As a reddened, rising moon kisses the sky, again we fall silent at the calm beauty all around us. One of the lookouts asks how I could give this up to hide in an engine room. I laugh that January in the Caribbean is often followed by February in the

North Atlantic, so I'll keep what I got. The other lookout will be converted to join the snipes before we sail again.

Time passes, we could be the only men on the whole ocean, surrounded by a dark smooth sea and a star filled sky. Nothing else exists except our boat and us. Quiet now, we are bonded to each other and to our beautiful world. Refreshed as to the beauty of our world and that all is well in it, I am ready to return to the little world I have chosen to live in for now. "Permission to lay below."

## **The Diving Alarm Ballet** by Mike Hemming

As I pass between the controllermen, the *oogah, oogah*, "Dive!", "Dive!" comes over the speakers and they leap to their sticks and rheostats. The engine shut down air lever is hit, rheostats spun down, sticks are thrown, as the ballet begins. Generator electricity wanes as the huge storage batteries are called on for power. Sticks pulled to new positions and rheostats spun back up to keep the motors turning. The flurry of intense activity over, minor adjustments made and times logged while listening, always for the sound of water doing something it shouldn't.

As I walk forward at the same time into the engineroom, the two men in each one do the shutdown dance. Throttles are slapped down, hydraulic levers pulled to the closed position to shut exhaust valves and drains opened by the throttleman. As his oiler spins the inboard exhaust valves the 32 turns to shut it, either the oiler or the throttleman (depending on who is closer) will have yanked the pin holding the great intake air valve open so it falls shut with a loud clang. His inboard exhaust valves shut, the oiler drops below to secure the sea valves that allow the seawater to cool the engines. Then, the throttleman checks everything secure one more time.

In the control room, the other area of great activity on a dive, lookouts almost free fall to their diving stations on the bow and stern planes. Quickly the bow planesman rigs out his planes and both he and the stern planesman set their charges to the prescribed angles for the dive. Arriving soon after the planesmen, the OOD, now the diving officer, gives the ordered depth to reach and the angle to do it. Then he checks that all is well and will watch the planesmen to learn if the trim needs changing.

The Chief of the Watch having closed the huge main air induction valve, will watch the Christmas Tree to see that all hull openings are closed. Then he pulls the vents to flood the main ballast tanks and watches the depth to signal the auxiliaryman on the air manifold when to blow negative tank to the mark to stop our descent into the depths. The manifold operator will hammer open the valve and then close off the roaring rush of compressed air, as needed.

By this time, the trim manifold operator will have arrived from the engine room. After climbing over the stern planesman he will be ready to pump and flood seawater to the tanks. This will trim up the boat to neutral buoyancy.

In the conn, the helmsman will have rung up standard speed so the boat will be driven under by the screws. The QM of the watch will dog the conning tower hatch when the OOD, the last man down from the bridge, pulls the lanyard to close it.

There is no music to guide this dance except calm orders given and acknowledged. Started in a flurry of activity, it will end by winding down quietly to a state of relaxed vigilance by men practiced and confident of themselves and each other. They have done this many times, this graceful and awkward descent into the depths. They do it as fast as is safely possible. This is where they belong, with many feet of sea hiding the strong steel of the hull. Men asleep in bunks half-awakened by the raucous alarm and noisy ballet, drift back to deep sleep, confident they are at home where they should be.

## **Taps** by Mike Hemming

As the notes of Taps float past a flag at half-mast, three men, unrelated brothers, pay honor to a fourth. They have traveled far to be here this day. The one on the left went out of his way to bring the old man in the middle. The old man bent and gray, leans on a walker refusing to sit on a chair offered to him. As long as he can stand he will, for he is the last that can stand from his past. The rest, are gone now, resting in coffins across this land or like some at the bottom of the sea. He is the last one of a small club made smaller by time, for he wears a Combat Pin under his Dolphins. They went out, unsure of returning, off to win a war. They did win, at great cost to their numbers, at a higher percentage than any other group in our armed forces.

The man on the left served on the same boat after the war. During another war that started almost as soon as the other ended. For 5 long years, he fought his share of a long so-called Cold War. Many others served with him during this time. Over 1200 of them served on each of these old boats long after the war they were built for ended.

Hull numbers from steel long gone now bind these men together. Three numbers imbedded in the souls of the 1200 men. One day, the men will all be gone like the ships they sailed on. But for now, until he is old and bent like the older man beside him, he will remember and honor those who have served as he has.

The sailor on the right, young like they all once were, stands in awe of the man before him and those beside him. They were tested in their own ways and found to be strong and true to their shipmates. His test will come he knows, and he hopes he will not let down his mates that recently pinned Dolphins on his chest. For they

trust him with their lives now as all submarine sailors do when they qualify a man to join them.

The man they honor and say goodbye to now, is beside his wife once more. She who waited through all the war patrols praying for his return to her and their son. Her unheralded quiet bravery as she worked in a war factory won her no medals, for all she ever wanted was him home again. Now they are together again, after four lonely years for him, without her.

The solemn notes of taps gone, the waft of smoke from the gun volley higher than the treetops like a message to the Gods, the mourners start to leave. But the three stand their ground, the two younger ones waiting for the older to finish his memories.

Then stiff knarled hands release the walker and a bent back straightens as a right hand snaps into one last salute. The other two match him, all straight and steady they offer their highest respect they can, to one of their own, one last time.

## **Submarine Mothers** by Mike Hemming

Not all boats had them or did they have them at all times. It was not something that could be assigned to anyone. It just happened, a first or second class somehow took the job of being a kind of mother to unruly bubbleheads. They were just men that cared for the crew and took on a somewhat thankless job. Their rate didn't matter TM, EN QM or EM, they just took the job and kept it until they left the boat. When they left, they may or may not have been replaced for some length of time.

They often were found when a COB wasn't up to snuff so to speak, acting as an added buffer between him and the crew. Most I noticed went on to become good COBs themselves, so maybe it was a self-imposed training mission for them.

They helped ride herd on non-quals, reminding and helping them to do what they should. They would make sure you were doing okay, getting along and doing your job. They often watched over the new guys to make sure they didn't run afoul of the rules on board or ashore. They gave timely warnings to avoid certain things and to do others.

"Hemming, why don't you come to Bells tonight with the rest of us?"

"Hemming why don't you catch up on your quals today?"

"Hey! No reading skin books until you're qualified."

"Maybe you better watch what you kid about until you have signed-off in Maneuvering."

"You got enough money to get home this weekend? I'll loan you some."

Often they were in charge of a berthing compartment, Torpedo Room, After Battery, or in the case of the Requin, the Stern Room.

The Stern Room on Requin was where I met my first one. I was told upon reporting aboard to go aft and check in with 'Mother'. Huh? I think, '*Mother*', who in the hell would be called 'Mother' on a sub? Oh yeah, this is one of those jokes they play on the new boot, I bet. Well I'm cool, I ain't gonna go marching into the room and ask for *Mother* and get laughed at.

To the first guy I see, "Ah, I was told to report to the guy in charge to get my rack and stuff." "Hey Mother, new guy here to baby along."

Next thing I know, I'm shaking hands with a first class Electrician and being assigned a rack, locker, and being in general, given the rules of the place.

"They really call you Mother?" "Yeah, but you don't have to."

Somehow, I realized it was better if I didn't call him that until I had learned to pull my weight and do my job. So I just called him by his last name. By the time I had reached the point I could call him that, I was transferred. But at the last Requin reunion, I looked up as he came in the door.

"Mother! You old wrecked-up bastard, how are ya?" Then I did something I should have done in August of 1963. "Thanks Jerry '*Mother*' Ender, for all you did for me."

## **The Last One** by Mike Hemming

Out of the morning mist she appears, a still sinister, low black shape. As she does, two men get out of a car and walk to the water's edge. Both are in uniform, the oldest put her in commission and fought a war in her. Then he returned at the end of his career to make her last cruise and decommission her. Retired now, he puts on his uniform once more to say goodbye. All the boats he served on are decommissioned and gone now.

The younger man, his son, qualified on her and sailed on her for 4 years before returning to civilian life. He too wears his uniform for one last goodbye. They both watch silently as she slips by, headed down river to the sea one last time. From this distance softened by the low fog she looks well cared for like she was when they sailed her. The man-years they and others spent on her are over now and will only be memories fading away. Father and son salute for the others as she passes abreast of them. The black hull moves on and fades back into the mists of her last journey. Slipping quietly through calm glassy water, she becomes a black ghost of steel.

The father and son hold their salutes as she fades from black to gray to gone in the mist. The tugs mournful foghorn is the last evidence they hear of her. Dropping their arms and turning away, they both catch the sadness in each other's eyes. But as they walk side by side, without words, smiles and twinkles return to their eyes. A memory of shipmates and of times good and bad, but mostly good, return. Memories of her steel, strong and true, that protected her men from the dangers of the deep oceans and her country's enemies. Memories that remind them how much they owe this deep-sea lady.

Because these men and others remember her, she will not yet die. Because men loved her, she became more than steel, she became alive to them. Because men loved her, will she ever fade completely from men's hearts?

## **We Did Not Forget You** by Mike Hemming

On this sacred hillside, the rows of stones seemingly march outward forever. The air here seems saturated with the solemn fading notes of Taps, it's played so often. Smoke from gun salutes seems to hang permanently in the air as a soft blue-gray haze. Submarine veterans are looking for one small stone, there near an old tree they find it. It has taken weeks to find this small old stone marking the resting place of 17 men, listed on the stone as 'UNKNOWN'. Seeing this, grown men cry because these men were not unknown. Their names were known and the 17 men deserved better than one small anonymous stone. They were our first loses of the over 3,800 men that have followed them in over 100 years. Seventeen of our brothers in arms needed to have their names inscribed on a stone for all that come to this sacred place to read and remember.

Submarine sailors pride themselves on remembering those that gave all in our history. When these men died, that tradition hadn't been created yet and so they were placed in a mass grave marked by a small stone and listed as 17 unknowns.

Now on this Memorial Day, the submarine veterans come back to this hallowed ground in greater numbers to dedicate a new stone in keeping with the sacrifice of the 17. Submarine sailors made sure they got their names back by listing them on this new stone. That this injustice has been corrected shows that our pride and traditions are intact. For this is how we pass those things on to those that follow us by proving, we did not and will not forget you.

**CASUALTIES OF THE USS F-4:** George T. Ashcroft, GM1; Clark G. Buck, GM2; Ernest C. Cauvin, MM2; Harley Colwell, EMC; Walter F. Covington, MM1; George L. Deeth, EM1; Alfred L. Ede, LT (CO); Frederick Gilman, GM1; Aliston H. Grindle, EMC; Frank N. Herzog, EM2; Edwin S. Hill, MM1; Francis M. Hughson, MM1; Albert F. Jennie, EM2; Archie H. Lunger, GM2; Ivan L. Mahan, MM1; Horace L. Moore, GM1; William S. Nelson, MMC; Timothy A. Parker, ENS (XO); Frank C. Pierard, GMC; Charles H. Wells, MM2; Henry A. Withers, GM1.

These are some the men that cared and did not let us forget: Richard Mendelson, Tom Denton, Ron Williams, Paul Meinke, Jim Mandelblatt, Mike Thresher.

## **Tears, Memories and Prayers** by Mike Hemming

I passed by the *Flasher* Memorial on the way to the Sub Vets clubhouse without stopping, because it was raining. Besides, tomorrow the sun will be out and I'll stop then. Later, on the way home, it's still raining at 11 O'clock at night... A typical spring rain with a cold wind off the Thames River. But now I must stop. At first, I tell myself I will stay in the car. But it doesn't work... I must get out. Why, I am not sure. I have been here before, years ago. Is there something new I'm looking for?

As I walk around it in a misty rain, my shadows are cast upon the gray painted bridge by the strange blue green lights. A lonely ghost looking for others? I walk to and read each stone with the lost boats on them. Stopping at the only one that has a connection with me personally. The *USS Grenadier*... Two men from my hometown, served on her. One was transferred before her last patrol and one who was captured by the Japanese after she went down. He survived the unmitigated hell of Nippon's finest brutality and returned to his family.

Walking on, head down, I finish reading the 52 names of those lost boats still not knowing why I'm here at this hour. Then looking up, I see it. I know instantly what it is. Dark and silent, it's a list of the 3,500 men carved into black granite. In the misty rain, I walk to it. Standing there in front of it, the only sound is the snapping of the flag in the wind off the river. I knew none of these men and because of the way the light falls I can't really read the names. After a bit, I step forward and touch the cold granite, the rain running down the stone feels like tears... Tears weeping from each name.

Tears returned after having been spilled by loved ones all across this land in 3,500 homes. Tears returned to America from the names of men that gave her all they had. Those men wept their own tears when they realized that they would not return. Tears shed by men as a shipmate slowly sank into the cold sea unable to swim to a life raft. As others watched a friend die slowly starved and brutalized in a prison camp.

Tears of happiness when a father, son or brother came home from patrol once again. Tears of joy shed on front lawns when the few that did return freed from those camps.

The mists of the night increase until my own tears fall to this hallowed ground. Wiping some away with my free hand, I look at the hand wet now with tears and rain. Leaning forward, I place it on the stone to mix mine with all those tears. I know now, it's all we can give these men. Tears, prayers and to remember what they did. We must, for we will be the less for it if we don't.

## **Been Down Too Long** by Mike Hemming

Foul air, breathed, rebreathed, used and reused, too hot and humid beyond belief. How many hours, days have we been breathing this same air? Not sure anymore but it's been too long. Whatever this operation is about is no longer important to the crew. Breathing has become the most important work for most of us.

Carbon dioxide at this level makes us pant like dogs on a hot day. We all have headaches that no amount of aspirin will cure, only fresh air. But fresh air is 300 feet away, straight up and unavailable. Cigarettes won't stay lit anymore, smoking is another chore ignored. They taste like crap now, anyway.

Doc has spread lithium hydroxide on the flash covers in the berthing compartments to remove some of the CO<sub>2</sub>. In the After Torpedo Room, the lung burning dust from the chemical eases one misery to create another, even though Doc tries hard not to stir the stuff up too much. Looking up from his CO<sub>2</sub> meter he says slowly, "4.4 %, the worst air in the boat." Shaking his head, he knows at 5 % we will begin passing out and at about 10% we will start to die. Adding oxygen won't do anything unless the CO<sub>2</sub> is removed from the air. Later, checking again, the level is down to 3.7% but it's no real noticeable improvement to us. Are we panting less?

Off watch, we don't give a crap. On watch, we struggle to do our work without screwing up. We know we won't die down here, but we don't know why we are here anymore. Is this all to teach us how rotten being down too long can be? Well if so, let us up... We know now.

Men congregate in the torpedo rooms because they are the coolest place in the boat under 100 degrees, cool being relative of course. They change 'cooler' for more CO<sub>2</sub> making headaches. The engine rooms have the best air but only a certifiable moron would linger in the brutal 135-degree heat without reason. The men there will drink 3 gallons of water in 4 hours to have it immediately sweat out of them, leaving only salt deposits on the deck plates. Stripped to shorts and sandals, sweat drips in steady streams from their wet bodies. In the 100% humidity there is no such thing as cooling evaporation, just steady dripping to the deck.

Elsewhere men lay in bunks half-cognizant of their surroundings, wanting to sleep to escape this hell that exists around them. But exposed flesh sticks wetly to the flash covers making sleep difficult. Messcooks try not to sweat into the food they prepare but few will feel like eating. At midrats, men turn away from eating damp warm sandwiches to go on watch with only a cup of coffee or warm bug juice. The Quartermaster tries to mark a damp chart while avoiding contact with the other hot bodies in the Conn. Everywhere men suffer, no longer laughing or talking except for desultory bitching about a situation none can control.



The IC watch and an oiler shove against each other to reach the ice machine first, only to find a skim of water with 3 small chips of ice in the bottom. The chips too small to last reaching the cup, they turn away both cursing each other and the over taxed machine. In a few places, men stand under air conditioning vents to catch the moving air, its coolness an illusion caused only by its motion. Also overtaxed, the AC units fight pathetically to cool tons of hot everything inside the boat and remove moisture instantly replaced by 85 sweating bodies.

Finally, this operation having reached an unknown conclusion we don't give a damn about, the skipper says, "We've been down too long, take her up." Stirred by the chance to breathe air that hasn't been used by 85 others 10 times first, we make preparations to surface. Some men not on watch move to where the air stream going to the engines will hit them for its reviving oxygen and coolness.

On the surface, engines drawing air through the boat, men catch that body tingling, mind swirling first deep breaths of clean, fresh sea air. For a few moments, an exhilaration and high of sweet salt fresh air replace our CO2 headaches, before returning to a normal state. The feeling it causes, once felt, is never forgotten, but the way to it, is too unpleasant to want to repeat, but we probably will before too long.

## **Graduation Day** by Mike Hemming

Were we ever that young? Yes we were, but now we are old and many youngsters since have taken our place. We sit in Dealey Center with these young new submariners as they join our ranks.

Good young men are still attracted to our calling, they still want to be sub sailors. Thank God for these young patriots. They sit in two rows at the front, with us old guys behind them. We can be proud of them. They know the history of subs and they are smart and eager. These men of the Lagarto class are ready to join the fleet. They are called the Lagarto class because each class has a boat's history to study and report on. What better way to instill our history in them?

Submarine School today prepares them better for what they are about to face than we were. The instructors have worked hard to instill the pride of being able to wear Dolphins in their future. Technology has been used wisely to give them a head start on their future qualifications. Being here with them lets me know our submarines are still manned by the best.

Old Veterans of World War II, the Cold War and these young graduates are joined in spirit by the 'Forever Young', the men lost and still on patrol are with us here today. They too are proud of what they see. They know the torch has been passed once again.

The Forever Young and the old ones here pray that these young men will grow old too. We pray that they never join the 4,000 men that have given their all in the service of this country. May these young men survive the dangers of the deep and our nation's enemies in these troubled times. The Forever Young want no more men to join their ranks.

## **Fourth of July** by Mike Hemming

There were six of them while I was in the navy, but I only remember two. One spent in Ocean City, MD on a 72, the other in Jamaica. The others were all at sea, boring holes in the ocean somewhere. That happened a lot to all of us, we came home and some of the world had passed us by. The Beatles and silly crap like that, who cared anyway, things like that don't mean much in the long run.

But missing holidays especially the 4th of July, the birthday of our country, that meant something to me. My 4ths were always simple but meaningful as they were watched over by my grandfather, a fierce little patriot born of immigrant parents. He always decorated the place with flags and made sure all the youngsters knew that the day was important.

That 4th of July in Ocean City was the first time I had ever seen all of a fireworks display at a close distance. We often saw the tops of the displays over the trees at a nearby town from my grandfather's place. I remember thinking that night walking back to the apartment, of thanking my ancestors for doing what they did so I ended up being born in America. I also thanked my grandfather and the rest of them for instilling the need to stop on this day and remember and celebrate the birthday of our country. The fireworks display, while beautiful and a real symphony for the eyes, wasn't the important thing really. It was that families got together, stopped their lives for a bit and remembered and cared enough to say 'Thanks'.

So, the truth is that those 4ths at sea were not really lost after all. I was with men that cared enough to serve. And each of us spent a little time that day thanking America for being born and remembering those that gave lives and fortunes so she could be born and survive all these years.

Happy Birthday America and may God bless you and those that sail today over under and on the sea in your name, in places far away and alone.

## **Never Ending Dreams** by Mike Hemming

He walks once more toward her, with jaunty steps through the moist night air. Condensing moisture sheaths her with a shine to her black hull. It runs in small rivulets down her superstructure across the numbers painted there. After crossing the brow and saluting the quarterdeck, he then walks forward on her slotted deck.

He goes to the bear trap and drops down through the escape trunk into the forward room.

To the TM there concentrating with a frown intent on fixing some small part, he says, "Hey Magoo how goes it?" "Red, we got a full load of fish aboard and are ready to go." "Great. I'm ready to go again too."

"Well Red, we don't have much choice do we?" "Nope. I'm going aft for a bit, you want a cup?" "No thanks... Gonna sack out after this is finished." "Okay, give me a growl if you change you mind."

Going aft, he speaks to those still up and about, jokes with a couple and says something serious to another. Later in the mess hall after drawing a cup he sits down, swallows some coffee and bitches to the mess cook, "Jeez Boozy, when did you make this shit, last week?" "Stewburner, when you gonna get this guy to make decent coffee?"

Sitting there, he shoots the breeze with those that come and go in the mess hall. He is a well-liked third class now and with time aboard he knows the boat and the crew.

When a mate from the engineroom gang comes in, they go over what needs to be done before pulling out on patrol again. "Red, we got to get number two still putting out like it should, it ain't right yet." "Yeah Charlie, I know. It can do better... All of us would like a shower now and then at sea." "We only got a couple more days before pulling out now." "And the chief is gonna be up both our asses if it don't work right this time."

Finally, enough time killed, he rises to go aft to rack out before morning, while brushing his teeth a face appears in the mirror. "What's up Yeo?" "Pack your shit, your going to new construction." "Whatcha mean, I'm transferred?" "Yep." "Aw shit, not me! Pick somebody else". "Sorry Red, you're going".

Standing there he watches his face in the mirror age, while the young smiling ones around him stay young... "Red,,,,,,,,,,,,, Red,,,,,,,,,,,,, wake up your having that dream again." "Yeah Billy... It's okay... I'm awake now." "Red, it's the same one isn't it?" Looking at Billy with old sad eyes, he says "Yeah." "Why after all these years Red, it wasn't your fault?"

"Billy, it don't make no difference, I transferred and they were lost. I'm old now and they aren't." "But still Red, it should be over for you now." "Billy, it ain't never gonna be over until they plant me six feet under."

With a haunted look far off into space he says, "Same thing, every time, always the question, if I had been there could I have done something?" Then looking fiercely into his young friend's eyes, "Pray it don't happen to you Billy." "Aw Red, that stuff

doesn't happen no more... The war has been over for a long time" "Yeah, it don't..." he says softly going back to a far off lonely stare.

Snapping back to the present after a few moments he asks, "Billy, what are you grinning about?" "Red, I'm getting transferred back to my qual boat. I'm gonna take leave while she's on sea trials after coming out of the yards." "Good for you, Billy." "Yeah it's gonna be great to see my friends on the 593 again."

"Bill... Hey Billy... Hey wake up! You're having that dream again."

## **The Nest** by Mike Hemming

As a west-reddened sun sets and a bright moon rises in the east and the subs in the nest end the day, Guppy bows and bullnoses are aligned forward of black painted step and North Atlantic sails. Freshly painted dark hulls next to peeling, just chipped and primed ones float in faintly oily water, side by side. One still carries her wartime superstructure aft of her bridge, painted gray all over she stands out from the others. But all are diesel-powered subs and all are mostly resting now.

For work has slowed in the still and heavy wet air. Some recreation begins below decks; movies or a few card games will start after chow. Men will sit and chat of home, cars, girls, and life that they may or may not yet have experienced. Work may have slowed, but it never quite ceases. Batteries and air banks are charged, minor repairs are done and always qualifications are worked on.

On one boat a hatless chief in grease-stained khaki sits on the forward capstan and imparts equal parts wisdom and submarine lore to a fresh from 'A' school young sailor and a somewhat salty 2nd class from the fleet. But both are about equal until they earn their Dolphins. This night, they both will proceed forward in the quest to gain them. Some future night in another nest, they both will place the knowledge gained tonight into other hands and minds. The boats mainly stay the same but crews move through them unceasingly. Men coming aboard, qualifying, getting rate, transferring, retiring, getting out, living and sometimes even dying. A chain of men stretching back to the beginning and forward into a far away and unseen future. Boys that drop-down hatches and emerge sometime later mostly as men changed and always and forever a little different from the others that sail the seven seas.

The nest does the same, boats come and go, here today, gone who knows where tomorrow. Secret missions or boring holes in the ocean, providing ping time, it's all the same to the nest and its boats. Over time, boats leave to other homeports or the sad fate of scrapping. The hull numbers change over time like the men's faces.

A periscope rises from the sail of one boat, to reach its zenith, spin around 2 times then to hiss hydraulically back out of sight. A test of something, qualifications or a shortened periscope liberty? Who knows, except the sailor in the conning tower?

The seagulls of the night emerge from hatches to haul the garbage cans of tomorrows flying seagull food to the dumpster. Messcooks gather there every evening at this time for a quick smoke and joke session. At the bottom of the chain, they gather in their food-stained dungarees to bitch about their lives with others that care just a little about their problems. Then finding nothing more of interest, they circle back to their jobs to finish up for liberty, sleep or quals. All the while wishing for release from this drudgery of mess cooking.

About this time, the dueling diesels start. Lined up for battery charges, they are lit off in a cloud of blue smoke. A Jimmy and a Fairbanks boat side by side erupt in smoke and noise, but soon settle back into that whispering rumble of warming up. In a bit, the loads will be put on and increased, and will make them noisy and smoke again until settling out into a louder rumble over the swish of discharged cooling water. The unsynchronized rumble and surge of the 4 engines is part of the seascape of the nest and soon fades in the minds of those topside. A comforting sound missed when absent. In the future, the men that call the nest home will miss it and dream of it.

A lone sailor from the destroyer piers stops in his walk down the seawall and for a while he looks at the nest. Is he thinking of joining the sub sailors or is he thinking "No way Jose"? After a bit, he walks on, his mind made up. A life changing moment? Either way, he has made a big decision, one he will never forget. Will he join those in the nest? Time will tell, but if he does his life will be different from then on.

As the evening progresses, the movement of men slows until it's only the topside watches checking draft readings. They sometimes talk back and forth, the usual "Where you from?" Or, "Did you see what Susie Q did to that fat Bosun's mate off the carrier the other night?" "Got an extra cigarette?"

Their battery charges finished now, the rumbling diesels are shut down. The nest quieter now with its signature music silenced. The rumble that was earlier ignored is missed now by those topside who call the nest home.

For long hours, the only movement is the topside watches checking draft readings and mooring lines. Some don't move about at all, trying to sleep leaning against the sail without falling down. Others move constantly either from a desire to not fall asleep or not having reached that experienced nonchalance, watchful stage of the permanent topside watch.

Before first light, the doughnut truck will arrive to deposit its load of sugary delights by each brow. On some boats, the watch will wait until someone goes below to get them to the mess hall. On others, a yell down the hatch will bring the below decks watch to the ladder and he will exchange a blond and sweet for them. Of course, both men will grab out a couple of their favorites to have with their oil tainted coffee.

On one boat, a man's head appears on the bridge resting his chin on his arms he stares out over the nest and the slip it's in. Thinking of home, or just letting his mind go blank for a bit. Someone that can't sleep or a just relieved below decks watch that doesn't want to bother to go back to bed right now. Anyway, he is just another part of the nest at night.

As a now reddening moon sets in the west and a faint light forms in the east, the two outboard boats come alive. Sleepy-eyed in ragged dungarees, the topside gang begins to make preparations for going to sea. Opening line lockers, finding brow clamp down bolts and recoiling heavies, they grumpily go about their well-rehearsed duties. Always they argue over where the capstan T wrench is. They have done this before and will do it many times more.

On another boat, two snipes use a greasy line to mule haul a fuel hose aboard. The oily black hose leaving its mark on their hands and already stained clothes. With non-sparking tools they will hook up the hose to then spend several hours watching pressure gauges and water discharge as the tanks fill. It's another one of those long, boring, dirty jobs in the nest.

Two boats will depart for sea and one will return today. From where, to where? To ops dull and boring beyond belief. Just long days of boring holes in the ocean, broken only by snorkeling, while the good guys play at looking for them. Or from places reached only by sneak and stealth, also long days of boredom. Then to be broken only by minutes of occasional terror while the bad guys work at finding them.

By now men in ones, twos, and groups come down the pier to go aboard their boats, another day is dawning. As the sky brightens, morning colors stops all for a bit. All men salute the flag of their country, honoring it, as they should. The nest's sinister black inhabitants having never completely slept, stirs and awakens for another day.

## **Cold Sailing** by Mike Hemming

We are an ice-covered gray ghost as we slide upriver, coming home finally. Salty brine frozen to the hull hides our black paint. Pale faces with red rimmed eyes tell of fighting mountainous seas for some untold weeks. Watches blurred into nothing as we fought day and night just to remain upright on watch, or horizontal in our bunks.

A calendar tells we were out for 4 weeks, but our minds can't believe it. Only a month, no it must have been years, but it wasn't. Time didn't mean much out there, either you were on watch or you weren't. For most of us, what we were doing there was not important. Were we actually doing something or were we just out there? We don't always know for sure, but somehow, we cared enough to go. We cared for our shipmates and *her*. She may be cold steel to others, but to us she has become

life, our reason to be. Because she carries us inside her, we went. We can leave, but we can't leave. To do so would be to become less in our own eyes and less in the eyes of those who pinned Dolphins on our chests. So, we stay and freeze in the north and sweat in the south, winter and summer.

Four long weeks of cold, wet and violent twisting, tossing around. Submerging to escape that only to have to snorkel for air and battery charges. Then for hours, the heavy seas cause the head valve to close and the engines try to suck all the air out of our home. Vacuums then try to pull our exhausted brains out of our ears. Men try to swallow to equalize the pressure even in their tired half-sleep. As the head valve opens and the air pressure returns to normal our eardrums are squeezed back into our throbbing heads. Swallowing and popping ears goes on until finally the charge is over. Or the seas close the valve too long and the engines are shut down on high vacuum. A ship or a plane comes too near and we must dive deeper into the cold depths to hide from all. We are alone, striving to remain hidden as we patrol. The cold sea is only one of our enemies.

Always the cold, nothing is warm anymore, even the engine rooms are cold. Nothing dries out, cold dampness pervades all, clothing, bedding, and even our skin, it seems. Blankets and foul weather jackets are gold and held onto with ferocity. We wrap up like mummies to eat, work and sleep. The extra padding helps also when thrown into a locker by the rough seas.

We became sullen and robot like, doing what we had to, cold and quiet, hanging on mentally and physically until the future day we sail ice-encrusted into port for warmth.

Warm homes, steam heated barracks, motel rooms, even a booth in the local submarine bar. Warmth, in hearth and home, warmth in companionship, missed so long and enjoyed to the fullest now. We take what we get when we can because we know it will end someday soon.

Back at the pier, steam hoses blast away her rime of ice, showing her sleek black paint once again. She is looking deadly again, not like a misshapen ice lump. With power to spare, heaters are turned on again and she warms inside and dries out. Life is warm again and we forget the cold until the next time, next patrol or next winter.

## **New Duty Station** by Mike Hemming

He walks down the long pier to the familiar boat at the end. His sea bag is light on his shoulder. As he crosses the brow saluting the colors, the watch directs him aft with a half-hearted wave. Down the slotted deck he goes, feeling at home once more. At the deck hatch, he reaches down and pulls it open... The smell, that wonderful smell wafts to his waiting nose. Smiling he yells, "Look out below!"

After dropping his bag to the deck below with a heavy clothing thud, he yells again, "Down ladder!"

Sliding down the rails, back against the CRS shield he hits the deck below with a grin. Turning he sees familiar faces among the men sitting there. The messhall seems overcrowded somehow. He speaks to several and then they're back catching up on people and boats in their pasts.

Leaning against the sink by the coffeepot, he listens to the banter and bullshit of a happy crew. Even the bitching has that carefree, don't give a damn, you can't piss me off, go to hell happiness that is priceless with a good boat. Filling a cup with coffee and adding canned milk and sugar he nods to the cook as he sips.

"Good mud Boof, you finally learned the idiot messcooks how to make it right."  
"Crap, what does a snipe know about good coffee? I remember when you'd think the bilge was good if it had enough sugar in it."

Grinning, he goes forward to get checked in. Handing his orders to the Yeo, he is surprised to be told to go to the after room and pick out a rack. "That's it? Just go pick out a rack?" "Yup, you want it to be difficult?" "Okay, if you say so."

Heading aft with his sea bag, he is happy but confused a little at the relaxed air in the boat... Something just isn't right. But he is pleased to find his old bunk and locker unused and so stows his gear. He introduces himself to the guys he doesn't know, and says 'Hi' to the ones he does. Wondering why there seems to be so many in the room but says nothing, unable to put his finger on the real difference. While changing into dungarees, he hears old familiar sea stories and new ones never heard before. It's obvious they are all connected somehow with this boat and some go clear back to the war and even beyond. It leaves him with a strange feeling he can't quite put his finger on to examine.

After changing, he heads to the engine room. Ahhh, he thinks, now I'm really home again, looking around the spotless shining compartment. The gleaming painted engines shining like he always remembered. Everything is clean and properly stowed, no oil spots or loose gear anywhere.

Damn, he thinks whoever is in charge here is got it really done right. Where is everyone? At that, he turns to see Bill his old oiler come in with two blond and sweets in one hand and a box of *Krispy Kremes* in the other. Sipping the coffee and eating donuts, they laugh and reminisce about old times together. Liberties pulled in far away ports, shipmates blowing off steam together. Practical jokes pulled on non-quals, green ensigns and old-timers alike. Working long hard hours to fix something at sea because it was a point of pride to not come into port on less than 4 engines on this boat.



After a time, he is surprised to hear the engine order bell ring and looks to see a start bell rung up. Bill asks, "Where we going?" "Out." "What we gonna do?" "Dive." "When we gonna be back?" "Never." "Why are we going out?" "Don't ask me I'm just a snipe, the CNO didn't cut me in on the big picture this week."

They both go through the familiar ritual that started the first time they sailed together and continued for almost a year.

After lining up the valves to start the engines, he rolls them both with air to check the cylinders clear. The wooshing rattle of the rolling engine clears his head of doubts for the moment. Caught up in the familiar motions of lighting off with his heart pumping, he grabs #1's throttle and pulls it into the start position. When the familiar sound of an engine rolling at its peak on starting air is reached, he yanks the fuel rack lever up. Rewarded with the sweet sound of cylinders firing and engine speed coming up, he is happy. Soon #2 is rolling then firing and climbing to idle speed for warm up. He and Bill grin to each other at the smooth sounds, sights and smell of power.

Checking gauges, all is well and everything is running nicely. But what is different? Something sure is. "Bill, something's not right. Why are you still my oiler? You made throttleman as I left, right?" "As you got out, yes I took your place. "Well? Bill, What the hell is going on? Why am I back then?"

"Remember, how Percy used to talk of the silver submarine in the sky when the end comes?" "Yeh, how could I forget, at the end of the golden pier." "Well this is it." "You mean?" "This is our Valhalla, where old bubbleheads go for the rest of forever." In Memory of: Bill Booth EN3(SS), Mike Reynolds EN3(SS), Percy Turner EN2(SS), Bob Pettit MM1(SS), Jerry Blackwell EN3 (SS), Roscoe Goodwin MM2 (SS). Sail in Peace Shipmates .

## **The Pier** by Mike Hemming

Gone now, she was a gritty version of the yellow brick road to adventure. But she was made not of bricks, but of concrete stained with oil, paint, garbage and just years. Shoe leather of thousands of young feet added their patina to her filth and wear. Covered with cables carrying electricity to boats that added ozone smell to the air above her. Fuel hoses leaked their rainbow sheen onto her concrete and the water below. Seagulls messed her surface in daylight, evil-eyed rats scurried in her shadows during night's darkness.

She had a number but the men, her lifeblood, never used it. She was always just the pier. Cabbies knew where to go when a young sailor got in and said or mumbled, "Take me to the pier." If he had Dolphins on, he got back to 'the pier' drunk or sober.

During the day, she was alive with comings and goings, men and machines used her. Cars carrying important men and trucks carrying important things traveled her length. Those men less important walked her stained, cracked and pitted surface. But they all used her to reach her reason for being. The black submarines tied up alongside her.

The men used her as a kind of launching pad to adventure and boredom. Foreign lands, exotic women, strange and wondrous sights awaited those who walked her length. Crossing the brow from concrete pier to black decks meant none of those wonderful things, too. It might mean long days keeping quiet in a cold northern sea. Or roasting in hot tropical oceans for a seeming eternity, for who knows what result.

The pier led to the Med, Caribbean, Far East, Pearl and Perth. Lands of fun and frolic. She led young boys to sea, but mostly returned young men full of swaggering life with Dolphins on their chests. She saw them leave loved ones behind in tears and returning to smiles and yells of joy. "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy's home!"

Then one day one of her charges didn't return. Instead of joy, sadness down her length and tears fell again on her surface. Instead of kisses of welcome from wives and squeals of joy from children, horrible never to be forgotten words were said. "I'm sorry, she's overdue and presumed lost."

A crew has walked her surface one last time and will no more. Her boat will never again tie to her cleats and rest easy alongside for protection, rest and replenishment. Strong and sturdy but the years took their toll. Wind, wave, weight, tide and time aged her. She survived many more years since that day until she was replaced by progress. But that day may have broken her heart as it broke all our hearts.

## **We Are A Submarine Sailor** by Mike Hemming

We are not the first of them and we will not be the last. Our heritage runs back to the first submarine. This heritage line continues forward into an unseen future. Each generation is trained by the one before. This will remain so until there is no more use for submarines, which will be never.

If one of us goes aboard a new or old submarine, we are comfortable with the men there. For they are us and we are them. Stand us in a line in all our dress uniforms or naked in our coffins, we are the same. We are and forever will be submarine sailors. We are one.

We can have everything taken from us, uniforms, medals, our sanity and our lives, but we will always be recognized by others and ourselves as a submariner. This status cannot be removed from us. Our Dolphins worn on our chests then, hung on

our walls now, or later pinned on moldering uniforms in our graves mark us forever. We are first, last, and always men that stepped forward and worked long and hard to become what we are. We are unique among sailors for we sail down deep into dark and always dangerous waters. We do this not with foolhardy go-to-hell bravery, but with cool calculation and care. We challenge the dangers with training and practice. We know that the time for bravery will come when two shipmates close themselves in a flooding compartment, knowing that the whole boat and crew depends on them to control the flooding.

We believe in each other, because we must. Alone at sea, the crew and a pressure hull are all we have to reach the surface again. Men with confidence in each other dive and surface submarines countless times. Each man trained by others holds the lives of those shipmates in his hands. Dolphins are the symbol of this tradition.

Submarine hulls have numbers and men have hearts and souls. We carry those numbers in our hearts in life, and they mark our souls in death. Silver or Gold, Dolphins are the symbol of this. To us Dolphins are it, no other symbol matters or means anything as important as they do.

## **Are You Crazy? - Hope You Get To Go** by Mike Hemming

Actually, I have heard the second far more than first. Though, I expected it to be the other way. What I am talking about is sailing the *Razorback* back from Turkey. If you don't know, North Little Rock, Arkansas is trying to get her back from Turkey for a display. It's too expensive to tow her back, sailing her with volunteers would be much less expensive. Most have been supportive, starting with my wife and family. After reading her the post about the *Razorback*, she was quiet for a minute, then said, "You had better get your name on the list quickly."

Not an easy thing for her to say, as I would be gone according to the plan during our busiest time of the year. My son also agrees, and he works with us. He will also have to take up for me being gone. Left unsaid by some I'm sure is the, "Are you nuts?" Well, I may be, but I want to do it for a lot of reasons.

Years later, I realized my swift departure from the Navy left some 'unfinished business' in my mind. It was one of those 'Lets save some money discharging everybody that has less than 90 days left next week' things. I had 81 days left on that Monday, on Thursday I was a civilian again. I am still not sorry, but I wish that I could have said some goodbyes to some very good friends. I wish I could have made one more cruise, savoring the good things about sailing a submarine with a good crew. You remember the reasons why it was worth doing.

On the bridge, with the bow parting a calm night moon light sea. Dark water becomes white at the bow. Then passes down the tank tops to slowly return to dark water again aft. Leaving a wake that arrows through the night up to your receding stern.

Leaning elbows down on the chart in control listening to the chief impart wisdom about the 'Old Navy'. Or BS about something he knows nothing about, but has a grumpy attitude about, in salty terms.

Sit on a bunk in the forward room playing 'Cutthroat' cribbage with the watch as your world rides up a wave and slides down its face. It doesn't matter if you are playing for points or pennies, to you it's a friendly clash of titans. The winner will be the forward room champion for the day.

To head aft through the airtight door into the berthing compartment, dark, dank and dingy, full of men that sleep well while you are on watch.

Of course the rumbling thunder of two big Fairbanks Morse engines, sounds that seep into your bones. Along with the hot diesel oil and smoke odors that get into a snipe's blood and never really get out again.

Drawing a cup of (in reality) bad coffee leaning against the sink and drinking it and not complaining about the taste. This is because you are listening to a most ridiculous non-sensible discussion by shipmates who know almost nothing about what they are talking about. It doesn't matter, you will probably join in and add your smoke and fog to the cloud of words anyway.

On the surface in the calm before a storm, to port, a red sun slowly sets, turning the sea to blood and gold. To starboard, a towering thunderstorm races down on you to turn the calm orange tinged sea into gray mountainous violence for a long few hours. For a while, I want to feel the power of the sea, not riding high above it like on a cruise ship in luxury. But down eye to eye with it and hang on to bunk chain in a rolling, bucking, round bellied, smokeboat. You will remember all these things and more.

I want to do at least some of them one more time. I want to refill my memory banks and try to write them down. Then write them down so hopefully they are kept somewhere so others will read them and realize what we did and what we had. And maybe, just maybe, a few young men will say, "Hey I want to do that." "I want to sail with men like that."

I think that on the way back, the *Razorback* should stop for a moment where the *Scorpion* lies quietly deep below and conduct a short service for those men. It would be a good way to honor those Cold War Submariners that gave all they had, so far from home. Plus to remind others of our fallen brothers and that, We will never forget them.

## **Taking a Walk** by Mike Hemming

"Hey Mom, I'm gonna take a walk down the beach. I'll be back before lunch."

Heading down the nearly empty morning beach into the sun and salt air. The sun, he hadn't seen much of, these last months. No sun, canned air, frozen and canned food and that funny smell was his life now. His qual Dolphins pinned on his hat just a few days ago shone in the still golden morning light. He almost didn't wear the hat but picked it up out of habit on the way out.

Life was good, finally qualified, made 3rd. class, and thinking of the future, he was happy. "Not yet 20, I got the world by the balls", he thought. "Going places and gonna do things, free from small seaside town life forever now."

He walked on leaving his prints in the sand to be washed away now or later by the eddies of the surf. There were few other people that were near or even far on this beach at this early fall time of year. It had been during the warming spring the last time he had left footprints here.

After a while, he reached his usual turning around place and he could see an old man sitting alone another 50 yards or so farther on. As he starts his turn, he noticed the man looking at him. Ordinarily, he wouldn't have paid any attention or cared. He had learned to avoid 'civvies' somewhat because they didn't understand his love for the boats. Some were even hostile to the military, even among his high school friends, especially those that had gone to some colleges.

But something made him keep on walking toward the man sitting there in a beach chair. Reaching the man who had never taken his eyes off him, he realizes the man was old, I mean, really old. "Hi!" His answer is a slight smile and a nod. "Nice day."

Again, a small smile and a nod is all the young man gets. "May I sit and rest in this chair?" he asks, not knowing why he doesn't just return home. The old one still looking steadily at him nods again. He sits, noticing that as he does the old man's steel blue eyes are the most alive and vibrant thing about him. It dawns on the young one and he asks, "Can you speak?" A negative shake of the head is his answer. "Okay, We will just sit and watch the ocean for a bit then."

With a smile and a nod, the old one looks back to the morning sunlit sea. After a time, as the young one turns and makes excuses to leave, he sees the man is looking at his hat. "You a boat sailor?" A nod. "Really, what boat?"

Forgetting the old one can't speak, but fingers moving on a gnarled thin-skinned hand give a 3-digit answer. "Damn, what year you qualify?" A 2-digit answer preceding the war indicates the old one is close to 100 years old.

Stunned to silence, the young one sits back and stays quiet for a bit. Then he chats for a while about his boat and what it's like, while the other listens, nods and smiles. He talks of long patrols and ops and the great crew they have. He proudly points out that he is newly qualified and wears his brand-new Dolphins.

After a bit he realizes the old man is sad now. "They are all gone now, aren't they?" "You are the last one, aren't you?" The nods and welling tears tell the lonely old man's story faster and more strongly than words. Unable to speak again, the young one sits back silently and the two look out over the beautiful ocean again. Calm and serene now, they both know the many moods she can show men that dare to travel on her. Green here near the shore, but they both know the brilliant blue of the deep sea where they have both sailed.

Approaching footsteps breaks their wordless contemplation and communication. "Grandpa, are you okay?" A nod and a twinkle in his eye give his answer. The two younger men introduce themselves, the grandson seeing the Dolphins recognizes them and comments. "It's nice you stopped to talk to him since he never sees the others anymore. He is all alone except for me and mom now."

They both talk for a bit, the grandson telling the other a little of his grandfather's service that he knows of. Toward the end of the conversation, the grandson mentions that his grandfather lost all his memorabilia in fire a while back.

After a while, the young sailor stands and says "I'll be going now."

Then he hesitates when he sees the old man looking at his Dolphins once more. Thinking and moving quickly he removes his hat, unpins the silver emblem with his name and the so recent date engraved on the back. Leaning forward he pins the Dolphins on the older one's frayed and faded sweater vest.

Stepping back he salutes the older man in a semi-formal way saying, "Thank you, sir". As he takes his leave, he nods to the grandson and says in a low voice,

"See that when his time comes those fish go with him, he earned them in a harder time than me. The two watch the sailor walk away up the beach.

"Why didn't you speak to him, Grandpa?" In a soft, low voice he says, "Because I didn't need to and I wanted to hear about his boats." "Besides, I wanted to see what kind of young men were sub sailors these days." "And?"

## **A Simple Ceremony** by Mike Hemming

My entry into the world of qualified submariners was yes, very simple. We were on one of those 'go to hell and back' Caribbean snorkel ops. Hot, boring and unpleasant is the only way to describe such a form of ocean travel. I had spent the last week finishing up, running around the boat checking this valve and finding another. Requin's qual board had a habit of taking you into a compartment, blindfolding you and saying go find so and so. But after that, the engineering officer's walk through was a snap.

I had finished with the engineer and was sitting in the mess hall with a cup of coffee, feeling somehow different. At least now I could watch movies and read a book off watch. As a fireman, I was still at the bottom of the food chain. But at least I was safe from messcooking from now on as a qualified man.

As I prepared to head aft to my rack for a nap before watch the COB stuck his head in and said, "Hemming, lay up to Control". .I thought now what?

I stood by the chart table, ignored for a few moments while the diving officer settled something. Then the Captain came down from the Conn and everybody in Control except for the planesmen, stood. Captain Frame handed my brand new shiny Dolphins to the COB and congratulated me. Then the COB pinned them on my filthy dungaree shirt. After several more congratulations, it was over. As I headed aft, the IC watch said softly, "Take an empty cup back to Maneuvering when you go aft."

Going into the chow hall, I got several, "Way to go, you finally made it." "Well Hemming, now you're a qualified asshole." "Jeez, they let anybody wear fish don't they?" "Now, make rate so you can throttle too."

Heading aft, I got more similar comments and a light punch or two on the arm. Or getting a 'thumbs up' signal as I passed through a snorkel-screaming engine room. Stopping there, I realized I soon would be standing throttle watches here in this world of noise, heat and haze of diesel smoke. No longer would I be waiting to do the bidding of someone else, now I would have the responsibility. "What the hell, I can do it", I thought, finding a brand new confidence I never had before.

In Maneuvering, I was told to hold out my cup and a mostly clear iced liquid poured in. Sweating men in ragged acid-eaten or greasy torn dungarees raised their cups and said, "Congratulations."

We all drank down rum and water with bit of lime in it. A drink that never tasted so good before, but to this day, it's my drink.

And it was over, never repeated exactly that way again. But it was all mine, no one else's. No photographers, dress blues, or saluting, just a quiet acceptance by men respecting your accomplishment in joining them. A relatively small club of men that you respect, honors you with their acceptance into their ranks.

Simple and not in keeping with today's desire to turn everything into a major production for the local papers for publicity. Newspaper photographs would fade, fall apart and be thrown away, anyway. But I remember and who else would care, besides my shipmates and me. I wouldn't change a thing.. Nothing was better than that simple 'off the cuff' ceremony 60 feet down, snorkeling to nowhere through a hot tropical sea.

# Hall of Warriors

by Mike Hemming

The door massive and plain swings open easily at a touch. All are welcomed to enter that have served. Nothing more is asked, for those that enter, gave without asking. They enter and rest among their own kind.

Over 100 years of men that gave, some having given all, are here. Those that were lost as pioneers from the beginning, welcome the new arrivals. The pioneers know that their sacrifice is remembered and honored. Those that followed, built and hold on to that tradition that they will never forget those that led them.

The 3,500 are here, the forever young, standing a little apart but not aloof from the rest. For they know they were chosen only by the fates. They faced their fate knowing that the others would have done the same as warriors. As such, all newcomers are treated as equals. There is no bitterness in this place about where the great wheel of life came to rest for those that fell.

The 500 are here too, those that gave all in an undeclared war. They were lost in peacetime and a war cold and undeclared. For in the dangerous realm they lived, the fates can take the life force from their bodies as quick as in a war. They too are now at peace in this hall.

The great doors of the hall allow no pain to enter for those within. Their time for pain and suffering is done. The sting of death is over and never will be repeated. Bodies and minds are whole here, whatever horrors befell those warrior's bodies are gone, leaving no trace.

The old ones enter too, those that served and lived long after. They are honored by those that fell, for all are equal here. Here the old ones are happy to be among other warriors once again.

Stories old and new of great battles fought against men and ships are told and retold. Ones of battling the storms of the surface and the great pressures of the cold black depths. These men know of the dangers being all around their small vessels. Fires and flooding worry them no more. No more dangers to face, they are at peace.

The warriors remember riveted iron or welded steel hulls where they lived and some died. Ships rusting on the bottom or scrapped and rebuilt and honored with a name of one lost. Names spoken with reverence and honor. For these warriors never forget the sacrifices that have been made by all.

Again, the great door swings inward, the warrior having seen the small sign, enters. The sign that says, *Undersea Warriors enter and rest among your Brothers.*



# **Diving and Submerging** by Mike Hemming

There is a difference and it is one of the things that separate smokeboats from nukes. Ignoring propulsion power except for the fact that one lets a boat stay down forever, diving is an art, submerging is a lifestyle.

On smokeboats, diving is life. Like all submarines, they are safer below the surface. But since they must surface for air to charge batteries, they must always be ready to dive. They always say 'dive' because it's done in a hurry. It's practiced over and over, do it fast. Do it safe, but you damn sight better get down in a hurry. Over and over always striving to get to periscope depth in under a minute. In World War II, 50 seconds or less was strived for religiously. That Jap plane would be out of the sun and on your ass with a 500-pound bomb that would ruin your whole day. The 'tincan' with a bone in its teeth would be out of a fog bank and blasting away with a 5-inch gun in a few seconds. You had better be able to pull the wave tops over your head in a hurry. Then you had to go deep fast so his string of ashcans wouldn't go off at a deadly hull-cracking range. The deeper and the quicker you went down, the better for your chances of survival.

Us Cold War sailors were trained by combat veterans and if you wanted their respect, you went down fast. For safety's sake, we didn't try to shave those last 5 seconds off, but they would blister your hip pockets if you hung around on the surface. Once you were past your trim dive, it was time to get serious. The command "Dive, Dive" meant something like, "Get me down, NOW!"

So we practiced and practiced, until it was ingrained, the alarm sounded and down we went as quick as possible. Guys not on watch did things to speed up and make safer the process. It was not unusual to see an electrician passing through the engine room stop to spin a valve shut or trip the engine air induction valve. Then walk on forward without a word, it was just done, no one thought about it. In other parts of the boat things were done, reports made, guys helping out because they were nearby. It was making an art of combining speed and safety.

It was our art and we loved it, for it was what we were all about. Diving - the act - was an end unto itself. Submerging to a nuclear-powered boat was just a beginning of a cruise. Smokeboats made more dives in a year that nuke boats do in a lifetime now.

Nuclear power changed all that and for the better I'm sure. But it's no longer an art, it's a lifestyle. Once down under nuclear power, you stay there. For weeks or months even, once down it's for the duration. Submerging is a slow methodical process, with cross checks and safety foremost. They don't even say "Dive" anymore, it's "Submerge the ship." Submerge sounds permanent, dive says this is temporary, we will be back soon.

I watched a tape of a boomer submerging for its patrol, it took about 6 minutes. Hell, a New London school boat could go down and back up two, maybe three times in 6 minutes. Of course, the oilers would have mutinied from having to open and close their 32-turn exhaust valves that many times.

Science often surpasses art in practical things and that's okay, its progress. Submarines today do more things better, faster, and safer than we did. The idea that the seven seas could erupt with flying death to rain down upon their heads, kept the Russians from doing anything supremely stupid during the Cold War. Boomers and fast attacks helped to win the Cold War with science that the Soviets couldn't match. Hell, they didn't even know where all those missiles were and spent themselves into oblivion trying to keep up.

But please forgive this old-timer when he remembers with a smile when diving a submarine was as much art as science. When eighty young men not long from high school, welded themselves into a crew that took aging submarines to sea. A crew that could drive a boat under in 55 seconds safely day after day, time after time. It was our life, diving was what we were all about. Diving was what we did, without it the submarine and we were less. It gave us pride and confidence in ourselves. More importantly, it gave us pride and confidence in others and made separate men into a crew. Even today, we think of what we did as one of the golden moments because diving was an art that pleased and satisfied the heart and soul, not a plodding scientific lifestyle.

## **Night Transit** by Mike Hemming

The boat surfaces at 2000 hours after a long day of ping time. Doing different things at different speeds and depths. A long, boring, hot stale-air day for the whole crew. It must even bore the hell out of the skimmers and airdales above us. But now they have gone, the airdales back to their nest and then the 'O' club for steaks and martinis. The tincan back to port for SlimJims and beer, while we transit to nowhere and have horsecock sandwiches and green bug juice.

I have the 20 to 24 in the forward engine room and I fire up my rock crushers for the battery charge. In the after-engine room, they light off to answer bells on two main engines. While charging batteries we are off, standard on two. Off to where? Not many on board know, and none of us care. It's another night transit, one of many.

We are blessed with a warm and calm sea, so we are happy. It doesnt take much, but with the milk gone, red bug juice would be a pleasant change.

So the four hours on watch pass, boredom lessened only by the decreasing load on the engines. After 3 hours, I shut down one engine, but the 5 minutes to do that add nothing meaningful to my, or our existence.

Watch over, I turn it over to my equally bored but still watchful relief. While the boat cuts through a night sea with only a slight roll, I head forward for mid-rats. The same damn stuff as last night and the night before. Except the bread is a little more moldy and the mayo skin in the can is a little tougher. I long ago gave up eating Navy mayo and opt for mustard since it doesn't change in taste or consistency on day one at sea, to the last day. I have another baloney sandwich for mid rats, but I do however, add some thick slices of onion. Strong and pungent, it turns my breath into a blowtorch. My shipmates who haven't showered for weeks, will never know in their own little clouds of stink. My personal smells will never be able to penetrate their thick miasmic shell of smell.

I watch the nightly poker game start, but I am broke so this chance for even the minor excitement of losing is denied me. Others around me sit waiting for something, but something never happens. The movies on board are so stupid, we wouldn't even pay a dime to see it ashore. Skin books all read or still busy in heads or corner bunks, and there is nothing new to read. A grease stained, ratty and tattered 3-week-old Time magazine no longer holds any useful info. No news may be good news, but it's boring as hell.

I am too bored to even start a ping session on the new night messcook. He has not yet learned to not rise to the bait. Last night we worried him for an hour over some imaginary fault just to watch his reaction. Finally, the night cook said, "Knock it off, let the kid work."

But until he learns to take it in stride, the messcook will have a tough time. Mean maybe, but it's our way of passing the time and it helps us separate the ones that can hack this life from the rest. Most of our recreation in this sardine can existence is verbal. We have no room for anything else except words. But words elude us now and we are just bored. Have you ever tried to listen to or feel your hair and toenails grow for something to do? Too many night transits, and you will try at least once in your life.

Jokes retold too many times, sea stories worn out, we need some liberty to find some new ones. Sea stories are the lies that tie us together into a crew. But we are on a night transit going nowhere, slowly.

Going forward looking for something to pass the time but there is nothing. Men on watch have that 'don't bother me' far-off stare. Shipmates awake close their eyes or roll over in their bunks to avoid conversation attempts. Men stare through bulkheads transporting themselves back home to ride free in a convertible. We want to snuggle against a wife or girlfriend thinking of anything but our foul smelling all-male existence.

We will dive in the morning and surface again that night. After a few more days of this, we will night transit again. To where? No one will care unless it's toward homeport. We amble across the sea from one imaginary point to another. At that

point someone will sail into view and have us do this or that thing for a bit and then they will sail off.

Night transit... Even if we could see the ocean, one wave looks like the next 10,000, so no one looks. We sail through a calm sea that closes over our wake while the air dissipates the faint smoke we leave behind, leaving the ocean unmarked by our passage. Night transit by a lonely gray ghost in the dark, wondering by now if we are forgotten out here. I turn in as we all do, passing the time in sleep when possible, to kill the boredom. The boredom of a night transit by a galloping gray ghost, going nowhere and back again

## **Memorial Day** by Mike Hemming

A shined boot measures the distance, and a small flag is stuck into the ground. The flag waves in the evening breeze in front of a small gray stone. The stone that will be visited the next day by one or many. An old sailor will come, to remember a shipmate, long gone from land and sea. But his memories linger like the sad smoke of rifle salutes. The memories will bring forth smiles and tears.

A son will bring his son to remind him of the sacrifice made by granddad to save a world gone mad by those who would enslave it. An older brother will be there to honor a fallen sibling. A mother and sister will remember at a stone that honors those men whose graves are in the deep cold sea. A wife will stand quietly for a time at a stone and as she turns to leave, a single tear will appear and course down her cheek to fall on sacred ground.

Men will come to honor men that they do not know except for knowing their sacrifice. Men that sailed the seas in ships like theirs. Men that gave all, men that gave limbs or sanity to protect their country. Men that did not return to loved ones and to complete their lives among us as they could have.

Men will honor and remember men that lie in a mass grave with one small stone listing the names. Men that know of things done by them in secret and stealth not spoken aloud even today. Men that gave all in wars hot and cold in our history. Men that died in ones and twos or the entire crew on or in the sea.

The little flag waving bravely in the evening breeze marks the place where men that did their duty rest forever. Tomorrow gun salutes will be fired, flags will be flown at half-mast, taps will be played, right hands will snap into stiff salutes one more time and tears will fall. But most important those that come to the flag-marked stones will say, *We did not and will not forget you.*

## **Engineer's Pride** by Mike Hemming

Snipes have pride. Our clothes may be greasy rags, but our engines will run. Lt. N.K. Schilling on Requin said once, "This boat goes out and comes back with smoke coming from all four holes." We didn't call them smokeboats back then. They were just submarines and most of them were diesel-powered.

'Jimmys' or 'Fairbanks', they made smoke and it was a point of pride to have all running coming back from a cruise. Snipes get little or no help from officers. Torpedomen can do everything right but if the officers in the conn screw up, then the fish misses. Not so in a 'Domain of the Diesel'... The rag hats are king and it's all on us. If we have a breakdown, the gang fixes it or it doesn't get fixed. Officers and chiefs can stand around and watch, but whether they are there or not, it doesn't make any difference at all. Matter of fact, by standing around, all they are is a hindrance to progress. Asking things like, "Do you need more help?" "Can you put more men on the job?"

There is a class in the Naval Academy called *Work Theory 101*, which teaches that if it takes two men one hour to do a job, then four men can do it in 1/2 hour. Expanding this idea beyond all common sense, a non-qual Ensign or JG will figure that 128 men will do the job in under 7 seconds.

Requin never came home on less than four in my entire time aboard her. Once though, it was a close call. About two days out, we spun a vertical drive on #3. In port, it's figured to be a 48-hour job. Bill, the first class in charge of the AER, asked for Stew and I to be taken off the watch bill and the three of us would work straight through until it was fixed. Mr. Schilling agreed, then stepped back and we started in. A vertical drive unit connects the upper and lower crankshafts in a Fairbanks Morse engine. Two cones inside are forced together as a slip clutch arrangement for safety, any slippage however creates enormous amounts of heat that welds the two cones together. This results in an engine out of time. To get them apart for replacement, holes are drilled in the outer cone, using every drill bit on board. Then the holes are connected by cold chiseling the metal left between the holes. Hours are consumed drilling and chiseling in a tight space that provides little room for such maneuvers. After breaking only to eat for 36 hours, we completed the job. Two hours before maneuvering watch was stationed, #3 engine was lit off and tested. Our reward when we pulled in was the other boat's snipes seeing Requin with smoke coming from all four holes.

No sitting in Bells that night listening to Torsk snipes saying, "What's the matter 481, can't you keep your stuff running?" Or far worse, a Jimmy boat snipe yelling, "We may leak some oil, but we run all day and all night." "You guys can't pack the freight." Fights started over less.

Heaven forbid, some other boat took your ops because you had engines down. Boats would leave port on two engines, with snipes busting butt down below, instead of another boat having to take your ops. It may have been the crappiest ops imaginable and you might hate going on it, but you didn't want to hear the shit if

another boat had to do the operation. Runner once singled up with only one engine - running a second one wasn't started until they passed the coal piers. I give the Runner snipes credit. Five days later, they came in with smoke coming from all four holes. Snipes with pride they were, bad luck is one thing but limping home is another. Nothing would make engine room snipes come topside faster than the yell down the engine room hatch, "Mudfish is coming in on one engine."

The only time Carp came home on three engines, I was on leave. A cold snorkel start on #1 and water being incompressible, conn rods and the crankshaft were bent. Walking down the pier coming off leave, a Requin snipe hollered out, "Hey Hemming, can't you Carp snipes keep your Jimmy's running?" "Your boat limped in last night in the dark trying to hide in shame."

Other gangs on board could have breakdowns and screw-ups, but if a boat limped up to the pier wheezing and belching white or black smoke, then the whole base knew the snipes had messed up. The rule of thumb was, if you have the spare parts you should fix it. If you don't have the spares and can't make them, hang your head in shame. All the well-fired torpedoes are useless until the engines put the boat where it belonged in firing range of the enemy.

If diesel smoke is the elixir of life to a snipe's nose, we all wanted 4 roses in our bouquets during maneuvering watch. If one rock crusher makes music to our ears, four of them are a symphony that we all wanted to hear. Just one more time, yeah, just one more time.

## **Locker Space** by Mike Hemming

Imagine for a moment, a 311-foot by 17-foot steel tube, filled with all manner of machinery, then add as an afterthought, places for 80 men to live, work and sleep. People that live under interstate highway bridges in cardboard boxes have more storage space and one hell of a lot more privacy than a smokeboat sailor ever had. Privacy in that only in the forward and after torpedo room crappers are you sure to be out of sight from your shipmates. Even in the After Battery head, the stall partitions aren't high enough to insure the guy entering or leaving adjoining ones can't see you. This lack of privacy extends to your possessions, as well. Open your little locker space and anyone passing by can look at your worldly goods. Love letters, pictures of girlfriends and/or wives, and your reading material is all exposed. Of course, the worldly goods you were allowed to carry onboard couldn't fill a shopping cart. I have seen one of those 'denizens of the underpass' having more stuff than I carried aboard for 5 years at sea.

Let me explain how you stored stuff on a submarine. In the torpedo rooms, you got a bunk bag to hang on the side of your rack. This satchel-like creation of the devil also doubles as an overnight bag, if you wish to unsnap it from your bunk railing.

Re-snapping the 4 hanging straps to each other into handles and VOILA! An overnight bag that stinks.

A bunk bag was about 2 feet long and when stuffed to the gills, about 10 inches in diameter. In it on board, you kept the items you needed everyday. Toothbrush, soap, towel, change of skivvies, and a couple of books, if you were qualified and allowed to read them. A deck of cards, cribbage board, a razor and shaving cream you probably used once a week at most. It was best to have shaving cream that came in a tube like toothpaste. If you snorkeled and a high vacuum exploded the can in you bunk bag, it was messy, to say the least. A bottle of 'foo-foo juice', or after-shave for those of you that have never traveled the seas in a submersible. You used the foo-foo juice even if you hadn't shaved, every week or so, so you didn't keep looking over your shoulder for the stinking shipmate that wasn't there. Deodorant in stick form wasn't only to make you smell better, you used it to help keep fungus from growing in your armpits in hot weather. It stung like hell, but it was the only thing that would cure or control 'Caribbean Armpit Rot'... Nothing the quack ever gave me, did.

Aside from letters you were reading or writing, there were a few other things that needed to be at hand like cigarettes, lighter fluid, wallet, and maybe some chewing gum. Chewing gum takes on a real interesting flavor after 2 weeks at sea. I'm not sure how to describe it, but it ain't *Beechnut* or *Juicy Fruit* anymore. As for letters being read or written, its best if the love letters to or from your onshore feminine companions were locked up in your wall locker. A shipmate might reach into your bunk bag, ignoring the money you have there, just to extract and read the letters. When you return, your shipmates might recite passionate passages of your latest horny missives, back to you. There always was at least one BS artist, whose letters to his girlfriend were worth reading, to spice up an otherwise dull afternoon.

The rest of your gear is kept in a wall locker, reachable only by climbing up and reaching over a bunk that usually has a sleeping body in it. Imagine a bus station locker that only has a door one-foot square, which limits the size of anything you might want to cram in there. The location and the ever-present curve of the pressure hull determine the shape of the locker inside. Remember that a submarine is a round hull filled with square pegs. In some places, a locker can look like a railroad tunnel inside. Its so long and deep. Some lockers are too deep for you to reach anything in the back, without crawling halfway into the thing. Whatever it was you wanted, the boat's rolling and up and down angles, insured that it was never anywhere except in the bottom at the back of your locker.

On a cruise that you left and returned to your homeport without pulling in anywhere else, you took nothing but one set of dress uniforms and your work clothes. In this case, you might actually have enough locker space, especially if it was winter and you were wearing blues. Though it was always best to have a set or two of whites stashed in your locker, just in case you made an unscheduled stop in a warm place.

The worst case was to be going south in the winter. This meant you had a set of blues that you wore to the boat to get underway in, plus as many sets of whites as you could cram in your locker. Laundry facilities were sometimes scarce or slow. In the tropics, a set of whites only last one day, at most. You might not stay in a place long enough to get your whites back. So you carried as many white uniforms as you had.

Living in the After Battery brought forth the unique container known as the bunk locker. Your bunk was your locker. You actually slept on a mattress laid on the lid of this aluminum sheet metal locker. It was 6ft long, about 3 ft wide and 4 inches deep. Lift the lid with your mattress on top and there spread out before you was all your stuff, neatly laid out and smashed to 4 inches thick. Little compartments laid out with no rhyme or reason and assembled by a drunken yardbird who had once caught his daughter in bed with a sub sailor. It is unknown how skivvies migrated from one compartment to another while you were looking for them in the dark, but they managed to. Using a flashlight to find things wasn't a good idea, unless you liked having boondockers thrown at your head and your parents cursed.

In the front center of the bunk locker was a lockable drawer that supposedly controlled access to the rest of the locker. Does anyone remember having a key for the drawer? I don't. They had all been lost or given to barmaids as signs of undying love, I guess. The fix for this was to put a hasp and padlock on to control access to the locker. A lock, which would snag and tear your dungarees as you walked past. Or place bruises on your shin, hip or shoulder depending on the height of the locker when thrown into it, at sea.

On most boats, qualified men also got a wall locker to stuff more things into. This however, did not solve the peacoat storage problem. The navy enlisted man's peacoat was impossible to store on a diesel submarine. Thick bulky and impossible to fold, they were hung, stuffed, jammed and crammed into any place that didn't prevent machinery from working. Some boats had a peacoat locker installed in the after battery somewhere, usually by removing a bunk. This locker always had a nominal capacity of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the possible number of peacoats on board. With brute force and awkwardness, the rest were crammed in until the locker bulged. Opening the door resulted in a muffled explosion of wool and large plastic buttons. There was also, the realization that it would be impossible to find or remove your peacoat. If you did get yours out, you found that it had spent the last two hot months sandwiched between two coats that their owners had barfed boiled iguana and Dago Red, down the front.

Submarine sailors with this decided lack of storage space become adept at two things... One, is paring down the things you carry. We all know guys that tore covers off books to make them smaller. New men quickly learn to leave stuff ashore. If you don't need to wear it you probably don't need it.



The other thing that they get real good at is finding a space to create new locker space. Then, bribing a yardbird or tender swabbie to build some kind of weird shaped locker to fit *into* the space. A space that no one else could figure out how to use. Trapezoidal-decagonal shaped lockers on top of another locker behind a pipe, become just another mounting problem. I once had a locker built to store stuff in, that had to be disassembled before it could be installed. A serious design flaw to be sure. But hey, with two weeks at sea coming up, time to drill out pop rivets wasn't the problem. With no pop rivets for reassembly, tiny brass nuts and bolts with lock washers filled the bill, even though it was time consuming.

Engineroom locker space was one place 'Jimmy' boats had it all over 'Fairbanks' boats. The shape of the General Motors V-16 engine allowed for a row of lockers just above the exhaust elbows. One thing to remember, as temperatures probably reached 150 to 170 degrees, storing chocolate or anything that melted, was out of the question. In those lockers, clothing and books was about it. Metal objects could cause first degree burns when retrieved at sea.

We had an EN2 named Ray that kept the messiest engineroom locker in the history of snipedom. Ray stowed his locker with force equal to a hydraulic press. Which was fine at the start of a cruise. After 3 weeks at sea, he just returned his dirty clothes to the mix, including damp towels and a few read books. As the dirty gear was rammed into the front the 'clean' gear was in the back. This made a 'stirring' operation necessary to bring objects to the front, while bitching that he couldn't find what he wanted. A kind shipmate, seeing the problem, returned to the boat with a tree limb. The limb was stripped of its bark and carved with appropriate and inappropriate things on it. It was carefully lettered 'Ray's Locker Stirring Stick' and it was hung by a chain from the overhead. When Ray left the boat, the well-used stick went with him. It was after all, the only way for him to find things in that locker without putting his hands in there. Locker space... We didn't have enough and what we had wasn't really usable. But then, we didn't have much to put in it, anyway.

## **Forty Years Gone** by Mike Hemming

Thirty, forty or fifty, the number doesn't matter. It's just a measure of the time that has passed. It's the faces and names of the shipmates that matter. Faces and names, names and faces, are not always matched up. Shipmates remembered even if it's only bits and pieces. We remember in snippets of things long gone, until we sometimes ask in our own minds did that happen or was it a dream or a story passed on? We would never say that out loud, for around our old buddies we always claim to remember all the good times and sometimes the bad.

They were good men that came from all over for many reasons and sailed together for a time. A time of testing and training, for men would pass on things to you that they themselves had learned. For you were expected to pass that knowledge on to those who came after you. It was a struggle to learn it all, sometimes. But you were

learning lessons taught by the school of hard knocks. A school that lists the names of some 4,000 men who don't want you to repeat mistakes already made.

There were faces of men now gone who once fought a hot war, who told you of traditions to honor those who did not return. Men that had seen too much to even tell it all. They were fighting a hard enemy that rarely gave quarter and so none was given back.

Faces of men that sailed through the years of a long cold war to hold our enemies at bay. Sacrificing years, marriages, limbs and even their lives at times to do what they thought was right. Years of stories untold even today watching the Bear and preparing for a war. Serving on boats built to fight a hot war and then holding the line through a cold war. Until the new boats that were built for the next hot war, a war that fortunately never came.

And faces and names of those that sailed with you and now are gone these many years. We all say, "I wish I could see him one more time, but I don't know where he is." He was an old salt that guarded your back while ashore. Or a young kid that became a man when he stood beside you and fought fire or flooding without backing down. You didn't say "thanks" that day, but now you wish you had. They are all there in the time that has flown away from us.

We have all moved on now for better or worse. Some of them did more and some we never called upon to do more again. They returned home and went on with their lives. Names of men tested and found to be shipmates, an honor which can never be taken away. Faces with names that we shouldn't have lost as we traveled down the road. A road that led us away from what we did then as it always has to. But we shouldn't have lost all the faces and the names for all time. The faces and names of these special men that wanted to do something few can do. They did it for reasons unknown to themselves, sometimes much less to others that can never understand the pride in the accomplishment of what they did.

For when the paths we travel meet again, we will all reconnect faces and names again. But wouldn't it be nice to sit with that lost shipmate forty years gone and remember that life just one more time, right now?

## **The River** by Mike Hemming

The river gives birth and life. Later, the river may watch life ebb and die. This one has seen the birth of many submarines. Finally, it sees their final sad passing. I have returned many years later... My boat is gone but for the memories. As I look down the river to the builders yard, it's quiet now this dark starry night. Under a clear sky, the green water shows the gold reflections of the town's light. No welder's sparks show a hull being welded strong and tight against the sea.

**Like all boats, mine was born of fire, brass and strong steel. Men in anger at a sneak attack had made her real.**

**Later, those men's sons would build boats to prevent an attack by another enemy that would have destroyed our world and the attacker's world. For near a century now, this river's work has made us strong and helped keep us free.**

**The men that sailed those boats came to this river. Came here to train and join the crews, to sail submarines into the seven seas. Young men, starry-eyed and brave, brought hulls alive. They studied, tested and welded themselves into a crew strong like the steel of the vessels they took to sea.**

**Most returned, but 52 did not... The gods of war do not always smile on all. Those men must forever remain always on patrol. Those, now battle-hardened men, that did return swore that they would never forget their shipmates. The school upriver, from where I now stand, still trains and reminds young men, like we all once were, to never forget those boats and men.**

**Young men still come to this place to become sailors of submarines. What makes these chosen few take to this life under the sea is not known. They themselves often cannot explain it. Something inside deep in the heart and soul allows them to do it. Once done they are forever different and will always stand a little apart from the rest. Like their ships, they were built for a higher calling.**

**The river flows like time past me, to remind me of two other boats that never returned. The crews forever part of the sea and our history. Sadly, some day they may be joined by others, though we pray that they won't. That is why we remember so fiercely not to forget them, so slackness will not kill submarines and men like us.**

**My boat did return to this river flowing eternally to the sea. Her job done, her crew gone and her career over, she was scrapped. The instant the first torch cut into her that last time, it burnt off a little piece of many men's souls and mine. For we were welded to her and each other in our hearts. As she lived we lived. As she died, a little of us died too.**

**I watch a dark hull slip quietly down river to the sea in the dark red half-light of morning. No diesel rumble or the swish of parting river comes to my ears, so silent and deadly are these new boats. I raise my hand to the brim of my hat. I give solemn salute to the boats and men that this river has spawned in the name of liberty.**

**A thought comes to my mind as I stand by this place while the submarine passes downriver. If some of the steel of my old boat was put in this one, will that little piece of my soul that flew free join the new one? In my waning years I know that, 'just one more time' will never be. But if part of me has joined this new boat and the river before me, I will be content in those years.**

## **And God Created Smokeboat Sailors** by Mike Hemming

It was admittedly long after the seventh day. After all, the human race had to get the ability to design and build a diesel-powered submarine. But God had prepared for the day of their coming. Hidden away in some special human beings was and still is the Smokeboat gene. It will never be found in all the DNA maps that are ever done, but it is there. It will remain there until smokeboats return when they are needed.

God implanted this gene that only shows up in a few of each generation. He knew that this was to be a delayed creation. Some might say he didn't want to take the blame at that time, but in truth, He knew the world wasn't ready then.

With this gene God gave us the desire to do something that few can do, to live inside their war machine that travels and fights under the sea. He gave us the guts to ignore the dangers of the sea around us without being foolhardy idiots. He gave us the ability to train ourselves and each other that we trust each other to do the right thing and not make mistakes.

He gave us the ability to see through the useless things about a shipmate and down to the core. The important core of whether a mate has what is needed to be there through the good and the bad. He gave us some of the finest shipmates that ever sailed the seven seas. Mates that will stick by you and be there when needed.

He gave us friendships that endure for our entire lives. He gave us the ability to laugh and have fun when life wasn't funny and was hard work. He gave us some of the best times of our young lives.

He gave us the right to bitch and complain about our boat. Included was the right to punch out any outsider that said anything bad about our boat. Finally, He gave us the ability to remember only the best parts all those years later. It wasn't a bad deal, all things considered. Maybe God never was a Smokeboat sailor but he sure knew what was needed to be one.

## **Join Us** by Mike Hemming

The blackness is complete, conscious or unconscious it made no difference. The transition to wakefulness was no different it was still black. His head hurt from being slammed into the gauge board when the Nip depth charges went off. "Damn, they got lucky with those two."

One went off over or on the cigarette deck and the other over the Maneuvering Room. The click whams so close together as to be one death sound. The violent explosions slammed the boat downward as they cracked open the pressure hull. The added weight of sea water caused the sub to continue downward until it

crashed into the seabed. Already stunned, the blackness overcame him and now with the lights out it seemed permanent.

Groping around he found a flashlight next to the workbench, but it was dead bulb; broken, he guessed. In the dark he crawled along the deck to the stanchion where the emergency flashlight holder was. Gripping one he yanked it free and turned it on. Blessed light rewarded him with a sight of his oiler and friend crumpled and bloody on the deck. The odd angle of his neck told him his friend was dead and he was alone in this engine room. "Shit." "Well I'll look aft first, maybe we can escape from the After Torpedo room, if we aren't too deep."

Passing the gauge board the sea water pressure gauge told him the bad news. A quick calculation tells him the boat was too deep to escape from. "Damn, 600 feet, what's left of the hull is strong enough."

The deadlight in the watertight door told him the After Engine Room was flooded. No passage aft to join his shipmates would be his while they waited for the end. Walking forward to look into the After Battery he knew the answer already. With the lights out, that was flooded also. Oily water and blackness was his answer in the deadlight there also.

The sound powered phone gives no answer to his repeated frantic calls. They are all dead or we are cut off from each other. Sobbing, "I'm gonna die alone in here."

Slumping to the deck, overwhelmed with a sadness that knew no end or bottom, like a pit to the center of the world. Curling up in a fetal ball he let the sadness and fear consume his thoughts until he goes a merciful blank. In the darkness only the hissing of air and spraying of water leaks were the dying submarine sounds.

"Join us,,,,,,,,,,,,Join ussssssssss." His eyes popped open at the sound of a voice, snapping the flashlight on and around in a desperate search for a human companion. But there was no one to be seen. Must have been the air leaks he despondently thought. "There is no one here." "*Join us.*"

Again he thinks he hears the voice sound and it's louder this time. But again his hopes fall as there is no one there in the flashlights fading beam.

Getting up, he goes to the bench locker to sit on its padded seat instead of the cold iron deck plates. On the way, he opens a locker to drag out a foul weather jacket to ward off the cold. The temperature is falling fast in the compartment to soon equalize with the cold sea outside. Huddling in the cold, thirsty and hungry as the air he breathes slowly goes bad.

Will I die from drowning from the cold sea filling the engine room or will I breathe up my air and suffocate? He hopes for the latter, it might be less painful. He is so tired

of being scared all the time at sea. Waiting for what is happening now. To die at the bottom of the sea.

**"Join us."** This time his eyes see a crankshaft in the middle of the deck where none should be. Blinking his eyes, he can see faded apparitions laboring to spin the crank almost like galley slaves. One of the grey-clad men looks up and smiles soft and sadly. The words come from the man like a smoke signal without being spoken.

**"Join us."**

**"Who are you?"**

**"We were the first but you will not be the last."**

**"Go away!"**

**"We cannot, just as you cannot leave."**

**"NOOOOOOOOOOOO! I will not join you!"** in a near shriek of panicky fear.

Snapping off the light to make the men disappear calms him for a bit. But then he hears it again, a different voice this time. **"Join us."**

The flashlight reveals other men this time wearing blue one-piece clothing made of a material he has never seen before. The men stand in a ghostly and huge engine room more like on a steam powered surface ship than a diesel-powered submarine.

**"Who are you?"** **"We are the last to have joined the first at this time."** **"What do you mean?"** **"We are the crew of the Scorpion and we have joined the men of the Hunley and all those that followed."** **"The Scorpion? She is still in Pearl for overhaul after her second patrol. I don't believe you."**

**"We are the second Scorpion the 589 not 278, but fear not, those of your friends are here with us also."** **"You will join them too."** **"No! you are wrong! We can't have built almost 300 boats that quick."**

**"You see, we have no beginning and no end once we started to fall."** Not understanding he yells, **"Go away."**

Snapping off the light makes them disappear and quiet returns. Shivering in the cold and fearful of what the light might reveal next he vows to leave it off. Alone in the dark with only the pressure creaking and groaning heard along with air leaking out and the water leaking in for company, he waits. **"Join us."** **"Join us."**

This time, after hearing the call several times, his light fearfully reveals a man standing in a smaller engine room with diesels different than his.

"Who are you?" "I'm Hans of the U-217, a mechanic like you." "How did you get here?" "I was sunk in the Atlantic by the Tommie's wasserbombs."

"Are all of you here?" "If you mean U boatmen or submarine sailors as you call yourselves, yes we are all here." Hans says, "All of us that have been lost at sea, since the men of the Hunley and into the future, we are all here."

This time he doesn't turn off the light and as Hans fades he is replaced by another, a smiling, friendly, familiar face. "Jack, is that you?" "Yes, it's me." "When did the Bonefish go down?" "In May of 45, about 6 months from now." "In the future?" "Yes, and now it's time for you to join us." Jack holds out his hand.

This time, relaxing, he no longer fights or fears the ghostly men that now surround him. They are welcoming him and giving their friendship. "There are so many of you." "Yes over 4,000 United States men alone and that's not counting all the others."

He feels safe and warm again. He knows that he will never be alone, cold, and afraid again. The almost permanent dull ache of fear his constant companion for the last year starts to fade. He had resigned himself to this fate long ago. Somehow he knew his survival like for so many others, was not to be. Relaxed now, even smiling, his breathing slows and stops as he joins them.

## **I Saw an Old Man Smile Today** by Mike Hemming

A younger man, a grandson I guess, pushed his wheelchair to the brow. He sat looking at the black hull in front of him. After a bit he gathered some strength he probably didn't know he had and heaved himself to his feet. His grandson concerned, took his arm, where upon the old feet shuffled forward to the grey steel bridge of his past. Stepping carefully up he planted one foot then the other on the brow. Taking his time, he shuffled forward into his memories.

Reaching the midway point, he stopped and with a glance commanded the young one to release his arm. Turning aft he straightened and threw an oft practiced salute to the ensign snapping in the stiff river breeze. A knarled fingered but straight-armed salute given with the casual but respectful way of a long time whitehat. Turning once more he continued his trek to his old home.

Reaching the slotted deck he turned aft with the attentive man at his side. Treading carefully in his old man way, he moved to a deck hatch. Stopping and looking down, he spoke some words that the other listened to. I could not hear them and didn't move forward to try. The words were not for anyone that was there in the flesh. They were for long ago shipmates faded in his mind but firmly held in his heart.

He stared down at the shiny steel ladder that he and others had vaulted upwards on and slid down so many times with youthful exuberance. With his youth gone the ladder no longer led to his home. No longer could it launch him out to exotic ports of call, the ladder was a barrier to his past.

The old one didn't seem to mind, he was close enough. The river's wind gusts drew the wonderful smell to his nostrils once more. The smell that only one who had been there through thick and thin could love for a lifetime to bring back his past. His past paraded through his mind to flare and fade like sparks.

After a time, he tired and turned to retrace his steps to land. Tired though he was, his steps seemed stronger and jauntier now. Traces of the walk of a gothell young whitehat were there. Reaching the center of the brow he again turned to salute his colors with practiced ease. At the end of the brow as he stepped down, the last vestiges of his spark faded to a smoldering ember.

After turning and sitting down heavily again the wheelchair, he knew he would never again see, feel, smell or hear the thunder of submarine engines. As he passed by, I saluted a smiling old man with a tear in his eye.

## **Warshot** by Mike Hemming

"Captain, Nine minutes at 8 knots is up..." "Very well, bring her up to 55 feet."  
"Coming up to 55 feet from 150 feet, Aye." "Up scope." "Bearing should be 030, Captain." "Very well, slow to 1/3." "Answers 1/3."

Slapping the handles down the Skipper does the quick crouching spin to check all around before stopping at 030. "Bearing Mark." "Zero three zero." "Range mark." "One four double 0."

The low to the water dark hull sails on in the scope seemingly unknowing and uncaring to its impending doom. "Down scope." The Captain stares a thousand miles into the hydraulic oiled descending shaft, his mind locked onto the job at hand. "Set depth at one zero feet" "Flood tube four and open outer door." "Next observation will be a shooting observation." "Have the COB report to the Conn."

"Coming up..."

"COB will you hit the firing key on this one?"

The COB with a strained look on his face, "Aye Skipper."

The Captain with a kind of sad smile says, "It won't be the first now will it?"

"No Skipper, but I hope it's the last like this."



"HMMMMM, yeah."

"Been a long time since we walked down the pier together to this boat as non quals, huh Chief?"

"Yeah me an E2 and you an O1, I outranked you even then didn't I?"

The Captain chuckles, which ease the strain on both their faces, "Yes, you always did outrank me in some ways. You took grumpy old chief lessons long before you were even an E5." Smiling for a second the COB says, "We have both come a long ways since those days, and now they are nearly at an end."

"Captain, Time."

"Yes, up scope"

Again the awkward spin around the scope to stop with the submarine in the cross hairs.

"Bearing Mark."

"Zero two zero"

"Range mark."

"One One double 0"

"Solution checks, Captain."

"Very well, this will be for MOT, Shoot tube four."

The COB's hand comes up quickly then pauses over the firing key and wavers there. In a stern voice that cracks ever so slightly the Captain says, "Shoot the fish!"

The tough hard hand of the chief that doesn't match the pain in his eyes smashes down on the key.

"Tube four fired electrically," The chief reports sadly.

"Running time?"

"Fifty Five seconds, Captain."

"Very well."

"COB, I better not have missed."

"Yes Sir, sorry, but it's hard to sink your qual boat."

"Skipper, Sonar reports, Torpedo running hot straight and normal."

"Very well." "Time?"

"5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Skipper, Plus 1, 2, 3,"

The Captain looks through the periscope his "Damn" to be rewarded with the violent geyser of sea foam under the engine room of the sub. Lifted high already broken in two by the Mark 16 torpedo's explosion she is doomed to the rest of forever on the sea floor.

"COB take a look. It's a better end than being scrapped."

Looking, he sees the ends of the broken black hull disappear quickly into the deep blue sea. "Yes, she will rest with all her sisters now where she belongs, Skipper." "She has served us well again."



*This section is dedicated to those boats that gave the last final extra measure for us in weapons tests. S(T) Sunk as target from "US Submarines Through 1945" by Norman Friedman. Jim Christley did research in other places and kindly allowed its use here. Also comments have been added by sailors that rode the boat that sank them or have knowledge of the sinking.*

- SS-2 A-1 was target. Sold for scrapping 26 Jan 22 with USS Puritan.
- SS-3 A-2 Adder 16-Jan-22 1/26/1922 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-4 A-3 Grampus Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-5 A-4 Moccasin 16-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-6 A-5 Pike 16-Jan-22 Sunk by explosion 15 Apr 17 Salvaged Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-7 A-6 Porpoise 16-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-8 A-7 Shark 16-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-9 C-1 Octopus Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-10 B-1 Viper 16-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-11 B-2 Cuttlefish 17-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-12 B-3 Tarantula 17-Jan-22 Used as target. Hulk sunk in Manila Bay, near Corregidor
- SS-19 1/2 (Seal) G1 designated target 19 Feb 20 stricken 29 Aug 21. S(T) in Narragansett Bay, RI; sunk in 105' of water 20 Jun 21 just north of Taylor's Point.
- SS-26 Thrasher G4 had been designated a depth charge target 6 Dec 19 sold 15 Apr 20.
- SS-27 Tuna G2 foundered awaiting depth charge tests 30 Jul 19 partially raised and scrapped 1962. She lies off Pleasant Beach near Niantic Bay, CT in 80 feet of water.
- SS-48 L-8 15 Nov 22 S(T) in 110 feet of water, 3 Miles South of Brenton Reef Light, outside of Narragansett Bay in 1926 in a test of the ill fated Mk 6 magnetic exploder.
- SS-85 R8 19 Aug 36 bombing. SS-94 R 17 to UK 9 Mar 42 Ret 6 Sept 44 served as target Stricken 22 Jun 45 sold 16 Nov 45.
- SS-121 S-16 S(T) 3 May 45 in 250 feet of water, 18 miles from Key West
- SS-122 S-17 S(T) 5 April 45
- SS-124 S-19 S(T) just off Pearl Harbor [London Treaty] on 18 Dec 38.
- SS-126 S-21 sunk as sonar target 23 Mar 45.
- SS-140 S-35 S(T) 4 Apr 46 after use as damage control hulk for new Fleet Damage Control School.
- SS-142 S-37 S(T) 4 Apr 46 "before being scuttled off San Diego?"
- SS-143 S-38 S(T) off San Diego 20 Feb 45.

- SS-164 Bass scuttled as a sonar target 12 Mar 45.
- SS-184 Skipjack Bikini target sunk 25 Jul 46 raised 2 Sept 46 S(T) 11 Aug 48.
- SS-196 Searaven Bikini target Jul 46 S(T) 11 Sept 48.
- SS-203 Tuna Bikini target, S(T) 24 Sept 48.
- SS-217 Guardfish S(T) 1 Oct 61 by Dogfish and Blenny 97 Miles south of Block Island
- SS-241 Bashaw S(T) 13 Sep 69 SS-242 scuttled as salvage trainer 3 Dec 70 off Hawaii.
- SS-243 Bream S(T) 7 Nov 69 by Sculpin (SSN 590) off southern California.
- SS-259 Jack S(T) by units of US Sixth Fleet on 1 Sep 68 after return from Greece. Sinking took place within 10 Miles of 32° 16' N x 132° 05' E. (By Entemedor, note from Frank Hill)
- SS-260 Lapon Loaned to Greece 8 August 1957. Returned to US control and S(T) in 1973
- SS-262 Muskellunge S(T) 9 Jul 68 by Tench (SS-417). She still had all the spare parts, tools, etc. aboard when she made the final dive. Any of you that were in New London at that time remember how hard it was to get spare parts to keep the diesel boats running, but the Squadron had a Jarhead guarding the brow so we couldn't salvage anything.
- SS-263 Paddle (Loaned to Brazil on 18 January 1957. She is reported as having sunk on or about 30 June 1968.
- SS-270 Raton sold 12 Oct 73 but reported used as target.
- SS-274 Rock sold 17 Aug 72 but reported used as target.
- SS-282 Tunny S(T) 19 Jun 70 by USS Volador SS490
- SS-283 Tinosa Scuttled Nov 60 after use as an ASW target.
- SS-285 Balao Main hull sunk as target off Charleston, South Carolina 30° 46.5'N x 74° 11'W on 4 Sep 63. The Conning tower and shears are at Navy Memorial Museum, Washington Navy Yard.
- SS-292 Devilfish S(T) by USS Wahoo (SS 565) in 2000 fathoms of water at 37° 05'N x 124° 8' W during a MK16 Mod8 service test on 14 Aug 68.
- SS-293 Dragonet S(T) 17 Sept 61 after explosives tests in Upper Chesapeake Bay in 150 feet of water.
- SS-299 Manta target ship 49-53 S(T) 16 Jul 69 off Norfolk Va.
- SS-300 Moray S(T) 18 Jun 70 off San Clemente Island.
- SS-302 Sabalo S(T) 15 Feb 73 in Sub Sink Ex Project Thurber.
- SS-305 Skate Bikini target Jul 46 then S(T) off San Clemente on 5 October 1948.
- SS-308 Apogon Bikini target sunk 25 Jul 46 Upright on bottom 800yd SW of Test Baker Site.
- SS-309 Aspro S(T) 16 Nov 62.
- SS-311 Archerfish S(T) 17 Oct 68 in 2000 fathoms of water at Lat 32°-23.0'N and Lng. 122°-58.1'W. At 2114Z this date a MK37-2 torpedo, fired from USS Snook (SSN-592), hit the stern and detonated, but did not sink the target. This was the second of two MK37-2 torpedoes employed; the first did not acquire or attack the target. At 2226Z, after being struck broadside by a MK14-5

- torpedo, Archerfish split in half near the after battery hatch and descended to her final resting place off the coast of San Diego, California.
- SS-312 Burrfish S(T) 19Sept 69.
  - SS-315 Sealion S(T) 8 Jul68.
  - SS-317 Barbero S(T) 7 Oct 64 by Greenfish.
  - SS-324 Blenny sunk as reef off Ocean City NJ. (Book is wrong on this. She was not sunk as target but as a fishing reef off Ocean City MD.)
  - SS-331 Bugara lost under tow for target 1 Jun 71.
  - SS-337 Carbonero S(T) 27 Aug 75.
  - SS-342 Chopper sunk 21 Jul 76 while being rigged as tethered underwater target.
  - SS-347 Cubera S(T) Date unknown by USS Salmon off the coast of San Diego. This was after she was towed from Venezuela, where she had been loaned in 1972.
  - SS-362 Guavina S(T) 14 Nov 67 by Cubera with a Mk 16 off Cape Henry Va. I have a photo of the explosion from Cubera's periscope on back the date is given as 11 Nov 67.
  - SS-377 Menhaden tethered underwater target 76 later sold.
  - SS- 386 Pilotfish Sunk Bikini 25 Jul 46 raised S(T) 16 Oct 48.
  - SS-392 Sterlet S(T) 31Jul 69 by Sargo.
  - SS-393 Queenfish S(T)14 Aug 63 by Swordfish.
  - SS-395 Redfish S(T) 16 Oct 69 by Sea Fox.
  - SS-398 Segundo S(T) 8 Aug 70 by Salmon.
  - SS-399 Sea Cat test hulk 1968-72 sold 18 May 73 (also reported sunk)
  - SS-400 Sea Devil S(T) 24 Nov 64 was sunk by USS VOLADOR
  - SS-490, a unit of SUBFLOT ONE/SUBRON FIVE by a MK37-1. LCDR Glenn M. Brewer was C.O. of VOLADOR at the time. I was on the TDjC and LT John B. Thomas, a former ENC(SS) aboard SEA DEVIL actually hit the firing plunger for the shot. Torpedo hit in the After Engine Room area. Sea Devil didn't sink until shelled (5 inch) by USS Halsey (DLG) later CG.
  - SS-401 Sea Dog S(T) 18 May68.
  - SS-404 Spikefish Reported S(T) 4 Aug 64
  - SS-412 Trepang S(T) 16 Sept 69.
  - SS-416 Tiru last fleet submarine in service; planned for conversion to remote control submersible target S(T) 2 Oct 76 by USS Silversides.
  - SS-419 Tigrone S(T) on 25 Oct 76. USS Sea Devil (SSN-664) fired MK 48 warshot at submerged target. Weapon acquired several times but kept turning away . . . some conjectured at the time that the onboard computer would not validate the target for close-in due to the absence of any noise whatsoever emanating from the target which was suspended stationary from two salvage pontoons. Cable on one pontoon parted next morning in rough seas and target sank . . . Weapons Officer and TM3 on bridge of Sea Devil at the time . . . pontoon shot up out of water . . . lots of roiling air on surface . . . only flotsam spotted were pieces of wood decking.
  - SS-422 Toro Sold Apr 65 (also reported sunk)

- SS-428 Ulua suspended 12 Aug 45 used as underwater explosion test hulk Norfolk 51-58 stricken 12 Jun 58.
- SS-568 Harder S(T) off Pearl Harbor, 1991
- SS-573 Salmon for converted to shallow water sonar target. Sunk near Hudson Canyon as bottom target, June 1993
- SSG-574 Grayback 13 April 86 Sunk as target in or near Subic Bay, RPI. SS-576 Darter S(T) 7 Jan 92 off Pearl Harbor, HI. by USS Tautog (SSN 639) in a Mk 48 ADCAP test.

## **Night Time** by Mike Hemming

A rust-rimmed bullnose aimed at a rising red moon  
 Parts an inky black sea. Turning it to white foam hissing along tank tops  
 To slide aft past and to be joined by jets of cooling water.  
 Together they disappear into a far distant wake  
 Returning to the darkness from where they came.  
 The rumble of engines is the only other sound.  
 Unsynchronized it rises and falls in a pattern  
 So sweet to the ear in our silent sea  
 She glides along under a starry sky.  
 Clouds now and then hide the moon  
 The air stirred by her passing is dungaree shirt warm  
 Ruffling the hair of the watching men.  
 They watch for others that don't sail in their sight.  
 Alone they sail to another watery spot  
 To submerge at dawns first light and cover her slick blackness with a protecting  
 sea.  
 When their time is done and she is no more  
 The men will remember this silent sail to nowhere  
 As a privilege and the best there ever was.

## **Smoke** by Mike Hemming

**Smoke. It's hard to believe for some but there is an aging group of men bound together by smoke. Not the smoke people ordinarily draw into their lungs for a buzz, legal or illegal, but stinky old diesel smoke made by burning hydrocarbons. It's burned in great big old noisy diesel engines designed for railroad locomotives and transplanted into a submarine, of all places.**

**This smoke binds them together with wispy chains stronger than the finest hardened steel. Men that sit around remembering shipmates and times good and bad, their memories brought to them on grey blue clouds. Clouds of it shot out over ports of the seven seas, on lighting off for going to sea. Underway and across those seas the smoke settles to an efficiency haze, but the diesel smoke smell follows them. The smoke and sounds that shut down when reaching homeport after many days alone at sea.**

**Today, these old timers travel many miles to see, hear and once more catch that wonderful reminder of their youth. With tears in the eyes of some they lean forward to breathe it in. They take photographs of diesel smoke clouds belching from exhaust pipes of museum piece subs. Back home they show them to others and post video clips on the internet. Others sit and wait for those clips to download over slow internet connections, just to see that smoke and hear the sound.**

**It is said that the sense of smell brings back the strongest memories. If so then we are lucky ones, because our smoke is strong and memorable. Along with our smoky chains we have those memories, and neither can be removed from our hearts. Many a submariner says, "One more time, just one more time". For some, that means to go out and make another dive, for others just to hear the roar and to smell that smoke. Me, I'd like to yank a throttle lever, feel the deck plates shudder under my feet, hear the sounds, smell the smoke and be with those that are bound together by these things.**



**"Just one more time and for a little while."**

## **What do you say?** by Mike Hemming

**When a shipmate passes on?**

**When a smiling face is gone?**

**Someone who was always there.**

**Through thick and thin.**

**Who laughed at you when you fell**

**While he was pulling you to your feet.**

**The one that gave you**

**A rough time on your quals.**

**When you got your dolphins**

**He slapped you on the back,**

**And said I'm buying next time at Bells.**

**The guy that stayed behind to help**

**Then loaned you his last clean jumper.**

**So you could hit the beach together.**

**The mate that you staggered back with**

**The one always guarded your back.**

**On board he relieved you early for some much needed rest.**

**Brought you coffee just the way you liked**

**When passing through your compartment.**

**He sometimes called you ugly and stupid**

**And laughed at your stupid mistakes.**

**Then sat and listened while you told him of problems**



And helped you through the rough spots.  
If he stayed in while you were out,  
He checked on your family to see if they were OK.  
And went and got a new battery for your car.  
The one that stood his ground with you,  
When the smoke got thick  
Or the water got deep.  
He is still a shipmate  
After all these years.  
What do you say?  
The same thing he would say.  
Standing on the shore at night,  
Looking out on a moonlight sea.  
“Rest your oar, Mate“,

## **What am I?** by Mike Hemming

My eyes have seen the red sun rise over the turtle back In the North Atlantic.  
They have seen the sun set behind Mt Fuji from the cigarette deck In the war-torn Pacific.  
And squinted through a periscope at Russian spy trawlers from Cape Canaveral to the Bering Sea.  
Smiling eyes have looked from a McCann rescue chamber to greet fearful eyes in the Squalus on the cold Atlantic floor.  
Seen St. Elmo's fires ghostly green dance down the long wire in the Med  
The green flash of the sun in the Caribbean.

**Watched happiness light up families eyes on our return to grey piers during a war cold and long.**

**These eyes have watched many come and go but they forever remain Brothers of the Dolphin.**

**My ears have heard the click of Nippon's depth charge pistols and the screaming screws of Mk 14's sent in return.**

**They have rung from the thunder of big diesel engines**

**And blasts of 6-inch guns, and the crack of 40 millimeter weapons.**

**Listened to the sound of 2 blasts of the diving alarm been eager to hear the words, surface, surface, surface.**

**We have heard sea stories old and new, tried and true over bars and beer glasses round the world.**

**Chipping hammers, hissing wakes, whale songs and wars hateful clamor**

**They are all sounds that have come to my ears. on deck my nose has sampled sea air sweet**

**And below air foul and fetid with CO2. Today it yearns sometimes for a whiff**

**Of smoke and the stink of yesteryear.**

**My hands have peeled spuds, pulled throttle levers and triggers**

**Handled lines from tropic seas and opened hatches at the pole.**

**Now bent and stiff but quick to straighten and salute our flag.**

**They are always ready to slap a mate on the back**

**And give a helping hand to those in need.**

**My heart yearns to be on the land of the free**

**And yearns again to be at sea.**

**It is filled with pride at morning colors when the lonely notes of Taps is played for the fallen.**

**To see Dolphins pinned on another proud chest.**

Sometimes my hearts pride is touched with sadness

When I remember those that sailed before Never to return, 62 boats and some 4000 men

Forever to rest on the oceans deep floor. What am I?

For over 100 years from the Holland until today I have been a submarine sailor of the United States of America.

I will go to sea for 100 score Until this land needs me no more

That is what I will be. "For we will sail together again one day."

## **The Last Run** by Mike Hemming

Cold iron, a week without being run, the big diesels will be hard to start. But they will start, all preparations made, the Throttleman nods to the oiler. The oiler starts to spin the big chrome plated exhaust valve wheel. The Throttleman, rolling the engine hard with air watches the oiler, when the valve is about half open he grasps the cold throttle lever to send fuel to the cylinders. At that second, he realizes in a flash that it's the last time he will do this. But intent on procedures, he snaps back and completes the start, with all its rattling, crashing, vibrating sounds. As that engine settles out to 550 rpm warm-up speed, they both move to the other engine. There they repeat the motions that result in another series of diesel starting noises. Done, they give each other satisfied half smiles.

Their eyes quickly scan the gauge boards looking for a reason to shut back down if needed. The gauges give the okay, it's a good start on both of the mighty 1600 horsepower engines. Both then look around the engine room for possible problems and finding no oil or water leaks, give each other a quick grin signaling all is well.

After watching the temperatures come up to operating levels, the Throttleman gives over control to the eager electricians in maneuvering room. They will apply the generated kilovolts to turning the main motors for heading into homeport for some repairs, rest and relaxation. The Throttleman will be out in a week after arrival in homeport.

He will be leaving this hot crashing noisy place of power, his workplace for the last 4 years. His home, his bunk is only 40 feet aft of this, is a short commute in any world. Four years ago, he was the junior man when he came aboard, but time and advancement made this place his. For the last year, he has been the boss in here putting his stamp on the machines as much as one man can do that. His time here was mostly a joy and sometimes a pain in the butt. All in all, the hard work was met with approval and well-run machinery.

Sometime later, maneuvering watch over, the signal 'stop engines' is given. His hand now grasps the hot to touch throttle lever and pushes it firmly down. The great engine losing the power to even turn itself over, slows to a stop. This action is far quieter than its roaring, rattling start. His action repeated on the other engine a moment later silences the pounding diesel din. Valves are spun shut, fuel and lube oil levels checked and logged in. His last shutdown, a finality he doesn't realize at the time. Nor will he ever think much about it for a long time. But then one day...

## **USS Carp's Mascot** by Mike Hemming

Avast ye scurvy sailors of the deep. Gather around all ye snipes, deck apes, torpeckermen, and even officers and chiefs alike. Listen close ye bubbleheads from smokeboats and glowboats old and new. I'll spin ye a yarn, old but a true No Shitter.

Ever since Noah built his own ship to get rated as an Ensign, there have been stories of animals at sea. There will be no mention here of unicorns, humpty back camels and such in this story. Pirates had parrots we are told. Many a sailing ship took goats and pigs to sea for food. But that was in times long past, with modern refrigeration, it's no longer done. Now and then, a dog or cat became a mascot on a warship of the skimmer fleet.

Now, submarines would seem a foul and cramped place to have a pet. A few submarines have had a dog, none the less. The Blenny had a small dog, complete with a uniform. The Archerfish even boasts of having a goat. It's true, I have seen the photos. But the goat never went to sea and took the down escalator ride to even periscope depth.

But this story is about something even better, Subron Six's Seagoing Snorkeling Skunk. After seeing the Blenny's seagoing and diving dog, the sailors of the USS Carp decided to have a deep diving test depth-rated mascot too. A big discussion was held in the mess hall of what animal would be fitting to have in a submarine. Many ideas from the sublime to the ridiculous were suggested. All were shot down by the COB, a wise chief, I'm sure. Then one of the more demented bubbleheads suggested a skunk. The COB thinking that we would never find one and in one of the sadly for him weaker moments of his career said, "Okay."

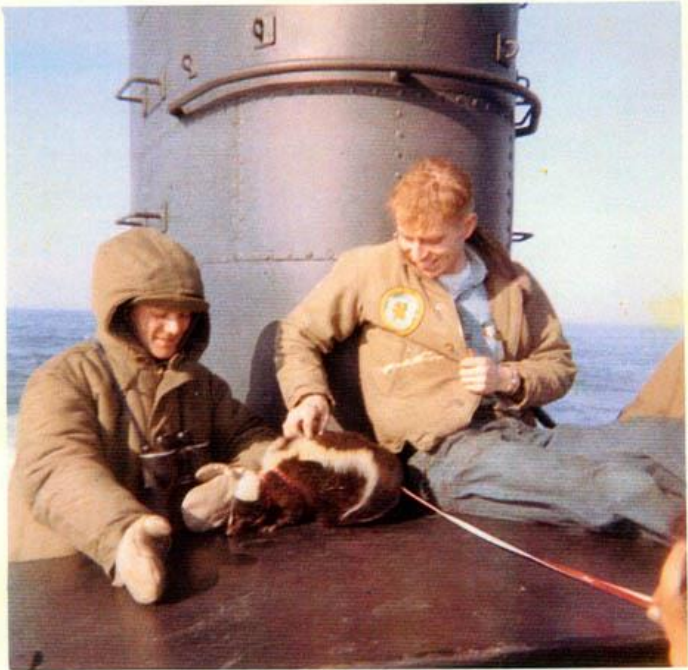
One of the mess cooks went to a New London radio station to put out a call for a skunk. Thinking it was funny the station put the call for a skunk out on the air. Well the rest is history, as a lady donated a skunk to the crew.

The COB, now realizing he had made a mistake but now was unable to figure a way to back out of his agreement. His only comment was, "If you SOBs name him after me, the Skipper or the XO, I'll keel haul the lot of you."

The question was put to the Captain, who not realizing 'Skunk' had been descended said, "What about the smell?" To which a crewmember happily replied, "Oh he will get used to it, we all did."

With a combination of mirth and disbelief flitting across his face the Skipper said OK.

After 'Skunk' became accustomed to the boat including the smell, I presume, he was let out of his cage. He made his home in a box under the Taylor Ice Cream machine by the After Battery ladder. He did travel through the boat but did have to be lifted over the sill of the watertight doors to fore and aft. He did stay mostly in the After Battery feeling safe and secure with the other animals that resided there. 'Skunk' gained weight rapidly from being fed by one and all. Like a true boat sailor, he would eat anything he could get into his mouth.



On our return to Pier 22 in Norfolk, all hands on the tender and other subs lined the rails to see 'Skunk'. Weird news travels fast even when the rule is to run silent. Also there to greet us was the Squadron Medical Officer who said 'Skunk' would have to go to a Vet and get all his shots, which was soon done. Nothing was too good for our pet.

One time we had to pull into Charleston N.C. for some repairs to our hydraulic system. A couple of the crew put 'Skunk' in his harness and leash to take him for a walk. His sea legs quickly adjusted to land travel again. However the local police lacking any admiration for a sea going snorkeling skunk brought all 3 back to the boat. The cops said, "You will not take a skunk for a walk in this town!".

I don't see what they were riled up about, 'Skunk' was far prettier than 75% of the Charleston bar hogs I saw and even smelled better than some of them.



Another time 'Skunk' was sleeping in the bottom After Battery rack just inside the airtight door when the rightful owner rolled in to sleep. Needless to say, there was much commotion in the After Battery for a while.

All the crew didn't love 'Skunk'. The mess cooks especially didn't care for when he missed his litter box under the ice cream machine. Or even when he hit it, as they were the ones that had to clean it out. This was something not normally a job specification on the normal Watch, Quarter and Station Bill for a mess crank.

The thing that cut 'Skunk's' career short as the world's only snorkeling skunk was just that, snorkeling. He couldn't equalize to the pressure changes when the head valve shut. This caused him to go a little berserk and he would run around in circles shaking his little head. This condition would also cause him to nip the ankles of crewmembers if he bumped into them. Sadly, 'Skunk' had to have his sea duty tour cut short. Kind of like an early out or a 'Kiddy Cruise' for skunks. But where should we transfer him too? We couldn't degrade the poor animal by sending him to the skimmers. After all it wasn't his fault he busted his physical. Besides, a Med Cruise was coming up and we didn't want him molested by a Frenchman and having him end up talking like Pepe Le Pew.

While at the Degaussing Station before our cruise started we gave him to the crew of the facility for a tour of shore duty. A fitting end to the story of 'Skunk' and his tour of duty in the United States Submarine Service aboard the USS Carp SS-338.

## **Saluting** by Mike Hemming

Who, what, when, and how to salute is pounded into us in boot camp leaving another of the indelible marks we have as ex-military. Through our military careers we did it and mostly correctly. When we left the service we stopped and went back to the civilian ways of doing it. After all, we didn't have to salute people anymore, just the colors. So we saluted our flag uncovered without hands over our hearts as we should. But lately a movement has started for veterans who have served this great country to salute the colors in the military manner.

I restarted saluting in the 80's twenty years after my discharge from the Navy at the funeral of my father in law, LT Lawrence E. Birge USNR. I loved and respected him for many things, just one of which was his WW2 service. As a communications officer he rode tankers from Boston to Liverpool through part of the war. After 6 years in submarines I knew the possible inferno a German torpedo could create in seconds after hitting the side of a tanker of Avgas. The quiet bravery of the men, civilian and military, that rode such ships time and time again through the cold and flaming hell of the North Atlantic deserves the respect of all.

After the service, the flag was folded and the recorded notes of taps have drifted into the sky. Music that fades but never quite fades to nothingness over the graves of those that served us so well. Yet something was missing, I needed to say good-bye and honor this veteran. Without really thinking about it I popped to my best parade ground attention and gave a perfect salute to the coffin just lowered into its forever resting place. It was right and it felt good.

It may well have ended there but not long after I was walking down the street when a bent old man came walking toward me on unsteady feet. The eyes looked out under a ball cap brim with "Guadalcanal Marine" on it were bright and clear. As he came to me I slowed and saluted saying, "Thank you for your service, Sir." Smiling and returning it, he answered, "You don't need to salute an old enlisted Marine son." My answer surprised me, "It was an honor to do it, Sir"

There was my answer; it was an honor to show such a man respect. We saluted while in the service to show respect. Now I can't do it because I am no longer in uniform? As my good friend and shipmate Dex Armstrong once said, "Turn over your dolphins, is there an expiration date on the back?" "If there isn't, you still are a submariner."

Well, there is no expiration date on the fact that we are armed forces veterans of the United States of America either. If they can burn our flag under the guise of freedom of speech, which is their right, then we can salute it, which is our right.

Hence forth, when covered with a military style ball cap, I will salute, our flag in parades, during the National Anthem, during the Pledge of Allegiance, Medal of Honor winners, at the graves of my shipmates and others who have served, and anyone I deem worthy of the honor it shows.

*Michael Hemming A veteran of the United States Navy Submarine Service 1962 to 1968.*

## **Years in Chambray Shirts** by Mike Hemming

This evening, I grabbed a shirt off the hanger that I had bought last summer made of chambray like our old dungaree shirts. The material sliding up my arms and across my back brought back memories of those shirts. I looked into the mirror to see an

old face in a new shirt, not the young face in an old faded shirt I remembered. When we think of those days we mostly think of ourselves and shipmates in dungarees. As well we should, we spent far more time in chambray shirts than we did in dress canvas. Every working day in port and every day at sea for weeks on end we wore that uniform. We lived in it at sea, day and night, on watch or off. Most of us slept in those shirts just kicking off our shoes to roll into an empty rack for some Z's.

The first real salty looking sailor I can remember was in a dungaree shirt. Not some starched, 'pole up his ass' Master At Arms surface skimmer puke type. This was a real sea going first class in a faded to almost white Kleenex soft shirt. Remember how nice that felt when they got like that? And how you tried to keep one going for one more cruise sealing tears and holes with masking tape on the inside as a quick sew job? I had two of those by the time I got married. This freaked my new bride out when she kept finding balls of soggy wadded up masking tape in the washer and wondered where they came from. My explanation made her shake her head in disbelief. Anyway, I wanted to look like that salty first class. I made first class and had shirts that were faded to near white but that was the only connection I had with him. My shirts were often torn and always stained with black engine grease and fuel oil. If they were the ones I stood still watches in, the nitercake for cleaning the stills had eaten huge holes in them. I came to realize while I might be at least a little salty, I would always look like 'Joe Shit the Ragman' in my most of my dungarees. But now forty years later, I remember myself looking like that first class, sharp and salty. Yeh, I know its selective memory, but it's my memory.

Those shirts were modified by us as needed, sleeves could be shortened for on deck working in hot tropical climes. Or they could be cut or torn completely off for at sea engine room watches. The cuffs unbuttoned and rolled back two laps to look cool. Or the sleeves rolled all the way up to the bicep if you didn't want to cut them off. They could be worn tails in or out, buttoned or unbuttoned as needed according to the temperature. The two button closed pockets could hold a wheel book and a couple of pens, if the owner thought he was important and could read and write. Otherwise a pack of cigarettes was about all that we carried. If you couldn't button it closed, you knew when you leaned over on below decks watch to check bilges, whatever was in the pocket would end up in the lower level.

In the pre-poopy suit navy, you were supposed to have an iron-on crow on the left sleeve. The crows that peeled off after five washings if you didn't sew them on to boot. I never had them, but I did write '1st class' on my sleeve after getting a ration from an Orion puke for being out of uniform. I knew I was a petty officer, my shipmates knew it, what did I care if some skimmer knew or not? You were supposed to have your last name over the left pocket. Most of us didn't. Again, your shipmates knew it and the last thing you wanted was a tender MAA being able to read it. If he didn't have you cornered with your cumshaw items why give him the advantage of knowing your name if you had running room? Did you ever borrow a shipmate's shirt with his name on it to pull off some nefarious naval crime on a surface craft?



One time I found in the rag bin a piece of shirt that had an ESSO gas patch on it. I cut the patch off and glued it onto my shirt with a 'B' inked onto it.

When we reach that silver submarine tied at the golden pier in the sky, the uniform of the day will be washed to a faded almost white Kleenex soft chambray shirt and Seafarer dungarees. That's how I want to spend the rest of forever. Finally, I will look like that real first class. Hell, I'll even iron on a crow and stencil my name over the pocket if that's what it takes for admission.

**Not to be outdone, Adrian Stuke has a few things to say about Dex...**

## **The Day Dex Died** by Adrian Stuke

I shouldn't tell this story because I never did repay Dex the white Navy jumper I ruined for him. It is another classic case of saving his ass once again. Oh well, not to worry, Dex really can't read anyway. He dictates all his stories to Solveig.

It must have been a slow night at Bells because we ended up across the street at Lovey's. Lovey's was like walking into any bus terminal toilet. Any bar in the world smells like stale beer, but not Lovey's..... I think it was called essence of Pine Sol.

As described in the Plan of the Day, a fight broke out among some surface scuds. It was a real knock-down, drag out. Dex and I were in the back, probably eating chicken gizzards or some other culinary delight known to come out of the fine establishments along Hampton Blvd. Ever wondered how food can smell so good and taste like old bow lines?

All of a sudden, the doors open and in comes a whole herd of SP's blowing those damn whistles they gave them. Well, I didn't need the mentality of a rocket scientist to figure out we were busted. I threw catsup in Dex's face and on his jumper. I threw him over my shoulder and started carrying him out the door yelling this man was injured bad. Now back then we didn't have Halogen bulbs so it wasn't hard to pull off.

We got outside and here sits a whole covey of SP paddy wagons and everybody from the Norfolk base who had duty that night that they rounded up and gave a SP armband . I'm yelling that I need to get to the Orion sick bay, right, because the man is hurt bad. You got it... They bought it. Drove Dex and I right on the pier to the tender. The SP got out of there fast as I think he was on the verge of an orgasm because he had to load up back at the bar.

Well, the next day here comes a SP wagon right up to the Requin. Seems as though the driver had remembered Dex's ship patch and he was there to fill out a report. Well, I was topside at the time with the usual suspects in the topside gang and intercepted him at the guard shack. I explained Dex had gotten his throat cut in the

bar fight, and the Orion did their best to save him but he had to be transferred to the base hospital due to all the blood loss. I can still see the SP standing there with his report. He just closed his book and left. Thanks Hunt's... You saved our butts that night.

## **Dex Captures Frogman** by Adrian Stuke

Dex's return trip to Bermuda brought to mind another of mine and my mates adventures.

They have closed the Naval Base down now, so it is no longer a security secret. In the 1961 time frame of the cold war, the Bermuda Naval Base was to be used as the Presidential command center in case of an all-out attack on the USA. Needless to say, the security at the base had to be at its highest level at all times. Security was so tight that the waters were even full of hydrophones to detect any type of an attack from any direction and/or method.

The Requin was on a training mission and we had some guys on board who were from a UDT outfit. Anyway, we were underway about a week before their mission took place so Dex and I got to know several of the UDT/FROGMEN. It has to be noted at this point that these guys were a special unit within the UDT's. I can't remember what their exact title was for this, but it was the early days of the Navy SEALS. I know that the Navy SEALS weren't official until 1962 but bet your ass we had them prior to announcing to the world about our special ops unit. Got to love that old cold war shit we used to do. Anyway, one night we came up to periscope depth, several miles off-shore, and the UDT team made their underwater escape from the Requin's forward escape hatch, rubber boat and all.

The purpose of their mission was a "Red Cell" operation to check national security at the base. Dex and I became friends with one guy named Jenkins, Jason, Jennings, or something like that, and made arrangements to go to a local watering hole the coming weekend for some suds and loose women. By the way, they did come back aboard when we got into port as we did take them back to Norfolk/Virginia Beach.

Well, we did go on liberty with "J" and he told us their mission was a total success, and in a short time the 8-man UDT team had captured the entire base. Well, needless to say, the Bermuda Naval base became the behind for everyone in Washington to take a bite out of and they were pissed about it because the base reacted with canceling all liberty on the base.

Dex, "J," and I were having a few and in walks three Shore Patrol from the Naval Station, who start giving "J" a bunch of crap about all the trouble his team did to the base. The next thing I know one of the Shore Patrol is poking "J" with his night stick trying to start a fight. I remember thinking that there was 3 of them and 3 of us

so all was cool, not to worry. All of a sudden "J" jumps up from the table and climbs right in their shit. Dex and I hadn't seen moves like that, so we just stood and watched him do his thing. Believe me, he was finely tuned/trained fighting machine. He didn't need our help. Hell, Dex and I were like his corner men.

Up pops the devil and in walks more base Shore Patrol and they have a whole herd of them in a van outside of the bar. They give "J" a hard time and even put him in handcuffs and were going to haul him to the brig for fighting, etc. Well, out comes my Shore Patrol band from my special Bermuda liberty pack. Remember, the boats had to provide several people from the in-port duty section to do Shore Patrol duty so there was never any suspicion when I had to go to my Batman utility belt for the SP armband. Dex and I walk over to them and proceed to tell them that "J" was on our boat for his mission and that he had stolen Navy property while on board and the skipper wanted him back because he was going to hang him. These guys are on the brink of an orgasm thinking about him in the brig after what the UDT did to them.

Although they turned him over to us to take him back, I realized a slight problem Dex and I had overlooked: no handcuff keys. The three of us are walking down the street with "J" in some serious handcuffs, and we are trying to find the bar that the Requin Shore Patrol personnel are in. Hey, real boat sailors don't write up boat sailors. I would go in the bars with my arm band showing and Dex would stay outside with "J." I remember walking outside of the first bar, and by the way he was holding on to his arm, thinking Dex had caught a Frogman. We finally found the right bar and ran into our guys and got some handcuff keys and unlocked "J."

Now that I think about it, I do believe there might have been an article in the National Enquirer about Dex's Frogman capture...

Now, I know what the article was about: *'Frogman captures the rare Dex species.'* Got to love my mate...If anyone out there was on this UDT special team aboard the Requin in 1961, please contact Dex or I, and tell us what th' hell was "J's" name.

'Laugh for the health of it' Adrian Stuke

**Another 'demented' contributor to the After Battery, Mr. Billy Bob "Launcher" Lary.**

**Jaws** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

Well there we were, at the marina, we had finally arrived... No thanks to a certain TMC. We had stopped in town, while passing through, and bought a lot more beer. We loaded up the sailboat and took off out into the sound. We headed to another marina to pick up the girls... Oh, oh, bad news... Only one showed up, guess who she was waiting for? Yep, Billy Bob's luck was still holding out... She was JW's old girlfriend... Looking for him.

We motored back out into the sound and dropped anchor. We decided to go skinny dipping. We'd jump off the bow and swim to the stern and climb back up using a small jacob's ladder. I was a little hesitant about this plan, since I had just gone to the movies and had seen the movie 'JAWS'. Now, I had never been afraid to swim anywhere, until I saw that movie, but I went anyway.

We had been swimming for a while and decided to take a break. We sat forward of the cabin, drinking beer and tossing the empties out into the water and watched them sink (I know, I know, I feel bad about it now) and if they didn't sink we had to jump in, swim out to it and sink it. Well, ol' Billy Bob chugged one, crunched it and heaved that sonvabitch out into the briny deep, and naturally the little bastard floated. So as per the rules, I dove in, swam out to the can and held it under water 'til it sank.

Without me knowing it, JW had slipped into the water and was hanging onto the anchor line. As I neared the bow, he dove under water and swam underneath me and brushed my leg... BOY, HOWDY, DID I MOVE!! I got my narrow ass out of the water, like right now!!!! JW almost drowned, he was laughing so hard... His girlfriend was also laughing so hard that she damn near fell out of the boat. Well, he's laughing too hard to get onboard by himself and she was in no condition to help him either, and I was damn sure not helping him... Finally, he climbs onboard and tells me that he has never seen anybody move that fast. I didn't know how I got on the boat until he told me. JW said, "It was the weirdest thing... It's like you climbed an invisible ladder on the bow. One minute you were in the water and the next you were standing on the bow. It actually looked like a giant leap!"

To say I was scared would be an understatement...I still like skinny dipping, don't like swimming in the ocean, don't care for warm beer, but I do enjoy eating shark steaks and I still love listening to 'FRANKENSTEIN'. Billy Bob Lary

## **Kiss Kiss** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

I thought that's what I've been tellin' ya all day. Now I need to come up with something that is really dumb, stupid or embarrassing other than the REDMAN smoking thing.

Let's see... Oh yes, one day back in launcher land on ye ol' SSBN 626 Daniel Webster (my second boat, first one after having the sex change - TM to MT) I was just relieved of the Missile Compartment Roving Patrol (for those of you not in the know, that's basically a fire and security watch).

Well, I was havin' a good time cuttin' up with a few of the other guys when our AWEPS comes around tube #1 to the watch station, to check up on his guys (he was the Missile AWEPS).

A break in the story to let you know a little bit about Ltjg Queen (seriously); a very religious man (not saying this is or was a bad thing, just setting the stage), very intelligent, no nonsense, short (5'1") and of African American heritage (again, not saying this is or was a bad thing, just setting the stage). Me, 6'2", white, smart enough to tie my boon dockers, I believe in the Almighty and say my prayers, love to goof off and be a jokester, not yet married and like to have a good time (panty games anyone?). OK, you got enuff of the picture for what happens next.

Mr. Queen walks up to the workbench and sez somethin' to the effect of , "How's it goin' guys?"

Everybody mumbles something incoherent, when suddenly something possesses me. I reach over, grab Mr. Ltjg 'No Nonsense short guy' and give him a lip lock. Not a little peck on the cheek or something dainty like that, NOOOO!!, it had to be a full blown, right on the lips, wet one. POW, KABOOM, WHOOSH! He was gone. Without so much as a 'I love ya' big guy'.

Well, the Chief was on watch up in control (COW I think), so Mr. Queen runs right up to him and tells on me, sorta like running to dad about stealing a comic book or something. MTC Singer calls back to the launcher operation station (LOS) to have a talk with me. He says, "Lary, what the hell are you doing to Mr. Queen?" I said,

"Nothing much, I just got off watch and kissed him good-nite." The chief tells me he didn't like it and to stop pickin' on him. He said, " I just got him trained, dammit! Don't go reverting back to TM and ruin him!" I said okay, and ever since then, Ltjg Queen stayed clear of me whenever the chief wasn't around. Oh, them was the days... Billy Bob Lary .

## **On The Beach** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

I've got a little laffer fer ya'. It was my first boat (Andrew Jackson SSBN-619 (Blue) 7/74-4/78). I was a non-qual dink TM3 and I'd only been onboard for about 2-3 months. My sea-daddy (TMC(SS) Langer) and the COB (ETCM(SS) Ken "Kenny TWO STARS" Duffy) were drinking buddies, and since I'm 6'2" and 200 lbs., my daddy "volunteers" me for everything for the COB.

We were headed for the Bahamas (Andros Island) for MK-48 certs and sonar tests. An FTB3 dink friend of mine and I had earned time off for "all our hard work" and were given 3 days on Andros Island (I guess they didn't need my big dumb-ass for the snubber line on the reload party). Well anyway, because of my close association with the COB he calls us into the goat locker (no disrespect intended) to inform us of the particulars of this "wonderful" liberty site (6 men to every women and of those, 4 of those women were MARRIED!!!!). He tells us of the cheap booze, warm sun and a NUDE BEACH!!! Kenny TWO STARS tells us that it's down the beach on the left from the base. "It's the second cove that you come to.", he says.

Well, with no reason to doubt this senior enlisted leader we take the launch the next day for our much deserved R&R. The first day it rained so we can't use information our COB gave us, the next comes and we're up at the crack of dawn. Can't wait to see all the NUDE women (even if they did belong to someone else, the testosterone high level alarm was ready to sound off).

Well we had chow and walked around the base a little to see the sights then had chow again (we were only 20, what do you expect, our brain was split between two parts of our bodies, groin and stomach). With part of our body taken care of, we headed off for a pleasurable time on the beach. When we get to the "cove" we take our swimming trunks OFF!!!

We take off walking down the beach and up ahead we spot two lawn chairs, unfolded with what we believed was NAKED women. Well they were women and they were nice looking and young, BUT they both had their bathing suits on. Not thinking this peculiar, we slowed down to get a better look and to return the favor (in case they were the rare non-attached kind). One of them hears us and slowly sits up, pulls down her sunglasses (I bet you thought I was gonna say her top), looks at us and says, "What the hell do you guys think you're doing?" I said that we were just walking on the beach. "Why don't you have your swimming suits on?", she asks.

I said that since this was a nude beach we were gonna walk around butt naked. They both started laughing their asses off, when they were able to catch their collective breaths, the second says, between gasping breaths, "There are NO NUDE beaches on this island!"

Well needless to say we both turned several shades of red, turned our backs and put our trunks on. We went back and got trashed, tried to avoid seeing those two again. The next afternoon we got the launch and headed back to the boat, when we reach topside, there is the COB waiting for the liberty party to return. We eyeball him, he knows that we did it and starts laughing, he laughed at us for the next three days. Hell the WORD got put out REAL fast and everybody got a good yuk - yuk at our expense (even we laughed at how stupid and gullible we were).

My shipmate moved on, we lost touch, I talk to my sea dad every now and again, but I haven't heard from Kenny TWO STARS in years. Ken if you read this, thanks for the lesson. Billy Bob Lary .

## **The Attack of the Scottish Taxi Stand** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

I don't think I can out do what the smoke boat sailors did. we were more refined... Not to mention our locations were extremely limited (boomers). But I do have one foreign experience that didn't involve paint.

Sometime in the warm months of '77, while stationed aboard SSBN-619 Andrew Jackson, we were refitting out of Dunoon in the Firth of Clyde (I'm not making that up folks). Well some of us 'weaponeers' finally get a chance to hit the beach and we head for a favorite local watering hole (they call them pubs over there, I can't remember the name of the place, only went to it this one time).

For whatever reason, the group of us that went didn't bring much money with us, so we were just gonna have a few beers then head back to the boat for some of the shut eye that we'd been denied for so long. Three of us junior TMs had our own booth facing the door. Well, we were almost done when three young ladies walk in, with NO GUYS hanging on to them.

Testosterone pumps went into overdrive, but quickly slowed when we remembered that we didn't have much money left. We invited them to sit with us and much to our surprise they accepted. We guys bought a couple of rounds, quickly depleting our resources. When it came time to order another round, we sheepishly explained that we only had cab fare back to the pier. "No problem Yank" says one, "We'll buy a couple".

Now might be a good time to add a little bit of info that the TMC gave us from our first patrol / liberty (the one before this one) out of Holy Loch (Dunoon).

Some of the women want to get out of there and move to the states. They can't for one reason or the other (mostly lack of money, I think). So they entice or seduce the youngsters into wedlock and get to move to the states. But sometimes the little brain disengages the big brain (you know what I mean) and you forget the small details. Well anyway, some of what comes next is a little fuzzy, but here goes.

I remember at least 2 beers with the girls, a beer that was different from the weak cat piss that I had been drinking. One minute, I was sitting next to this young blonde beauty and the next thing I know I'm laying on a blanket on a grassy hill next to a beach somewhere outside of town with the very same young blonde. It's a little breezy, but not cold, we were both half undressed, when I had this sudden urge to fill the Firth.

I walk over towards the water and fell off the damn wall onto the beach (read rocks). I took my leak and had to find a place to climb back up.

After all this I'm starting to really sober up, I realize what almost happened. I walked over to the blanket, picked up my shirt and started walking in the direction of all the bright lights (either the pier or the town). I still had my cabfare so I know wasn't ripped off.

I tried flaggin' a couple of cabbies down, but they wouldn't stop, which was making me even angrier than I already was. I was pretty upset with myself for almost being a hubby / daddy before my time. Eventually, I happened upon a taxi stand.

They look just like some of our bus stops here, glass panels for viewing in and out. A couple of cabs drive by without even slowing, even after seeing me. When the third one drove by, one of the panels jumped right up onto my hand, then another, and another. I was able to ward them off finally and walked down the road to the next stand.

This one was a lot friendlier... How I finally got a cab to stop I don't remember.

I was dumped off at the pier (probably for twice the cost, since I only had American and he EXCHANGED it for me, what a nice guy) and only had to get past the bobbies (Scottish police) at the head of the pier. When I held up my hands to be frisked, he noticed the little cut on my hand, well I thought it was little, my hand was all red from dried blood.

Well they held me for the shore patrol (good thing for me they were boat sailors and not the tender guys - need I explain). The bobbies took a statement (for some reason they didn't believe that I was attacked!).

One of the bobbies drove down to the stand and found 3 glass panels broken. I offered to pay, but they said a report would be sent to my submarine with the complete cost of repair. Well, the chief was a little upset, the XO restricted me to the boat for the rest of the refit (we were only there one more day before sea trials).

The locals either never sent a bill or it got paid by someone else. After sea trials, the chief, being the good guy that he was, let me go ashore for some fish 'n chips and some brew at the EM club before we went to sea. Whew!! Billy Bob Lary .

## **Mongo** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

I don't see what the fuss is all about... NBF, DBF...WTF, a bubblehead is a bubblehead, some just do it deeper, longer and cleaner.

I mean I went to sea on a boomer for 8 years and I was at sea with guys that woulda qualified as a smoke boat sailor just by lookin' at 'em or smellin' 'em, at least that's what I heard.

Talk about being too stupid to be nuclear qualified, how about a guy that engraves his name on CRES piping...WITH HIS TEETH!, drinks hydraulic fluid, chews on glass like candy, or bites the heads off live sea creatures? Kinda sounds like someone destined to be a smoke boat sailor. Right?

Wrong... This guy rode nukes, actually boomers. This guy was a TMSN and lived his life like he was a throw back to a bygone era. I think he could've helped keep Dex, Olgoat and Cowboy stay in some deep doo-doo. Hell, they coulda STILL be in the hooscow! I was with him on several occasions, but I was lucky.



His name, for now we'll go by his boat name, Mongo, as in "Blazing Saddles" fame. I've seen Mongo in some of his crazy younger days while we were both on the 619B. What he did later in life was probably still wild, but I don't think that even he could continue to be as crazy as he was then.

Some 10-12 years after the exploits of the infamous duo of Dex and Stuke, Mongo and I had our own snake ranch and did our share of drinking and collecting panties. Most of the trouble that we saw together was in Charleston, SC.

One time in particular comes to mind now. We were in a bar on Reynolds St. (don't remember the name, just that it was a biker bar). Mongo and I went sniffin' and soon found a pair of honeys sittin' all by their lonesome. We ordered a pitcher of beer and sat at their table. We was have a good time for a while, jus' sittin' there drinkin' our beer and makin' nice with the ladies, when in walks a couple o' dudes in leather. They look our way and head towards our table.

Let me tell you, they was the biggest & ugliest guys I had ever seen that close up. They had chains everywhere, following them came the rest of the gang. I was just about to fill my britches and get the ass whoppin' of my young life... But not Mongo, nnoooo not him. He calmly reaches over and pours himself another beer. At this point the first guy reaches our table and hollers, "Hey, assholes, what the f\*ck are you doin' with our ladies?"

Mongo doesn't say a word, he puts the now empty pitcher up to his face and takes a big bite out of it! Well let me tell you, those guys stop dead in their tracks, and they stare at him for a minute. The first biker starts to say something else and Mongo just starts CHEWING THE DAMN GLASS!!

I'm here alive and with all my original parts because of that pitcher. We didn't get our asses whapped, instead we all just became drinkin' buddies, but did had to give up the panty raid though, we just sat around drinkin'. They even dropped us off at the main gate. We did get a free drunk out of it and we were welcomed back anytime.

Who sez what you ride makes you different? I say it's how you live life that makes the difference. Smoke boat or Nuke, doesn't matter, it's the impression you leave on the world that determines your mettle. I say that if you can go into a metal tube and close the hatch, knowing that you are going to purposely sink a perfectly good ship, then you are truly a bubblehead, period. Billy Bob Lary .

## **Halfway Nite** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

Always a fun time, half-way through the "BOOMER" patrol you have a little party, complete with entertainment of a competitive nature, "The Beauty Pageant".

In this politically correct society of today, this is probably a lost art, converting a butt-ugly boat sailor to one of the "Fairest Maids at the Ball". I believe that was the purpose of all those "pig contests" during our misspent time on the beach, finding the fugliest woman in town so that you have a model to build from.

Anyway, one patrol on the yusta fish (626G) we (the Missile division) cheated. We started off with a non-qual of exceptional beauty. A fair-haired, blue-eyed lad of slender build and straight white teeth (all of them his, even). Wait a minute I'm getting ahead of myself...

We picked up the boat in Kings Bay, Georgia, the "new base", for a warm water refit (we made our patrols out of Holy Loch Scotland). At the time (Nov '79) there's not much for a sailor to do in the immediate area, Hell they were even showing the movies on the side of a building, but however comma, the base provided a bus to and from the drinking establishments in Florida (Jacksonville ? the memory fades here).

Well, after we had decided who our "Queen" was gonna be we went to town with a mission...bring back items that will or might actually get us a 'win' in the beauty pageant.

Now some guys would ask their wives or girlfriends for certain items that they wouldn't want back, or the most desperate ones actually went out and bought them. Not us though, using our manly skills, we went forth in true submariner fashion to talk strange girls out of their "personals" and have them donate them for a worthwhile cause.

To all of the TMs (and DBFRs) out there I want you to know I taught those MTs well, those young lads did us proud, we went back to the boat after one night with all of the garments necessary to outfit any "lady". We had a couple pairs of panties to choose from, we had various types of lingerie, teddies, halter-top spaghetti-strapped things, a feather bola, scarves, crotch-less panty hose, the works. Hell my sea pup even got a pair of shoes that fit him.

Not only were these ladies gracious enough to donate these articles but they sprayed enough fu-fu juice on them that berthing in the missile compartment smelled just like a cat house and you could almost expect the infamous Thelma that we hear so much about, to step around a missile tube and promote her girls (not that I know personally what those places smell like, that's hearsay knowledge).

Well, we now have all the stuff needed to create our "Goddess", the only problem now is that we have to wait a gahdam month and a half (35 friggin' days) to put it all together. We've also gotta explain for the first few zone inspections, why our bunks smell so funny. "Sailor, that rack don't smell like no amine or hydraulic fluid to me." "Is that an atmosphere contaminate you got there?" "No sir, just something my wife sent in the last care package."

"Well I wouldn't hang my wife's panties out in plain view like that, someone just might want them worse than you" "Aye aye sir." Not to mention all the wild dreams you had with that scent constantly around you.

Halfway nite finally arrives, our entry decides that he's going to shave his arm pits, legs, and chest, basically his whole body for effect. Then I get to "paint" a tattoo on his "cheek," my favorite Ltjg walks into the compartment, sees what I'm doing and immediately leaves. I paint a rose on his little butt, which becomes his name for the contest. He puts on his selected outfit and his make-up (yes we even got some lipstick and rouge).

We had this thing won from the get-go, but to insure his victory, our little Queen sat in the skippers lap and "LAP DANCED", blew in his ear, then finished his short journey into Daniel Webster history. What I don't understand is, why none of the wives wanted any part of the costumes!?!?!? We had to keep them for future patrols.

We went to sea for a reason, but we had fun too. Many thanks to all the girls at the "TOP OF THE TIDE", "GOOD TIME CHARLEY'S" and the infamous "BOOBIE TRAP" who contributed to our fun and good times. Billy Bob Lary .

## **Angles and Dangles** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

'Angles and Dangles' (sounds like a cross between geometry and butt cheese), is not a term many DBFers are familiar with, but every 'glow in the dark' subsurface sailor has some experience with. For us 'boomer' guys it meant that sometime during our sea trials, we would pretend that we were a glider and try to take this big long black tube and turn it into a ballerina. At times it seemed like the skipper was trying to stand the ol' girl on either her nose or her toes.

5 degrees up or down or 10 degrees up or down didn't phase too many of us, but try takin' a 35 degree down bubble or how about a 30 degree turn... This may piss-off the skipper, if someone finds out the hard way what's not stowed for sea and at the same time everyone onboard will find out if they're ready to ride submersibles.

I've seen (or done) numerous things during these evolutions... Stand on non-skid decking and act like a meter needle (try saying that 10 times real fast), sit on a navy blanket at one end of the Missile Compartment Middle level, port side and slide from one end to the other (Praying that the doc or the nukes don't open the door to their office. Had that happen a couple of times... No teeth or bones broke, just had a few hellacious boo-boos... I mean bruises). But ya gotta be careful at the end of the ride, you don't want to smash into the fire control switchboard or fly up into the scrubbers and burners... You hit one of them and break something, it better be you.

Another thing we did was to go into the mess decks and hold yourself up between two benches and swing back and forth, watching the deck move out away from you. Hey you know what they say, "Simple pleasures, simple minds..." It's not too hard to entertain the weak minded. See what GOOD times you smoke boaters miss... Billy Bob Lary .

## **Wet Trainer** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

My first experience with the DC trainer (that's Damage Control for the non-quals reading this), is one event that I'll NEVER forget.

After going through sea trials, then a DASO (Demonstration and Shakedown Operation), we (SSBN-619 B) turned the boat over to the other crew. I know that this hard for a lot of you DBFers to understand, but that's the way boomers operated. We were pampered and we prepared ourselves for a winter in New England. If you've been here in the winter, you KNOW what I'm talkin' about.

Now I'm from the midwest, having spent many a winter in either Wisconsin or Michigan, so cold and snowy winters didn't bother me. However, those days never prepared me for the Wet Trainer portion of our DC Training. When I last went through DC Training, it was on lower base. Now they have a new facility closer to the NEW barracks. In this first encounter, I went with both the Missile Tech div and Launcher TM div in the dead of winter Feb '76.

After going through the normal 2 days of classroom instruction and OBA training, we got to spend 2 glorious days getting wet. Friggin' water so cold that I think it killed all the male sperm in me (We know that women have that icy stare / touch / speech and that this wouldn't faze the female sperm). At least the coldness made my jewels numb... In fact, I was afraid they would break before they got warm. I had never felt water so friggin' cold!!!!

We had a sharp bunch of people and passed with flying colors, but in order to pass one particular drill, some of us performed above and beyond the call of duty. There was one time that, since we had stopped all the leaks given to us during one flooding drill (In a timely manner... Not record setting, but close) THE INSTRUCTORS DECIDED TO GIVE US MORE LEAKS!!!!!! (Assholes). But, we were out of bandit material, DC plugs and most all the things that were needed to stop water from coming into the people tank.

Being the NQP's that we were, us JUNIOR guys asked, "What the hell are we supposed to do now?" My bright-ass TMC sez, "Use your clothes."

Yeah right I thought, you can kiss my ass, I'm cold enough now and you want me to TAKE OFF MY CLOTHES?!?! "That's the only way we're gonna pass", he sez.

"What about you?", I ask. The sonuvabitch just grabs the corner of his friggin' collar and shakes it at me.

What do you think happened? About 7 or 8 of us stripped down to our skivvies to stop all the damn leaks, hell with as many 'holes' that there were in this boat, we could have drained some gahdam noodles. Did I mention that I was "FRIGGIN' COLD!!!

But at least I knew that in an emergency we could stop most water from coming into our home away from home. After we were done I asked the wise ol' TMC, "Chief, why was the water so gahdam cold?" TMC sez, "Hell that's good ol' water straight from the Thames river. There's a leak in the storage tank, so they're pumpin' it in right from the river. Besides dumbass, if you think this is cold, try stoppin' a leak while in the north Atlantic... You wanna talk about cold?"

"HELL NO, I don't wanna talk about cold, I AM COLD!! So cold, I can't feel my manhood..." "That's what she said..."

"So now you'll be used to standing topside in the dead of winter in Scotland, a place where they only have 2 seasons... Wind & rain or wind & snow... Always cold, besides, it builds self-esteem."

"Honest to gawd chief, my self-esteem is the same color as my dungarees, and I think my gonads are too, can't we get the hell outta here?"

I've never been to the new trainer... Hear that it's real nice, heated water and all (Heard they import the water from the tropics) Too many bluejackets stayed blue I guess. BTW, I never did find out where the water came from. If not the river, then they must had a spare storage tank IN THE RIVER! Did I mention that I was really, really, REALLY COLD? Billy Bob (brrrr) Lary

## **Amazon Women** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

One of GOD's greatest and loveliest creations, is women. I love women... Like to look at 'em, like to smell 'em... Used to like to touch 'em, but now, I'd get it cut off if I did.

Women... All ages, stages, shapes, sizes, colors & smells. Tall ones, short ones, round ones, thin ones... But there is one special kinda woman that if you ever meet, you'll never, ever forget.

I was first introduced to AMAZON WOMEN while on SSBN-619 B (Andrew Jackson). Seems that the guy in charge of getting our sea movies liked Amazon Women movies. You name it, we probably saw it. That's where I first met them.. Movie stars

(kinda)... Bunches of 'em... 'B' movies... Nothin' more entertaining than poor acting and nekkit women.

I'd seen few 'BIG' women until then, mostly my elder aunts, but not BIG MUSCLE-bound honeys. At first I was able to maintain my flat-lander innocence, I only saw 'certain' women... In the picture shows... Yeah, right.

Then one night, sometime in '76, while in Charleston, SC in drydock, a few of us hit the beach. An HM3, ET3, TMSN and just a plain ol' E-3, of course me too. Well, being short on cash, we head on over to the AMVETS club (I think most o' you guys know where it is... This ain't no geography lesson). We're in the club lookin' for an 'SS' night (suds and sex).

Well it's a rather busy night, but we manage to get a table, we've already downed a couple when in walks this honey, followed by one of the boat flick's movie star, come alive. She wasn't messcook ugly, just BIG... Everywhere. Hell, she woulda made a good size TM or a puny EN. Anyway, we have a couple of extra chairs, so we invite them to join us and since it was so crowded, they accepted. The night progressed, we danced, we drank, we drank, we drank, we danced until our HM3 was rubber-legged shit-faced. Somewhere along the way, we lost our 'honey', but our AMAZON stayed right with us. A little while later, she suggests that we move the party to her house. "Where do you live?", one of the less drunk of us asks. "Just 2 blocks past the gate.", she sez.

So we leave, we're walkin', well some of walked... Some of us staggered, yet again one of us was being basically carried, towards the 'party'...yeah right. One chick (BIG girl, but still one) and five guys.

Anyway, near the entrance to the gate, our corpsman performs one of the wonders of being drunk... Power puke. Well the guys carrying him decide to take him back to the boat and my wimpy TMSN buddy (not MONGO) decides he's going back also! Well, they abandon me and leave me with 'BIG BERTHA' all by myself. But being a TM3, I've got a reputation to uphold, so I figured I'm gonna handle things just fine.

Wrong. Bertha and I get to her place in a short time and things start to warm up. First, she gets a bottle of wine and a couple of kitchen glasses... Who needs fancy. Well, we make nice for a while... You know that romance thing. Then we move towards her room, when it's become evident that things have progressed in a mutual direction. But, as soon as we crossed that threshold to her bedroom, it was quite evident ol' Queenie was in charge. Men, if you've never experienced anything like this, DON'T.

She yanked me around and put me in positions and made me do things I didn't think were possible. Five guys - one girl (hell with that... Amazon), yeah, it woulda worked. I think this girl either wrote the scripts for some of those Amazon movies or at least starred in several of 'em. But a good time is a good time. Didn't need to

collect any panties for a souvenir. I walked bow legged for a week and slept all I could for 3 days. I never saw her again. Oh, the energy of youth. Billy Bob Lary

## **Dancing At The Boobie Trap** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

Most Floridians know these landmarks. A lot of them think of them as eye sores, but to female-deprived subsurface warriors, they were a shrine.

The 'Boobie Trap' is a bar (Designed specifically to look like a huge pair of tits... A bodacious pair of breasts someone just left sitting on the side of the road.) in which lovely young things dance around taking their tops off and perform various gyrating acts in front of these very same sea going adventurers, exciting them to the point of stupidity. There were several such establishments throughout Florida, the exact number I don't know, but I DO know of four.

One night in particular, sometime in Nov '79, about 3-4 months after I got married, I visited one with a bunch of guys from the Daniel Webster (SSBN 626). I had just converted from TM to MT at the start of this year and was determined that these guys gotta realize that I was still a TM at heart.

The night progressed pretty slowly... Guys drinkin', girls dancin', guys whistlin' and cat callin', girls still dancin', back 'n forth. We were being entertained into boredom. Next thing ya' know, one of our FTB girls (I can call him that, 'cause he ain't close enuff to do anything 'bout it) jumps up on the stage and commences to dance with one of the real girls. Oh man, the bouncers were there like RIGHT NOW, but since all he was doing was dancin', the girl signaled to those guys to let him be.

Well, he danced with her and even stripped down to his skivvies. Now let me tell you, when he started dancing, the place started hoppin', people started pilin' into the place and that bartender WAS workin'. So when this set was over the bouncers escorted our FTB outside. Heated words were exchanged but, no punches were thrown. Seems the bouncers forgot to look behind them until after they were outside... They were outnumbered 4 to 1.

We all went back inside and JDAWG should remember this (even though he was just a little pup, he was there), another one of our shipmates decides he gonna dance too. This time, it was a "A" ganger... Short, stocky, looks (and smells) like a bull. Our next Fred Astaire-wanna-be takes one step on his chair and one on his table (actually the edge of the table) and breaks the damn table top off, wackin his self upside the head so hard, he's down fer the count.

We took him out back to the beach and the fresh salty air brings him around. In true bubblehead fashion, we all go back in fer the rest of the night's festivities... The next morning, Mr. "A" ganger-table dancer wants to know why he has such a big egg on his noggin'. Minutes later, when we catch our breath, from laughin so hard, we tell

him what he did. He had a good laugh ('til his head started to hurt worst). Love them dance halls and them dance hall girls, the beer, the girls, the friends, the good times.... Ahhh youth, to be young again and dance on the top of a table... With your drawers down around your ankles. Billy Bob Lary

## **58 Chevy, Warm Beer and Music** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

In the summer of '75, shortly after I'd reported aboard USS ANDREW JACKSON SSBN 619 B, one of my running mates (a TMSN, who, since he's respectable now, will remain nameless, but since he is a grown man and not innocent, will go by his initials JW) and I were scheduled to the weekend off - a 72! He was from Long Island and had taken me back home with him a couple of other times.

This particular weekend was gonna be a wild one. The plan was, get to his house in time for dinner, change and head down to the marina, to his dad's sailboat... JW had arranged for us to meet a couple of girls he had graduated from high school with, at the marina, but our Chief had other plans...

We had the most junior division in the weapons department. Besides the Chief, we had a TM2(SS), me (TM3 non-qual) and three TMSNs, so we always got all the shit jobs. Anyway, this one particular weekend we had skipped eating lunch, working straight through so that we could leave on time. But the Chief foiled that plan... No matter what we did and completed, he came up with something else... So instead of leaving at 1400 (early liberty), we didn't hit the beach until 1630.

To say that we were pissed was the understatement of the day. For the record, the Chief's name was Langer TMC(SS) (my sea daddy, who the day I reported aboard was a TM1). He put on khakis the week I reported onboard...

Well, JW and I finally get underway, head to the barracks, grab our AWOL bags, stuff them with some clothes and our ditty bags and head on down the highway. JW had a neat car, a '58 Chevy convertible, white with red interior. This was a bitchin' ride and one of its best features was an 8-track tape deck, complete with quadraphonic speakers.

It was a hot, beautiful day, we had the top down, the wind blowing in our hair, and we were tooling down I-95. We made a quick stop in New London at a package store and we each bought a six pack of beer (back then it was legal, in the state of Connecticut, for the passenger to have an open container) but we didn't have a cooler, so we both grabbed a can and put the rest in the back seat, yep, directly in the sunlight... Now we all know, drinking and driving don't mix, but it definitely don't mix with a pissed off attitude. JW was driving and we were probably on our second can of beer when he started to pass an 18-wheeler, all of a sudden JW swerved to the right (my friggin' side), right at the side of the trailer!!!! I hollered, "What the f\*ck?!? Are you trying to kill us?!?" He said, "No, but look at the name on the side of the trailer."



So I looked and wouldn't ya' know it, it said "LANGER TRANSPORT" in big bold letters on the side. I said, "So what, you think you can run him off the road with this? Besides, if Chief Langer owned a trucking company you think he still be in the Navy?"

Well he did quit trying to play demolition derby with a semi and we finally reached the Throgs Neck Bridge, well at least we made it to the off ramp, at about the same time as damn near everybody else in New York... We sat in the car with the music cranked up really loud and drank our beer, we sat on the back of the seat, talking to our new found friends stuck in a traffic jam, we were crankin' Led Zeppelin and the albino himself; Edgar Winter, our favorite FRANKENSTEIN.

Some people were annoyed with us, but for the most part we were surrounded by folks just enjoying the tunes and life. We finally made it on to Long Island and made it to the marina... But that's another tale, watch for 'JAWS'. Billy Bob Lary

## **Good Conduct** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

Each one of was damn proud to change our designator from (SU) to (SS), but did you know what SS actually means?

Until you made E-6 or you got married (and even this is in question), SS meant – SMARTASS SUBSAILOR, STUPID SHIT or maybe even SNOTNOSE SONUVABITCH.

Case in point. In '78, a certain TM2 that we all know and love, was in school at GMS (GUIDED MISSILE SCHOOL) Dam Neck, Virginia, going through the painful TM/MT conversion process, you know, trading my deck screwdriver, slugging wrenches and boots for high heels and a purse. It so happens that this suave and debonair young man completed his fourth year of not getting caught (at least not anything bad enough for NJP or Captain's Mast) and was awarded his very first GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL.

Certain days of the week were designated for GMT and each classroom was equipped with a TV. One day a week we watched VICTORY AT SEA and on another day we watched other educational shows. Stuff like "How to fool IVAN", "Security and you", "VD: The Silent Killer, don't take it home", you know entertaining shows like that. One fine Navy day we watched an episode on being captured and later on it alluded to sailors being taken advantage of by civilians. They like to trick sailors out of their money and their Military ID cards. We were instructed to never surrender our ID cards unless we were arrested. Can you see where this going?

At the end of class, on the day I received my Good Conduct award, some of my fellow classmates (all mindless E-3 animals) took me over to the EM club, "The Shifting Sands". Nice place, went back 14 years later and not much had changed. Anyway, we drank a bit and since I lived off-base and we had a class the next day,

we leave early, right around 2000-2030. I head over to the barracks to drop a couple of the guys, when outta nowhere, red and blue flashing lights are everywhere. I pull over and one of them SP/base security/MAA skimmer buttheads sticks his face in my window and starts yelling at me. Hey, he's an E-5, I'm an E-5, where does he get off !!?

Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, Mr. E-5 SP/MAA/security (whatever) NUMBNUTS tells me I was speeding. I musta gave him my "you gotta be shitting me" stupid look and he asks for the standard, license and registration, which I have ready, then the fun starts.

Mr. Hardcase "tells" me to "give" him my ID card . Hey, I just learned today, not to "give" my ID card to anybody, unless I'm being arrested, didn't he watch TV today? So TM2 (SS - STUPID SHIT) sez: "If you want my ID you'll have to arrest me."

"Look pal, you were speeding and I need to check on you, now give me your gahdam ID card!" TM2 (SS – SMARTASS SUBSAILOR) sez: "We just learned at GMT this morning not to "give" our ID to anybody unless we've been arrested." "Wait right there."

Long pause while he goes back to his vehicle, a few minutes later a second vehicle pulls up and out jumps another E-5 SP/security/MAA. He goes to his partner and gets "A" story. Then he comes over to me. "Why didn't you give this man your ID card?" "He didn't ask to see it." "But he said he told you to give him your ID card." "Yeah, he "told" me, but all he had to do was listen to me and "ask" to see it."

They took me down to the office at the main gate, and since they had no way of telling if I was intoxicated or not, they called for help from Virginia Beach's finest. He takes me to the Princess Anne precinct for a breath analyzer test, I barely fail. He asks me if I've had any cigarettes since I was stopped, I told him yes, 5-6. He tells me that the test is null and void since tobacco increases the readings.

"Besides that", he sez, "they can't use this against you. You were pulled over on a military base by base security, we have no jurisdiction since they or you didn't involve us." I like to think he helped me out because I had joined the Virginia Beach Aux Police and he was one of my instructors.

He takes me back lets them know that they screwed up by letting me smoke and there isn't anything he or they can do. They still write me a speeding ticket and file a complaint on me. The next day I'm summoned to the security office and speak to the OIC. I guess they don't like their boys shown up. I had my base driving privileges revoked for a year (but no fine). Which sucked, if you never been to the base, the main gate was a LOOONNNGGG way away from the classrooms, at least it seemed that way. Sometimes too much training is not good, so be careful of training (over or under) anybody under E-6. Billy Bob Lary

# **Temper, Temper** by Billy Bob 'Launcher' Lary

In my youth, I was known for my quick and vicious temper. My qual boat, USS ANDREW JACKSON SSBN 619B, had two divisions in the missile compartment. They consisted of Missile Technicians and the Launcher Torpedomen. Most, if not all of the work in the compartment, was split into technical and non-technical thus pitting the MT's against the TM's. Towards the end of my tour in '77-'78, we received notice that the Launcher TM's were being "done away" with; either you converted to MT or went to the "room". This meant that a lot of the jobs that only TM's did, now fell to the MT's. This also meant that those TM's opting to convert had to be "educated", however, as it was proven over and over, there wasn't anything that an MT could teach a TM, because we already knew it all, heh heh heh.

Now during the end of one long patrol, we were directed, as usual, to change ready conditions from 2SQ to 4SQ. Now part of this meant that we had to enter the missile tube and install plates (which is where I'm gonna leave that). Anyway, we split into two teams, one made up of TM's and one of MT's. One more part of this tale... We also were getting a lot of new personnel, both of our chiefs were leaving, so we had a new one, MTC DuSavage (Some of you may know of him from Dam Neck, Va. or one of the tenders). We also received a new first and second class, both of which were dink from the get-go (They both were non-SS and coming straight from the tender, MT1 Forgy and MT2 Merswa (sp)... Yeehaw, this was gonna be fun) and being a third class standing LOS with a first class MRCP, tender puke at that, was almost more than I could ask for.

Anyway, we were directed to set 4SQ and the two teams started. We had already shown the MT's what needed to be done and it was expected that the TM's would finish their tubes ahead of the MT's and give them help. Well, the TM's ran into several problems installing the plates and the MT's finished before the TM's and left us to finish by ourselves. This pissed us off... We were supposed to be a team and they were keeping it split.

We finally finished and words were exchanged, but nothing came of it. However, I was still pissed, I was seething, I was looking for something or someone to hit.

With only one shitter in the missile compartment and it being in use, I went to the lower level Ops crew's head on the port side, did my business and was washing my hands when a TM from the room came in and started busting my cajones for letting the wimp MT's beat us. He was a small dude, TMSN Carl Lindlau, and was laughing at me and having a real good time with it.

I looked at him in the mirror... He was standing right behind me, actually he was entering the stall directly behind me. He looked back at me in the mirror, saw how pissed I looked and ducked into the stall. Luckily for him, he was quicker than me. Just as he closed the door, I was turning and swinging. Just as the door latched, I

punched it which snapped both hinges off and Lindy was standing there holding the door with both hands.

I was instantly calmed, mostly because I knew I was in trouble, but also because I was able to vent some of that pent-up fury. Well I knew shit was gonna hit the fan, so I went to the person I felt needed to know about the problem, MMC Martin, A-gang LCPO. I told him what I did and asked if there was anything he wanted me to do, all he told me to do was to have the MM1 add it to the 3-M list and he'll include the needed 2Kilo. I did as told and hit the rack.

Not two hours later, this new chief of ours racked me out, and then bitched me out, first about my role in breaking the door, then not informing him, and for not filling out the required work requests. Anyway, no amount of explaining to MTC DuSavage worked, he wouldn't listen to anything. I still had to work up all that paperwork and have it approved by him to pass along to MMC Martin before I could hit the rack.

Oh yeah, and Carl... Well, Carl never did try to make fun of me again nor try to piss me off... Billy Bob Lary

**Now come 14 entries from fellow boat sailor, Ron Gorence, QMC(SS) who shares his thoughts from the WESTPAC side of the house.**

## **Growl, Tiger** by Ron Gorence

The ship passed between Najimo Saki and O Shima lighthouses while it was still dark. When the short-long flashing of Tsurugi Saki's white light was sighted dead ahead, she came around to a northerly course toward Tokyo Bay. Normally, the ship made fifteen knots at standard speed, but the pit-log showed eighteen; the men on the sticks in the Maneuvering Room had been told repeatedly to maintain standard turns, but the screw-count had gradually increased each time. Channel Fever was rampant below decks. The showers had run all night, and the diesel-fuel smells in the air mingled with Vaseline Hair Tonic, Mennen After-Shave, and Aqua Velva. Two rocks sticking out of the water at the southern end of Tokyo Wan, called "The Brothers," became visible at sunrise and the Maneuvering Watch was stationed. The Officer Of the Deck regained precise control of the ship's speed and engine-room snipes, who had not seen sunshine for a month, rushed topside in preparation for handling our mooring lines.

The Razorback (SS-394) had been on Northern Patrol for 36 days - not a record run, but long enough for Baby Huey to develop a hearty thirst to match his size. The ship's log read: "0830 - Moored starboard side to Berth 1, Yokosuka Naval Facility, Yokosuka, Japan. Present are various units of U.S. Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force."

Huey sprinted across the brow and jumped into the first taxi in the base-cab lineup awaiting our arrival. He was shouting, "Hiako, hiako," to the driver who had wanted to wait for a full load. Some crew members pretended they were too cool to have channel fever while others attacked the second taxi but all hands understood the fever well enough to overlook his almost-unforgivable breach of pig-boat etiquette and Baby Huey was in the Starlight Club by 8:45. It was almost noon before enough crew members had assembled to completely obliterate Starlight's tranquility.

When I finally drifted into the Starlight, everyone but the serious drinkers had a gal on his lap or alongside. These were beautiful women, in western dress like bobby-soxers back home or in full-dress kimonos. They would have been breathtaking - all of them - even if we hadn't been smelling diesel fumes and each others armpits for two months. Baby Huey's regular, Mioko, sat across from the bar on a bench and pouted. I guess she realized that tonight her "big teddy bear" would not be promising to marry her and take her back to Ohio. He was dead-serious drinking. She glared at the bottle which he was stroking with uncharacteristic tenderness.

Huey was about six-four or five, and almost as tall. He weighed 250 or so, with no beer-gut. We drank our suds from Asahi bottles in the Starlight but at picnics, in the days before aluminum cans, Baby Huey always crushed his beer cans in one giant hand to improve their throwing ballistics. He brushed imaginary dust from the lip of his Seagram's bottle.

We ate squid on a stick, drank Saki, Jack Daniels, San Miguel and anything available while we smooched, smoked cigars and discussed world affairs, but then just about sunset every face, the soberer ones at least, turned toward the commotion at the bar. Huey was half standing, with half his butt on the bar stool, leaning on his elbows toward Papa San on the other side. It was starting.

"Yeashhh, I'll flip you fer the juke-box..." He slammed a hundred-yen piece on the bar, and with the back of his other hand cleared the stool next to him, where a shipmate, now on the floor, had muttered something like, "No, Babe. Please don't do it." Everyone calmed down though, because Huey lost the toss. He put a hundred yen in the machine, played "*She Ain't Got No Yo-Yo*" and a couple of others. "All yours." he said to Papa San.

At the Starlight, we brought in our own bottles of booze, and Papa San labeled them with our names and stowed them while we were out on patrol or weekly ops playing hide and seek with the surface skimmers and air dales. He charged us a hundred yen (about 30 cents at the time) for a glass of mix and ice and poured a very generous shot. Most of our drinking was hard stuff, because Ten High was about a buck, and JW Red was under two dollars at the tax-free package store. The real expense was the Cherry Drinks for the girls, usually 300 yen a pop, but if a guy wanted to compete for one of the girls that everyone else liked too, it could go to five- or six hundred. These nymphs could drink a torpedo tube dry if anyone had the cash.

Anyway, about the time six-hundred yen was starting to sound cheap, and the noise level had gone past uproar, Baby Huey was back at it again. He'd won the toss. He slipped once getting off the bar stool, staggered over to the wall behind the Juke Box and yanked the cord out of the wall. Dean Martin's ". . . Amore . . ." groaned down to silence like he'd been dropped down #2 periscope well, and Huey put his shoulder behind the Wurlitzer and began pushing it toward the door. Papa San vaulted the bar in one jump, and yelling in Japanese, tried to curtail Baby Huey's progress. Papa San was about five feet tall, so I couldn't see him on the other side of the music box; Huey towered over them both.

Baby Huey was bellowing, "I flipped him for the somobishhh, n I won," while he brushed off shipmates like flies.

Papa San was shouting Japanese profanities and leaving skid marks on the cement threshold. Huey's eyes were glazed over so bad that he was navigating in darkness like a sub at three-hundred feet, but he had no problem getting the Juke Box out the Starlight's door and into the alley which was lined with drinking establishments. He headed it in Razorback's direction with vividly colored reflections shimmering on its curved glass face, and its little wheels clacking on the cobblestone. Papa San disappeared down the neon alley, screaming bloody murder and apparently looking for help.

Knowing that the police or the Shore Patrol would soon be on the way, several of us, like monkeys hopping around a giant organ grinder, tried to talk Baby Huey into putting the machine back, but he was concentrating too hard because of the added weight of a couple of guys on top of the machine.

Finally, after about half a block, the word "Beer" penetrated his fog and he agreed to stop in an adjacent skivvie house for a large Ashai. He had to take the machine with him, which provoked many excited and unintelligible Japanese voices, but we got him to sit down and drink a beer. I guess we hoped in our snickering desperation that he would pass out, so we could just find a skip-loader or something to get him back home.

In fact, he was starting to look a little drowsy when the Shore Patrol showed up, and we were relieved to see him submit docilely to the authorities. He even helped them as best he could by now and then moving one foot in front of the other as the four military police dragged him by the armpits to the Shore Patrol wagon.

"You're in a lot of trouble," one of them said as though Baby Huey could have understood either English or Japanese in that condition. "Take me t' my f\*ing bunk. I'mn tafter-pedo-room," he slurred softly. "You're goin' to the brig, fella. We got a Status of Forces Agreement here, and you can't get away with that kinda crap."

Of course we weren't helping much: we offered everything from a twenty-five-pound can of coffee to a case of steaks for his freedom. They were too busy to write us up

for attempted bribery. Unfortunately Huey liked the idea, and started mumbling that they ought to let him go with us. Their nasty mood got worse, and they roughly manhandled Baby Huey into the back of the wagon and slammed the expanded metal gate shut with a loud clang, and snapped the padlock shut. Huey sat down, slumped his shoulders and was a teddy bear again. We were just turning away from our hopeless task when we heard the biggest of the SP's bang the side of the cage with his nightstick and bellow, "Now, let me hear you growl, tiger."

Well, that was a mistake. Baby Huey woke up and tried to find the source of the voice through his glazed eyes. He shook his head once and backed up until his butt was against the pick-up's cab. He bent down like a spring compressing, and roared as he slammed forward into the locked door.

The door held, but the entire rear wall of the cage, onto which the door was hinged, flew fifteen feet into the street. Huey landed on his knees between the twisted metal and the pick-up. He got up very slowly, with two SP's trying to tackle him, one swinging his baton and one sprinting for the radio in the truck. Baby Huey walked over to the pick-up, grabbed it under the driver's door and tipped it onto its side. A rear view mirror went flying; sparkling little gems of broken window glass spread out in a fan across the asphalt, and it sounded like a dumpster had fallen out of a third story window.

We were screaming, the Japanese audience was screaming and the SP's were screaming. Only Huey was quiet. Three of the SP's were hauling the fourth out of the pick-up cab with the radio mike dangling from a loose wire in his hand. The Japanese were shouting louder now, yanking on the SP's sleeves and pointing to the puddle of liquid which was growing under the truck. We ran around a corner-bar into another alley, with Baby Huey in tow, and immediately nearly got run over by a cab. He who looks after stray dogs and drunken sailors had provided us with a base taxi.

We got Huey into his bunk in the After Torpedo Room, with a minimum of trouble because he was getting kind of tired by that time. I think we were the last ones to get on base before the gate guards started checking all incoming cabs. Some guys complained that they were held up for over an hour. Razorback sailors chuckled, but the rest of the navy simmered.

Of course, the swift minds in Naval Law Enforcement eventually homed in on SS-394, and the skipper had to ensure the base commander that the villain would be severely punished at Captain's Mast. It was held two days out at sea after we departed Yokosuka, and Baby Huey was reduced to Engineman 3rd Class - suspended for one month. Huey was suspended for most of the three years I spent on Razorback!

There was never an engine out of commission when Baby Huey was aboard, not on Razorback or any other boat he sailed on. Some said that those diesels were afraid

to make Huey mad, but he's the only one I ever saw actually cuddling those 1600 horsepower monsters, and wiping oil from every surface like a mother caring for a new born kid's butt. At sea he hovered over them perpetually checking for whooping cough or something. In port, before heading ashore, he always patted them gently on his way to the After Torpedo Room escape hatch. No one had ever seen him actually kiss an engine, but I'd caught him smooching Mioko once, and his scowl convinced me that I should keep my mouth shut for the rest of the century. I did.

## **Typhoon** by Ron Gorence

The sharp Guppy II bow on the submarine lifted almost imperceptibly toward the sky ... slowly ... gently ... in apparent disregard for the laws of gravity. Distant waves crashed in upon themselves in the distance, and their booming percussions blended into a rumble of thunderclaps that was in one instant deafening, and in the next, consumed by the screaming wind. Stormy Petrels had been playing in the spindrift above the great waves, soaring down into the trough below the lookouts, and then rollicking high above, getting lost to sight in the water-filled air. They were all gone now.

The tube of steel - engineered to hover silent and unseen beneath the surface of the ocean with near-perfect neutral buoyancy - is out of its element on the surface. The diesel boat's bathtub-hull rolls uncontrollably in the trough of the smallest waves, and any angle beyond forty degrees from vertical increases the probability that acid from the main batteries will dump to form deadly chlorine gas. Captain Gillette ignored his intended navigational track, and put the bow into the waves, his ETA no longer important. Like a chess master, a good Skipper hones his skills for the normal task of outsmarting opposing target forces on or under the surface, and the consequences of his skill level vary with the world situation. When Mother Nature is angry, consequences are more simple: Survive or die.

It climbed... until my stomach hinted that we were about to do an inside loop. The bow hung in the air above my lookout-port, above my head. White foam poured from the limber holes and then dissipated in all directions as it was blown by heavy winds from the tank tops. It hung there so long that I remember thinking ridiculously that I should be able to see Najimo Saki or Point Loma lighthouse from this height - were it not for the pelting salt spray that stung exposed skin and filled the air in every direction. The bow held its angle and then, with my shoulder pressed painfully against the aft constraint of my lookout station, I watched it pause as the whole world dropped from under the ship and she pitched downward into the trough. The deafening clap of water crashing into water and teak decking was amplified by the reverberations in the steel to which I was chained. The wall of water in front of us seemed even higher than the point in the sky where the bow had just been. My stomach lifted until I felt it pressing against my lungs; and I felt green



water rushing over my head and blasting into my face, and then the reluctant dive ended and the bow ... slowly ... gently ... almost imperceptibly, lifted toward the sky.

The Officer of the Deck was attempting to hang the XJA Sound-powered phone back into its snap-in cradle, while wedging his body between the Target Bearing Transmitter (TBT) and the plexiglass bubble, rigged above the TBT in better weather as a wind breaker. He managed to get the XJA seated just as we hit the trough, and was knocked loose from his perch, and yanked short by the three-foot safety chain snap-hooked to the TBT stand. Sounding like a hundred-pound sledgehammer hitting plate metal, the green water hit the outside of the doghouse and rushed through a small window - shattered out by a previous wave - like water from a fire hose just below his prone body. The geyser picked him up and deposited him upright, on his feet, facing the lookouts.

"Prepare to ... Lay below to Conn," he shouted to the lookouts above the screaming gale. "Stand by to open the hatch," Simultaneously, he passed the word on the 7-MC to below-decks: "Conn, Control, Bridge, Opening the Conning Tower hatch; shifting the lookout watch to the Conning Tower." "Bridge, Control, Aye, Aye."

The lower Conning Tower hatch was already closed - on the latch - in order to direct as much salt-water into the inadequate Conning Tower bilges as possible. Much of it overflowed and was sucked into Control. Diverting salt water from the Control Room with its array of electrical and electronic equipment was high priority. The auxiliary gyro had already tumbled, but the main gyro was still on line, and the Electrical Switchboards were dry. The personnel in Control replaced wet rags around the grates under the lower Conning Tower hatch with recycled dry ones from the Forward Engine Room. "Bridge, Con, Aye." The Quartermaster of the watch put down the 7-MC mike and raised both scopes so the lookouts could resume their ineffectual search of the non-existent horizon immediately; a collision with another storm-tossed ship would send us both to the bottom. He then pressed his body tightly against the bulkhead next to the bridge hatch cowling, to get out of the way and avoid the rush of green water sure to come through the hatch when they opened it; more importantly, he was ready to grab the hatch lanyard, yank the hatch shut and dog it down as soon as the bridge watch was in Conn. Hesitation could let in more sea water and cause shorts in the electrical gear our lives depended on.

Heavy-weather lookout duty in the Conning Tower had its good and bad aspects. The burdensome foul-weather gear, useless binoculars and the safety belt were discarded. The sounds of normal human voices relieved some of the trepidation that we had felt topside where wind and water were mixing and racing in every direction at speeds no animal on earth could outrun. Warm coffee, undiluted with salt-water, felt as good on my hands as it did in my gut, but anything over half a cup spills as the ship rolls, and it was cold by the time we could release your hold on something solid long enough to pick it up. Anxieties, which were reduced by warmth, human voices and relative silence, were replaced by others. Now the storm was outside,

lurking somewhere beyond the pressure-hull like a bear outside a camping-tent that you'd almost rather see with your eyes than envision in anticipation. Topside was like a roller-coaster: you can see the tracks drop ahead as the negative G's move your insides and you know they'll all soon be back in place. The time topside in zero-gravity lasts a lot longer, but it's the same roller-coaster feeling; it's even fun once you convince yourself the ship will right itself. Outside, when the ship pitches or rolls, you can see where *up* is -- even though it is seldom where you want it to be. In Conn, on the other hand, I found myself trying to force the clinometer's pendulum, by sheer force of mind, to hang straight down. With one foot on the deck, and the other on the starboard bulkhead frame for the UQC underwater phone and hanging with both elbows draped over the periscope's handles, the concept of *up* was more a prayer to the clinometer than a meaningful direction. Most boat sailors are religious somewhere deep down inside, but most of them also subscribe to the concept that *He helps those who help themselves*, so I frowned at the pendulum.

Number two, the attack scope, extends about sixty-two feet above the keel, several feet more than number one scope, but has much poorer optics. I was on number two, and could see green water during each deep plunge of the boat. There was not much else to see, and number one was no better. The glass was a windshield with no wipers, so we attempted to find the probable horizon - the separation between light and dark areas - to search it for other manmade objects which would increase our danger. When the sun went down somewhere beyond the horizon we could see, visibility was worse. My left hand was in constant motion with the elevation controls, because the scope pointed down into the trough or up at the equally dark sky with each roll, pitch and yaw of the boat.

On some rolls, I was unable to hold my footing, and was swung bodily with the scope a hundred and eighty degrees from port to starboard, and had to force my field of view back to approximately the same bearing where I had lost control. A complete 360 degree sweep around the horizon - every direction held equal danger - was essential. No gaps. We were making two-thirds speed on two engines, which would ordinarily be about nine knots, but in this storm, heading into the sea, we might be making ten knots in the opposite direction. We could be run over from astern just as easily as from ahead, and now in the dark, the horizon's location was only a guess. We hoped lights on another ship would show up through the howling spindrift and fogged scope lenses, though we also wondered if we could maneuver to avoid contact.

Wahoff, our first-class Quartermaster, Assistant Navigator and best emergency helmsman; he had been told to man the helm for as long as he could stay awake. On the wheel for over twenty-one hours now, he looked like a wet rat. His shoes and dungarees were soaked to the knees from saltwater, sucked through the upper-Conn hatch while we were on the bridge.

The engines were running in surface-snorkel mode which meant they were getting air from the snorkel induction head valve and exhausting through the diffuser plate - both of which were about thirty feet high on the back of the sail. The normal intake and exhaust were riding 20 feet below the surface as often as above; diesels can't breathe salt water, and their exhaust can't overcome submerged sea-pressure. When the head valve electrodes sense green water between them, they shut the snorkel induction valve, and the engines suck air from the only place available: the inside of the ship where it competes unfairly with other forms of life for oxygen. There's an automatic shut-down on the main engines which theoretically prevents ear-drum explosions, but when the upper-Conn hatch is on the latch the engines suck a high-speed stream of salt-water mist over, around, and past the helmsman. His dungaree shirt had been above the jet stream, but he was also soaking-wet from perspiration. His temperature was not high, but his concentration was. Wahoff's unique skill was more feeling than logic; he felt the ship shudder through his hands on the wheel and his feet on the deck grating while the stern yawed in a large slow circle as the screws came out of the water; he watched the gyro-compass indicator change from a rightward swing to left, and leaned his whole body in unison with the clinometer as it hovered left or right, and then, at just the right second, he'd slam the rudder over hard left or right and put our bow directly into the oncoming wall of water. The trick was to meet the immense force head-on.

I'd been on lookout watch for two hours, and the OD was taking his turn on #2 scope, so I was sitting on top of the cushioned sextant locker, braced securely by both legs, drinking coffee when the XJA chirped.

"Mr. Montross . . . the Skipper," the Quartermaster said handing the handset to the OD. I jumped up and took the scope so he could talk. "Yes Sir. . ." A pause, and aside to Wahoff, "What was your clinometer reading on that last roll?" back to the Skipper, "Helm says 38 degrees," A pause, " No change. Visibility about fifty yards through #1 when she's out of the water. Wind direction still variable; speeds gusting to fifty, couldn't stand up against it topside. Same with the seas. No direction. We're heading generally South; 165 to about 225 degrees true. . . seems to minimize roll best. Quartermaster has logged thirty-five-foot waves from South-Southwest." Pause. "Yes sir, he's on scope watch. . . Affirmative sir. No problem. Permission to secure one lookout watch? Both scopes manned, no problem . . . feels good to be out of the weather. Thank you, Sir."

Mr. Montross hung up the phone, and turned to me, "Gorence, you're relieved. Captain said to tell you to get below and get some sleep so you can relieve Wahoff." "When do you want me back up here?" I asked the OD. "How you feel, Wahoff?" he asked the helmsman.

"Get someone to take the wheel so I can make a head-call and get some coffee, and I'm good for a few hours." He turned his back and shut out the rest of the world as he felt the stern start to rise, his knuckles white on the wheel, but decided it was a false alarm, and he turned back to Montross, "I'm OK. for four more hours, sir."

"Probably a couple of hours." the OD said to me, "Can you sleep?" I assured him that I could and went below. "We'll call you when we need you - don't put in a call." He shouted after me.

I knew there were sound-powered eavesdroppers in the Control room, so I expected a razzing since the Captain had asked for me, by *name*, to take the helm - but I got a surprise. The chief on the diving manifold told me to drop my foul weather gear, and he'd take care of getting it back to the engine room for drying. "Just take any bunk in the After Battery that's empty," he said. "Try to get some sleep."

As I turned to starboard at the bottom of the lower Conn ladder, the ship rolled to starboard, and the deck dropped off steeply in front of me, and the Auxiliaryman manning the air manifold grabbed me by the shirt and stopped my nose about an inch away from the I.C. Switchboard. He saved me from a nasty bump - a non-qual cannot catch himself with his hands for fear of hitting a switch and turning off 400 cycle power to the gyros or something equally important. It's OK to bleed but you'd better hope you have not damaged any equipment - especially if you're a non-rated, non-qualified puke. He didn't call me stupid, or anything else - just arrested my fall, and let me go. The old chief who'd sailed with Noah and the snipe who took lug nuts off with his teeth had both been nice to me, almost fatherly! *Screw getting discovered in Hollywood. Screw hitting a home run in the World Series.* Doesn't get any better than this without Dolphins. I was going to go topside and calm the storm all by myself, until I remembered that the Old Man had ordered me to get some shut-eye.

The mess deck was empty except for two green-gilled mess cooks who were cleaning something off the deck that looked like a mixture of creamed-corn and partially digested meatloaf -- which is what we'd had for the last hot meal before we hit heavy weather. I asked them to help me trice up my rack. I picked the first one forward, starboard side, top in the After Battery sleeping compartment. The lights were out and there were loud snores from guys who were too dumb to worry about a typhoon.

Hank Snow watched me across the passageway from his bunk as I vaulted, with help from a starboard roll, onto the flash-pad - the zippered Naugahyde cover that waterproofs mattress and bedding. Shoes and all, wet where the foul-weather gear leaked.

"That's great, thanks," I said to the mess cooks as they as they lifted the bunk with me in it and secured the chains at both ends.

"Looks like forty-foot seas out there," I pressed down my flash-pad and squinted at Hank, "Probably headed for a typhoon."

"Yeah, they're 'Baguios' in the Philippines and 'Willie-Willies' in Australia," He closed his book, "In the Atlantic, where they're 'Hurricanes,' they're *real* storms. *All*

non-quals are sent to the West Coast for training before they're allowed to sail the Atlantic. You're in the Western Pacific. Got it? Now try not to wet your pants, and keep the noise down. I'm busy read'n here . . . I think this guy's gonna kiss his horse." He rolled his back to me, and reopened his *Louis L'Amore* to where his thumb had been. His small fluorescent bunk-light shined dimly through an eight-inch space he'd left to squeeze out through in an emergency. Apparently he hadn't heard about the Captain and me.

I wedged my knee between the asbestos-cork sweat shield laminated to the inside of the hull, and a cable run to keep from getting tossed out of my rack. I reviewed what helmsmanship Wahoff had tried to bang into my head over the past couple of days. There were no books to study, no ship-handling instructions or seamanship manuals. Just a feel for what the sea was doing to your ship, and what she would do next in response to how you reacted. We had experimented once, with me on the scope telling him what the next wave was doing, and Wahoff on the wheel, but it didn't work. It only confused what he could feel through the helm and the seat of his pants. I hoped what practice I'd had, with Wahoff hollering, ". . . stupid, non-qual somobitch," over my shoulder would serve me well enough to justify the skipper's confidence. Wahoff must have told him I could handle it, and I wasn't above a little self-pride, but this was getting real. Please Jesus, don't let me put the rudder the wrong way and increase the roll. I fell asleep just as I started feeling panic.

"Gorence, get up. Hit it! The Old Man wants you." I looked at my watch. I had been asleep over six hours, so I bounced off lockers and tables making my way through the mess hall on a deck that was moving up and down in split seconds to places other than where I intended to place my next step. I felt quite talented to be able to button my shirt and zip my jacket at the same time I kept my head away from hard steel objects.

Wahoff had been relieved an hour ago, and the OD had waited as long as possible to call me. The helmsman who had relieved him had done a good job, but soon the ship started to hang on a series of port rolls for an unusually long time between its normal pitching and yawing. The last roll had been 40 degrees, a new record, and it had hung there for what seemed like several minutes. The torpedoes forward and aft had been strapped down and rigged for depth charge, but there was still some concern that they might shift. All four ship's cooks had come to Control to report that there was not a single box or can still in the place where they had stowed it, and even Hank Snow was in the Control Room cursing the helmsman through the lower hatch. The ship was rigged for red now, so I took my time and walked with my hands - my feet helping occasionally as they found something solid - to my helm station.

"Gorence has the helm. sir. Steering into the seas . . .no ordered course, all ahead two-thirds on two engines, snorkeling on the surface." "Very well," the OD acknowledged.

I expected some sort of comment from the lookouts, the OD or the QM but the silence from the after part of the Conning Tower was almost spooky. Ordinarily, conversation was held to a minimum, but there was absolute silence, and I wondered if they were staring through the dim red lighting at the back of my head. She steadied on an even keel for a couple of minutes before the bow slowly pitched downward with the sea, and the screws vibrated the stern enough to rattle teeth in the After Torpedo Room. The shuddering astern grew and then she started to yaw, making up her mind whether to roll or pitch. The gyro-repeater began to spin behind the needle, 155 degrees, 162, 175, and past due South in less than five seconds, and she leaned slowly to port. The clinometer was a quarter-circle piece of sheet metal, welded to the hull, with engraved graduations on the round lower edge. A pendulum, exactly like a grandfather clock's with a pointer at the bottom, hung from the apex. At even keel, the pointer wavered back and forth across zero; now it was at 25 port, 26, 27, moving like it was lubricated with molasses, but moving the wrong way.

I put the wheel hard-over right and waited for the hydraulics to move the rudder over to 30 degrees - right full - and held her there until the port roll slowed. It stopped at thirty degrees, and the clinometer agonized back a degree or two in the direction of zero. It seemed like hours before it moved, but when I was certain she was headed back, I put the rudder amidships. Razorback came back to even keel and went ten degrees past. I left the wheel alone and she righted. Similar waves ambushed us twice more in the next hour, but then she began to roll ten or fifteen degrees to port and then to starboard. I found I could maintain that stability with about seven degrees right rudder. Heading about 185 true. In the next couple of hours, I came to use full rudder less and less to correct a roll, and the ship stayed within ten degrees of vertical more and more. Someone shouted up from Control, in a tone somewhere between smart-ass and sincere, "Little-Jesus need a sandwich or something up there?" but adrenalin and hunger can't exist in the same space, and I just asked for a black and sweet. By sunrise when I had been on the helm six hours, I was holding fairly close to an ordered course of 070 with little difficulty, and we were headed toward Pearl Harbor, all ahead full on three engines. Going home turns!

I was awakened the next time for my regular 16-2000 lookout watch. I had to eat chow before relieving the watch so I couldn't avoid the crap I knew I'd catch in the mess hall. Someone said that I had triced up my rack so high that the below decks watch couldn't find me until the storm was over; Hank said the Old Man was gonna give me a commendation for using magic to calm the ocean, even though I was the lousiest helmsman in the fleet.

I had noticed that the ship was riding as level as a bar's pool table, but when I got to the bridge, my mouth fell open, and the OD said in response to my gape, "Amazing, isn't it? I've never seen the ocean like this."

The sky was deep, deep blue, and except for a haze on the horizon, not a cloud to be seen. What really got my attention though, was the sea's surface. Not a ripple. Blue

marble. If Mount Elbert had been out there someplace, you could have seen its perfect reflection just like Turquoise Lake back home. A sheet of glass, blue as the sky. Razorback's prow sliced through the flat surface like a knife through Navy-issue mayo. The bone in her teeth disappeared before the white foam reached the doghouse and trailed abaft the port and starboard beams like tiny two-inch wrinkles in silk. The ship's wake trailed off astern in a straight line and disappeared toward the horizon (... not *perfectly* straight, because I wasn't steering). It was the only evidence that humankind had ever passed through this vast ocean plain. The Quartermaster logged zero wind, temperature 78 degrees Fahrenheit, 5 percent cloud cover. One more strange thing: the Terns. Hundreds of them, sitting on the water like ducks on a pond. All around and behaving like they were tame - wouldn't budge even after the bow hit them in the butt. Tame Terns in a duck-pond a thousand miles at sea.

"Permission to come on the bridge?" It was Wahoff's voice from Conn. "Come up." answered the OD.

When he came out from under the cowling, with his ever-present cup of coffee, Wahoff was all spruced up. Shaved, hair combed, starched dungarees and all.

"No dope on radio about the storm?" he asked the OD, knowing full well that the bad weather was a complete surprise to ComSubPac. There were no satellites but Sputnik in those days, so weather info had to come from all the ships at sea who radioed in data.

Montross was the Navigator and was back on watch with the first team. He asked Wahoff if he thought we were in the eye of the storm, and they got my attention when the answer came, "Damn near positive." I marked a section in Bowditch for you to read when you get off watch. I'm working trying to vector out the best course to get out of this thing."

"Wahoff, Wahoff, Lay to the wardroom on the double. That is Wahoff to the Wardroom." the bridge 1MC speaker called him away, and he went below. We slowed to two thirds speed and changed course to due south about ten minutes later. There were a few scud clouds up ahead, and faint cirrus mare's tales started to appear. They curved in the high atmosphere and seemed to merge somewhere on the horizon astern.

When I got off watch, Wahoff had laid claim to one of the tables in the crew's mess; it was covered with pilot charts, books and drafting tools. I grabbed a black and sweet and eased onto the bench opposite his, and said, "I've been thinking about striking for Quartermaster. Anything I can help with?"

"Yeah, read that and tell me what you think." He slid a book about the size of four stacked bibles across the table toward me, with his finger on a paragraph headed something like, THE DANGEROUS QUADRANT. I'd heard him previously refer to this

book as the Navigation Bible, and it was written by somebody named Bowditch. Not one of the paragraphs following the heading made the slightest sense to me, and I told him so.

"Listen, you've had your qual notebook signed off for over a month. You've been on the boat, what, a year?" "Ten months," I answered sheepishly.

"Talk to me when you've got Dolphins, and meanwhile get some sleep so you can steer this pigboat. Stupid, non-qual somobitch gotta be good for something." I had the feeling that he liked me. He was also right, I needed to shake my 'Final Qualifications' terror.

He'd packed up his gear and was heading forward, when I asked: "Are we *still* in the center of the goddamn storm, after all the crap we been through?"

He leaned his head back over his shoulder and sneered, "Getting *in* was easy."

The deck gang had to go topside, chained from a safety belt to a C-hook, which followed a T-shaped track running the full length of the deck, to check for storm damage. One of the line- locker covers had broken loose. It and the mooring lines it protected now belonged to Davy Jones, and number two fold-down cleat was completely gone. Must have weighed two hundred pounds, bolted down with half-inch studs, and it had just floated away. Seven or eight broken teak deck boards had to be removed and thrown over the side - can't have loose gear floating around the scopes or the screws when we dive. The major damage was to the doghouse. The forward part of the sail just below the bridge had been hammered in until it popped a couple of ½ inch rivets. The missing plexiglass window was welded over, and the doghouse door was welded shut. I was the ship's Leading Seaman, so I grumbled about the welding; it would be my gang's job to file, scrape, sandpaper and repaint the mess they were making.

"I don't *do* pretty," the safety-belted Auxiliaryman told me. "I do *strong*." Case closed.

Everything looked shipshape topside, so the working party was sent below and the OD turned the ship South-West, course 225 and cranked up three engines, full speed. We were probably making over 21 knots now, with Pearl Harbor 1500 miles astern and opening.

I was off the watch bill now, 'cause it looked like I was going to have another turn steering, but I couldn't sleep. Strange, I could sleep sixteen hours a day on patrol, with a meal, head-break and a four-hour watch breaking it into eight-hour segments. Now Wahoff's words haunted me: "Getting *in* was easy."

In the crew's mess we talked about submerging - getting under the storm - but the consensus pretty much went along with the Skipper's adamant refusal to consider



it. At a hundred feet, there was no light and no turbulence; hell, you could probably play ping-pong at a hundred feet. Razorback could stay down on battery-power twenty-four hours easily if we made dead slow turns. Not enough oxygen to keep a cigarette going after about twenty hours, but if we spread out the CO2 absorbent, we could probably stretch it out to thirty-six hours. Problem is, that at some point, you have to come up. Everyone nodded. Bringing a round-hulled sewer pipe up to periscope depth in the trough of a -twenty or thirty-foot wave would almost certainly amount to the first step of a final dive. Boat sailors, being generally contrary, like to believe that *what goes down, must come up*. The ship might even survive fifty degrees, but there wouldn't be anyone left to care. Of course, the odds are fifty percent you could come up with either the bow or the stern into the seas, but 50-50 is not an acceptable bet with Uncle Sam's property, which included the boat and everything inside her pressure hull. We had service numbers in those days, just like spare parts.

Flatley came into the mess while we were somberly shaking our wise young heads, "You ain't gonna believe this," he grabbed a cup of coffee and fell onto a bench seat. "It's raining on the bridge, and there ain't no clouds!"

I had to wait till another kibitzer came down from the bridge, because the OD had to keep count of visitors in case we needed to dive in a hurry, and Flatley was right. Nice warm drizzle - and blue sky above. From the bow all around the starboard side there was a bank of dark sky rising about five degrees above the horizon, and dead astern the tops of white cumulonimbus clouds had begun to appear. The raindrops made little circles in the calm sea next to the tank tops, but the pond-ducks were gone. Razorback's batteries were fully charged, so 1600 horsepower from each of the three Fairbanks/Morris engines was going directly to the main motors and the ship's screws.

"We gonna outrun the somobitch?" I asked the OD.

"The storm isn't behind us. The wall of the storm is three-hundred-and-sixty degrees around us; we're picking the best place to break through."

The prow was getting wet now, though no waves could be seen. Must be some mile-long swells building up. I said something vulgar, and asked permission to lay below. I could sleep now. Damn sure *better* sleep now.

When I woke up, the ship was rigged for red, so I knew I'd had some shuteye. I grabbed a sandwich and rigged myself from the waist up in foul-weather gear.

"Permission to come on the bridge." I heard the wind topside, and the blast coming through the bridge hatch was cold.

"That you Gorence? Come up."

The OD and both lookouts were leaning over the port side of the bridge, looking aft.

"We got a line or something hanging over the After Torpedo Room hatch," he pushed me against the cowling leaned against my back, and pointed.

The wind was howling again, so he had to shout; there were no stars in the sky, but I could see something snapping up and down on deck with one end over the side and the other near the hatch wheel.

"Captain to the bridge," through the bridge hatch. No permission involved. A hundred men could recognize his slightest whisper.

Within two minutes, the Skipper had taken the conn, moved the OOD and lookout watch to the Conning Tower to preserve their night vision, and had the signal searchlight rigged on the bridge.

"You Leading Seaman, Gorence? Busy trip for you, huh?" he ignored my answer.

"Control, Bridge, send up a seaman with two life jackets and safety harnesses. We're gonna send men out on deck. Gorence is on the bridge."

The periscope watch reported that the cable was from the aft messenger buoy, which was still in place. The Skipper shined the searchlight aft on the cable. The salt spray reflected the light so that everything was either pitch black or bright as day depending on the wind's whim. He cupped his hands around his mouth toward us:

"I want you to heave around on that cable until you get enough slack to tie a mooring line to it so we can get it aboard. I'll get a couple more men to help."

By the time we got on deck, the ship was pitching and rolling enough that keeping a tight grip on the safety chain was about all we could do. Two of us heaved with all our strength, and couldn't get more than a couple of inches of slack. In an hour there were three of us, spending half our energy in pulling each other off the tank tops and back onto deck by the safety chains. The ship was pitching wildly now and green water over the deck was more of a problem than equilibrium.

We'd lost two pairs of bolt cutters over the side, and everyone but Hammitt was just trying to keep upright and waiting for another pair. We'd frayed a few strands of cable with the bolt cutters but were a long way from cutting through the moving-target's 1" diameter. Hammitt was playing with a hacksaw. I thought it was sort of like trying to empty the bilges with a soup spoon, but with nothing else to do but hang on, I decided to see what Hammitt was doing. He was mostly cussing, because as soon as he tried to lift the cable to cut it, the cable would crush his fingers against the deck. Finally, I maneuvered myself behind him, put my arms around his waist and held up the cable in front of him with some slack from my chain. Hammitt just sort of floated back and forth, up and down, in my arms. At times he was

between my legs, and sometimes he sat on my knees. His safety chain ended up wrapped around my left calf. Meanwhile, he ignored the blasts of sea water, the cold air, me, and rest of the world . . . he just sawed. Both his hands were bleeding, because each strand that he cut gave way with a viscous snap that left scars in the teak deck, the steel superstructure and his wrists; his knuckles dangled half-inch strips of saltwater-cleaned pieces of white skin, where they scraped teak on every stroke, but he bounced back and forth with me and sawed. He said later that his feet never touched the deck all the time he was in my lap.

Suddenly, the stern dropped and I turned to see a twenty-footer coming over the fantail. I don't know if I had my mouth open, but the wind was so strong that it filled my lungs and I panicked for an instant: 'Gasping for breath,' inadequately describes suffocation with lungs that are too *full*. The wave swept us up and slammed us against the tank tops ten feet away, and I got rid of that extra air in my lungs and a little more, immediately. Aching and angry, I clambered back up on deck, and saw Hammitt still down on the tank tops, hanging with both hands to the outboard teak plank, and with an unbelievably stupid look on his face.

"Come on, man!" I screamed through the wind and the thundering engines, though it was my gestures that really communicated, "Let's get the goddamn thing cut, and get outa here."

The boat rolled, and in an instant he was looking down at me; he motioned toward my feet and then lost his grip and landed where he had been pointing. "Gone," he grinned... It was.

The bridge had tried to call us back several times, for our own safety, but the sound-powered headset was one of the first casualties, and the guy manning them was so busy trying to keep Hammitt and me on deck, he'd long since forgotten anything else.

The Skipper gave us enough time to get into dry clothes, and then called us to his cabin. A shot of brandy all around.

"That cable could have dropped onto the screws," he explained, "Particularly if we'd slowed while you were on deck, or later on if we'd have had to slow because of the storm. Could have wrapped around the shafts. Not good losing propulsion in this kind of weather. Well done men."

"Just a minute, Gorence," he called me back alone. "Wahoff says you might be interested in on-the-job training for Quartermaster." He didn't wait for me to answer, "He asked the XO to talk to you."

"Should I go see him, sir?"

"No, I'll talk to him. I'd like you to bring me a request chit when you're ready, and we'll see if we can get you a school or two." I guess my eyes were lighting up too much, because he didn't stop there, "I'd like to see you go through Final Quals before we get into port. If you can't make it by then, I think it would be a good idea if you just stayed aboard in port to study. Wahoff and I are both behind you. Oh, I also spoke to the COB, and he agrees. Good luck."

The Chief of the Boat, the Skipper and Wahoff all behind me. Crap! A month and a half at sea, two months' pay waiting for me, and no liberty when we hit port. I was three-quarters of the way through reviewing all the filthy language I could think of, but the warm clean sheet under the flash-cover, and the gentle drumming of the diesels put me to sleep.

We later learned the typhoon had been christened *Vera*, and that it killed over four thousand Japanese people, but Razorback had found the weakest spot in its south wall and cut through the storm like it was mayo. We were five days late pulling into port. Just outside Pearl Harbor, while I was putting on some decent clothes for Maneuvering Watch, Hank grabbed my hand, shook it twice and said, "Christ, now they're gonna teach you to navigate. . . Whole goddamn Pacific Ocean, and they're count'n on you to find a rock to run us aground on." He reached up and brushed off a small piece of lint from my breast pocket just below my new Silver Dolphins.

## **If It Won't Fit in a Seabag...**by Ron Gorence

We were to play war games with a Destroyer Group. The surface Navy needed some Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) training, and the Razorback was handy. The group was on a northerly heading to intersect our track somewhere over the Marinas Trench within the next few hours. Razorback had been headed for Bangkok for R&R, and the crew had not been pleased with the delaying message. The Skipper had cranked on all-ahead full when he'd first received the orders, to make sure we wouldn't waste any time looking for them. As a result, we'd had swim call in the deepest water on earth, and had been circling on station at ten knots for several hours with the Radar watch and lookouts on full alert.

I was standing port lookout, and Tommy Thompson was searching the horizon to starboard. "Ever been to Thailand, Mr. Green?" I asked the Officer of the Deck. He looked about my age, and nearly as salty. Nevertheless, it wasn't a dumb question because a commission required a college degree, so I knew he was at least four years older.

"No. Only one in the wardroom who's been there, besides the Captain, is Mr. Colson. He says the religious temples there are the most beautiful in the world: absolutely stunning."

I rolled my eyes at Tommy and was just about to ask him what Mr. Colson had to say about Thailand women, when I suddenly sensed that there was something abnormal on the horizon off the port bow. I squinted my eyes - nothing. Then I raised the binoculars, "Mast on the horizon at three-two-five, relative," I said above the sounds of the engines. Immediately, the 27-MC barked, "Bridge, Radar: Contact bearing one-four-zero true, range fifteen thousand yards."

"Left full rudder, come to course one-four-zero," the OOD shouted down through the upper conning tower hatch, "All ahead full."

"Left full rudder, come to course one-four-zero, All-ahead full, Aye . . . Rudder is left full. Answered all-ahead full. Coming to one-four-zero, Sir," replied the helmsman.

During the ten minutes after the Skipper was informed, our speed, course, and position were transmitted to the Surface-Skimmers; we closed our distance to the Tin-Cans as fast as our engines would carry us.

My estimate on the contact's bearing had been off by only five degrees; I'd hoped that Mr.Green would take notice, and be impressed, because he was responsible for signing-off several of the schematics that I'd traced-out and diagramed.

To get my Dolphins - which would designate me *Qualified in Submarines* - I had to prove that I knew the boat. It was as if I'd flushed the toilet at home, and immediately everyone in the house became anal-retentive about the destination of my deposit. The qualified guys, who joked and laughed and kidded about cops and women and typhoons and everything else, were downright anal when it came to putting a signature on my qualification card. The bottom of the toilet on the ship and the sides had pipes attached, with valves and elbows and seals; they all came from - and went to - somewhere. Tracing meant following each pipe associated with a piece of equipment through slimy bilges, watertight bulkheads, pressure-hull seals, and spaces so small only a flashlight could fit. Knowing the boat was an intimate thing. Toilets were easy, but something like the IMO (Internal Movement of Oil) Pump was complicated, with a dozen hydraulic lines going in or coming out. Electrical or electronic gear had wires, properly called cables, instead of pipes to trace out and draw. Each qualified man had created his own schematic of every system onboard, so when if mine didn't compare, I started over. They also compared each other's, so cheating was impossible. Dolphin-wearers seemed to make light of everything sacred, dangerous, or even patriotic, but not submarine qualifications.

Instead of being impressed by me, the OOD wrapped his brain around this ASW exercise, as if nothing else mattered. We'd told the Skimmers exactly where we were. Then challenged them to come find us. Mr. Green passed the word on the 1-MC throughout the ship, "Make all preparations to submerge the ship." *Christ, three days ago the Old Man had waited 'till the OOD got a cup of coffee on the bridge, and*

*then surprised him with an emergency dive, I thought, Now we are making preparations? We've been prepared to dive since we left port.*

"Clear the bridge," Mr. Green shouted, though there was no wind and only one Fairbanks-Morse diesel now online to drown out his voice. He pulled two short blasts on the diving alarm, shouted "Dive, Dive." into the 1-MC, and then twisted around to jump down the upper conning-tower hatch, where Tommy and I had just disappeared.

Tommy and I had a running bet with the Quartermaster on watch that we could beat the ship's eight-second record for clearing the bridge. I figured we had a good chance, having been *prepared*. Tommy was first. He'd tucked his binoculars under his shirt - to keep from eating them as he descended - and jumped down the eight-foot ladder into the conning tower with his hands on the rails, feet well away from the rungs. He twisted to his right, grabbing the lower-conning tower hatch rail, and dropped another ten feet - again, hands-only on the ladder - into the Control Room where he pivoted to his right, pressed my bow planes rig-out the switch, and sat at the stern planes. I was there a second later, turning the large chrome wheel toward ten-degrees down.

"Ten-point-five seconds," shouted the Quartermaster.

Meanwhile, the Chief of the Watch had opened the main-vent valves. Main Ballast saddle-tanks, surrounding the hull like life-vests, immediately filled with sea water and the ship was no longer capable of floating on the ocean's surface. Our rumbling diesel engine, requiring air, was shut down, and main motors, attached to the screws, shifted to battery-power. The Skipper took her to 200 feet, below the temperature layer, and changed course ninety degrees to the right.

The surface fleet pinged with active sonar and scoured the depths for two hours, until the Old Man finally got on the UQC, the underwater telephone, and announced, "This is Lobo; we hold you bearing two-two-zero, approximately three-thousand yards; my contact, designated 'S-1', over."

Pinger's on voice came over the 27MC, "Conn, Sonar, contact S-1 changing course toward; speed increasing."

The return communications suggested that the skimmers had known where we were all along, but we knew better. Finally, they all closed in and simulated depth-charging. If it had been a cowboy movie, we'd have picked up the UQC mike and said, "Agh, ya got us." but the Old Man calmly acknowledged the kill and asked if they'd require additional services. We all grinned at the negative reply.

Tommy and I had failed to beat the record for clearing the bridge, and I hadn't impressed the OOD enough to get any signatures, but we had allowed the Destroyer Navy to feel potent. The only really exciting thing about the transit had been a star

that moved rapidly across the sky during midday. Someone said it was Sputnik, which had been launched by the Ruskies, but I didn't believe an object the size of a basketball could give off that much light in the daytime. I privately resented the Russians' success in space, and worried about them having both Sputnik and The Bomb, but I'd been informed that earning dolphins was my appropriate contribution to world affairs. My opinion was not needed, and besides, what was once called the Kingdom of Siam was just over the horizon.

None of us in the taxicab had been to Thailand before, but we had been briefed by the saltier members of the crew regarding the unique superiority of both Thai females and Thai souvenirs. Somewhere way back in our brain, where things like "Yes, Ma'am," and, "Thank You," were stowed, we all planned to buy souvenirs for mothers or sweethearts back home. Prolonged deprivation tends to rearrange - or create its own - priorities. We had many American dollars and few inhibitions thanks to thirty days at sea. I looked at my closest buddy with a let's-be-cool-and-not-rush-into-the-bar-like-hungry-dogs-look and he nodded back, so Tommy and I displayed a steely self-control that anyone would have been proud to tell future grandchildren about.

Our shipmates rushed headlong into the *Rose Tattoo Bar*, fumbling to get their money out before it became invisible in the bar's dim lighting. Not Tommy and me. Across the narrow street from where the taxi let us out, a large hammered-brass coffee table glistened like gold in the sun and caught our eye. We ambled across to the large shed filled with Thai hand-crafted items hanging from the rafters, and from every vertical surface. We were so nonchalant - so cool - that anyone would have thought we'd just spent all night in a cathouse. The shop was no different from other shops interspersed between Neon-signed bars up and down both sides of the street - except for the brass table - which was marked "\$5, U.S." in big red letters. Tommy was losing his resolve until I pointed out that the *Rose Tattoo* was within spitting distance.

When I showed some interest in the coffee table, the shopkeeper inexplicably pulled me by the elbow farther into the store and showed me Teak chess-sets, Jade Buddhas, Ivory elephants and more coffee tables - half as big and twice as expensive as the one out front. I began to suspect that the table I liked was a come-on, intended only to get sailors into the store. We had been "cool" for more than five minutes by now, and Tommy was getting antsy. He was shifting his weight between his feet and I could see the sweat starting to bubble out of his forehead as he nervously glanced across the street and then bought a deck of cards adorned with naked ladies. When he said they were for his mom, I told him he was nuts. He responded by looking back and forth between me and the table and rolling his eyes. The proprietor had been doing everything he could to avoid my brass table, but after I glanced at Tommy who was acting like he had to use the head, I forced the guy to admit that the table had been marked \$5 because he knew it would not fit through a submarine's hatch. He assured me that the dinky tables in the back were of a lighter, more elegant brass, and that they had genuine plastic legs - as opposed to the

garishly carved rosewood I admired on the monster table. I snapped, "no thanks" and we left empty-handed - except for the cards.

We were both amazed at how a little self-imposed discipline and abstinence could improve the taste of a beer, so we ordered two more each, and then finally relaxed. But not for long. I was fully aware that an unmarried eighteen-year-old diesel-boat sailor doesn't have much need for a hand-hammered, hand-engraved, hand-carved, shiny brass five-foot coffee table, but my shipmates in the *Rose* were paying attention only to Tommy's version - he said that I had been *fondling* the engravings. No one said a word about his mom's cards.

"Jeeves! Light the candles on the *golden* table by the fireplace in the lib-ree!" shouted Tubes, pinky finger in the air, as he held his beer bottle up in salute. The gal on his lap flourished a dollar taken from his breast pocket and put it in her bra with similarly-exaggerated finesse.

"The King's entourage will be arriving at six P.M.." he continued.

"No . . . Make it 1830, mon petite cheiri," answered a sonar tech, called Pinger, "Need time to press my smoking jacket and starch my white hat." He returned the salute as a long-legged gal put something tasty, but unidentifiable, into his laughing mouth.

She raised her glass in agreement, and he nodded to her, then to no one in particular said, "I think I'm gonna marry this one." He was already drunk, so no one thought that arguing with him would be worthwhile.

Stu, our skinny little hundred-and-thirty pound cook, said, "Let's help him get it aboard. We can use it to serve horse-cock horse-douvers in the crew's mess," and everyone laughed a toast in my direction.

At the table next to mine, the wisdom was traditional and somber: "Did Uncle Sam issue it in your sea bag?" The invariable answer, "No? Then you don't need it! Gov'ment wanted you to have a brass table, or a wife, they'd a issued you *one-each* - like a peacoat - in boot camp." No dissent possible. "It's called a 'Loss Leader,'" some Quartermaster shouted above the barroom noises, and over my head.

I'd watched Tommy disappear for a half-hour at a time with his gal - the one he'd chosen for her "great running lights" and I suppose he'd lost track of me a couple of times too, but we finally got together and decided to add up what I'd loaned him, and what he'd loaned me. Duke had paid me back the ten he'd owed but had borrowed twenty from Tommy - that was definitely gone 'till payday; Tubes lost a ten under the table, but we couldn't find it. After four or five hours, I had five dollars and taxi fare left in my sock. It was getting dark as I carefully nursed my last drink, but I could still see that coffee table, reflecting Neon greens and reds, through *Rose's* open door.



"How'd he know we were on a submarine - that the table wouldn't fit through the hatch?" I asked Tommy. "How many U.S. Navy ships do you think there are in Bangkok now? . . . You dumb shit!" He motioned to the door, "You think all those legs hanging out of the bat-wing doors were there yesterday?" Tommy somehow made it all clear: Everything around us was a set up - just to get our money. So I walked through the neon rainbow and bought the gaddam table for five bucks. Sometimes you gotta do things just because they say you can't.

The taxi ride back to the ship was uneventful. I was the only one with three dollars for cab fare, so everyone agreed to hang an arm or two out the window to hold my twine-wrapped treasure safely above the road surface. Several legs were also hanging out of the taxi's windows to port. I hid my treasure behind the dumpster at the head of the pier and hit the rack.

I had week-end duty, so on Saturday I smuggled my prize into the rear sail-area, and on Sunday, as Leading Seaman, after the deed was done, I signed off, "Topside, secured; ready for sea." which was supposed to mean that there were no foreign objects laying around which might make noises or stop valves from closing when we submerged. We were heading for Yokosuka, Japan, for fueling. There were 'sea vans' in Yoko, like small trailer-houses, where we could put anything, smaller than a taxi, for later delivery by surface ship to our home port, San Diego.

The Rosewood legs were hinged in the middle, so with a few screws removed, I hid the parts above the air-conditioning piping over my bunk in the After Battery. When everyone was involved in a showing of *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* - which was a mushy love-story, but a great Hong Kong travelogue - I suspended the brass table in the sail. It was just aft of the periscope housings, and just forward of the UHF antenna mast.

Twenty-one thread is strong enough to support a man my size, and I used two large spools of it to secure the piece of brass in space. I used a bowline knot every time I needed a loop to create tension; I tied double-becket-bends when I needed to connect 21-thread to heaving-line. I spared no government expense and used all my marlinspike seamanship knowledge to create a spider-web of support for the one-eighth-inch thick, hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind, brass masterpiece. When I was convinced that I had duplicated the best attributes of both beehive-construction, and spider-web-engineering, I doubled everything. We only had to make it from Bangkok to Yoko, but I wanted to be sure.

The only real test in transporting my treasure was to be one trim dive. There was no reason to dive our submarine, since we were on a simple transit, except that a boat must always be ready to dive in an emergency. Consequently, the boat must submerge after leaving port just to see if someone put rocks in the Forward Battery - which would make us sink instead of submerge.

We dived a hundred miles out of Thailand, went to a hundred feet, and then surfaced. Trimmed-for-dive calculations had been confirmed, so the Skipper rang up three engines, all-ahead full, and set course for Yokosuka, Japan.

When things died down, the Yokosuka liberty party was ashore, and the duty section had settled into routine, I crept into the sail. I was startled at first - then I searched every cranny. My beautiful brass coffee table was gone! Disappeared. Evaporated. A single, frayed piece of 21-thread was dangling down from the superstructure. It couldn't have moved - but it did.

Then the perspiration came: I visualized my table floating into the back of the sail and fouling the main-induction valve as we submerged; I saw our little hundred-and-forty pound cook, Stu, trying frantically, impossibly, to close the valve manually from the crew's mess. I saw water streaming into the battery well and mixing with sulphuric acid, creating poisonous and explosive chlorine gas. I imagined the surfacing alarm, and the words on the 1MC, "Emergency Surface," repeated three times, followed by the collision alarm. I saw Razorback plunging, with an uncontrollable down angle, down thirty-thousand feet, to the bottom of the Mariana's Trench. I resisted the urge to throw up.

Then I began to think of what the crew would do if they found out. I'd signed what I'd thought was a stupid Navy Regs check-off sheet, and they had trusted me. There were many things that a submariner could get away with, but not this. They would not do something as mercifully-conclusive as killing me - they would likely ban me from the Submarine Navy forever. I threw up.

I was shaking as I dropped down through the bridge hatch, through the Conning Tower, and into the Control Room, where the Chief of the Boat happened to be giving advise to a lovelorn Engineman, named Oily, who was standing below-decks watch. A married Chief Petty Officer didn't have a chauffeur, but damn near everything else he and his family needed. Most Chiefs had one house, two cars, three kids, and at least four five-foot coffee tables. Chiefs also had an old man's lifetime worth of opinions and loved to talk. This one's normal talk was actually a snarl, but I felt a need to talk at the time, so I hung around.

"Being in love ain't got nothin' to do with it." he was saying, "You wanna carry more than what fits in your sea-bag, it's okay... Up to you. Just don't bitch at the Navy. Uncle Sam only guarantees what you *need*, not what you *want*. 'Indispensable' is a big word, Oily - fills a sea bag plumb-full."

I wasn't too aware of what they were talking about, but I'd previously been warned that the table wouldn't fit in my sea bag, so that rang a bell just about the time Oily left to make his rounds.

"Chief, I gotta tell you something that's bothering me." After I spilled my guts, I asked him, "You gonna tell the Skipper? He'll kick me out of subs." He lit his pipe,

and his snarl was almost a whisper, "Don't go anywhere. You're restricted. I'll give it some thought and let you know." "When?" I asked.

He gave me his best COB frown, in a disgusted puff of smoke, which meant that I had been dismissed. It was the longest night of my life.

The next morning after quarters, the COB called me aside, and said, "Take another shower and relieve Ackerman on mess-cooking."

He regarded my response, mumbling that I had only been off mess-cooking for a few weeks, as an inappropriate interruption, "You are volunteering to sleep four or five hours a day, peel every gaddam potato in the Orient if necessary, and serve coffee in bed to anyone who asks you."

He had to pause to relight his pipe, "You will wash and sterilize all greasy Engine Room coffee cups and will allow Smith to sleep while you take all mid-rats duties. Meals will be ready precisely on time, and the mess decks will be clean and spotless in time for evening movies. You are happy to volunteer because you think you deserve it! I agree. Plan on liberty sometime in March. This is between you and me! Understand?"

I'd gotten his point about half-way through, and was already feeling slightly better about my future, and things returned almost to normal for me about a week later when the crew threatened to assassinate me for an entirely different reason.

The left-hand deep-sink on diesel subs was for washing and the right was for rinsing. Over the washing sink was a stainless-steel box for liquid soap with a handy petcock at the bottom. One day at sea, I closed the petcock, but not completely. A little ribbon of soap trickled down the stainless backboard, and aided by the two-degree up-angle ordered by the diving officer as we snorkeled, gently curved aft and ran quietly into the rinse sink. Of course, the rinse water foamed if I agitated it, but otherwise it looked completely clear. The COB happened by and asked me how long the valve had been in that position - just as I was about to shut it. I knew I couldn't have served more than two meals like that because I became suspicious when I'd had to change the rinse water so often. Submariners on diesel-boats were very concerned about wasting water.

Coincidentally, the next day, a plague struck Razorback: Everyone had raging uncontrollable diarrhea! We ran out of toilet paper in two days. We ran out of baled rags two days later, with another week at sea ahead of us. The crew used dirty laundry to wipe, and would have used corn-cobs if they'd been able to find any. The Chief Of the Boat, if he hadn't already owned me, could have guaranteed my eternal servitude, but he was so angry, he let the cat out of the bag. The Auxiliaries threatened to remove my fingernails, one at a time, because they didn't enjoy disassembling the sanitary tank flush valves daily to remove rag fragments and pieces of skivvy shirts. People were awakened at all hours to relieve someone else

who had to make a head-call. Even officers, who didn't eat in the crew's mess, threatened me because their toilet paper was gone too. Anyone with stomach cramps wanted revenge, and that was just about the whole crew. Tommy wouldn't talk to me.

The COB told me, "Forget about liberty in March. I may be committing suicide, but by God, you're gonna mess- cook 'till you do it right."

And I eventually did. By the time a couple of months had gone by, I was actually feeling so good about myself that I grinned almost all the time. I'd kissed butt, had tried to be every man's own personal food-servant, and had been cheerful no matter what was occurring around me. Sometimes, in a conversation, three or four sentences would go by with no mention of the screamin' shits. Only the COB truly understood. I'd begun to feel needed. Not one of my shipmates would have considered banning me to anyplace, because each of them had plans for personal retaliation. The crew wanted me around, and alive, so they could make me suffer.

Later on, I found that whatever the Chief had told the Engineman that day in the Control Room about true love must have worked, because before we'd been in Subic Bay for a week, Oily had been stricken again, and this gal had made him so broke that he sold me his Genuine Bangkok Brass Tableware, Setting for Six - for twenty dollars. I'd been restricted to the ship for so long that I had money coming out of my ears. I also figured I'd sell it back to him for twenty-five on the first payday after the Philippines.

As my qualifications progressed, I became so close with the crew, that several men even intervened on my behalf when the COB was considering me for another tour of mess-cooking duty. Tommy and I were going on liberty together again as though he'd never even heard of diarrhea, and one night, in Subic, he asked me, "What did you say when the COB chewed you out about the table?"

"Chewed me out for what?" I asked, genuinely not understanding.

His eyes got wide and then he quickly bowed his head and muttered, "Never mind."

I tried to find out what he was talking about, but the most I could find out was that he had suddenly developed a tremendous fear of spending the rest of his life mess-cooking. I lost my concentration after the next couple of beers because, in Olongapo City, Subic Bay, a lot of people said a lot of things that didn't make sense.

Now, years later, every once in a while my eyes get a little glassy, and I feel like telling my wife about the coffee table but she inevitably interrupts with, "Yes dear, I know; you got drunk in Thailand when you were eighteen. I've heard about it before." And she's never shown any interest in trying out those forty-year-old brass knives and forks.

Occasionally, I'll quietly place a pewter mug of diet coke by her Weight-Watcher's TV-dinner on our simulated marble and mahogany-veneered particle-board tabletop, sit down next to her and close my eyes.

Our glistening brass table has romantically-taunting inscriptions from the Kama Sutra that cannot be seen with open eyes. *Only a silver bejewelled chalice from the King's golden table is adequate to confer the choicest wines unto her lips.*

There are beautifully engraved birds floating above elegantly-carved castles, and from one of them, a young knight slowly emerges. Even before he knows who She might someday be, he has gone out in search of a golden table for his Princess. He is armed only with fierce determination and a desire to prove his worthiness. He invades barbaric lands, outwits dishonest oriental merchants, survives poisonous potions, prowls the darkest alleys; he braves the wrath of King Neptune, enlists the aid of reluctant sea-faring comrades, and even defies the seas' depths.

She nudges me gently, and accuses: "Dear, you're snoring." Naturally, she refuses to concede that it is just possible that I might have been, in Fairbanks-Morse baritone, humming a love tune. It's the thought that counts.

## **Recirculation** by Ron Gorence

My middle son, Mark, was born a healthy baby, but there were doubts after Sabalo received the delivery news via UHF radio. I was on the periscope peering at the coast and at Camp Pendleton.

Submerged, the ship ran on battery power and was completely divorced from the earth's atmosphere. When the last hatch was shut, air trapped within the hull was air-conditioned for the benefit of electronic equipment and continuously recirculated for incidental personal use. Whether a crew member had brought aboard faintly-lingering sweet scents or an overabundance of flatulence from last night's escapades, it was shared democratically. There was little which was not shared on the old smoke-boats, and most of it was filtered through the air conditioning ducts. An Engineman in the Forward Engine Room, standing on a toolbox with an ear to the vent, could eavesdrop on normal conversations in the Crew's Mess two bulkheads away.

We had cast the Beach Recon Marines off with their rubber boats from topside before sunrise, and I was giving instructions on periscope photography. We had taken some Polaroid test shots for exposure, and were clicking off a mosaic series with the 35mm camera when the Radioman handed me the message up through the Control Room Hatch, *29 April, 1967 Mark Gorence arrived 0922 Local. 8 ½ lb. Normal birth. Wife resting.*

"Mary Ann have the kid?" Honeybee called up from Control.

**"Yeah, an eight-pound boy," I hollered back, while focusing the image on the camera's ground glass. No surprise because we knew the baby was ready - just an instant of relief that it had gone well - so I finished the sweep. The shots had to be equally spaced so we could paste the positive prints together seamlessly. I stuffed the message into my shirt pocket, but its contents had already begun to recirculate.**

**We secured from Photo Recon stations about a half later, and just as we were replacing the normal scope faceplate, the 7MC mike in the Conning tower barked, "Chief Gorence, report to the wardroom on the double."**

**Just as I neared the wardroom curtains, the Communications Officer burst through them, at Battle-Stations speed, and headed aft toward the Radio Shack. I tapped on the bulkhead, and said, "Gorence." The Radioman who had given me the message pushed the drapes aside and motioned for me to stand next to him in front of the Old Man. He fidgeted with his white hat and poised somewhere between at-attention and full flight.**

**"I've just told the Division Commander to cancel the helicopter." The Old Man frowned at me, "Now. How's the baby?"**

**"Eight-pound boy, sir," I answered, confused. No helio's in our operations that I knew of.**

**"That's it?" I had never heard the Old Man never raise his voice, but I was certain he was about to, "What else?"**

**"That's all, sir. Wife's resting comfortably." I reached into my pocket for the crumpled message, which he took from my hand as I attempted to unfold it.**

**"This is the only thing you got from radio?" He looked from Sparky to me and back.**

**When we both nodded, he waved us away with his backhand, "That will be all."**

**We stumbled, dumbfounded, through Control and into the Crew's Mess where all mysteries are solved (and many, created).**

**Present were the mess cooks, whose main purpose in life was to maintain continuity as crew members from the Torpedo Rooms, Engine Rooms, Maneuvering, Conn and Control entered and left the current subject of interest. A steward from the Forward Battery, Officers' Country, was also in attendance.**

**During Photo Recon, there was little else going on for anyone not involved in maintaining periscope-depth or taking pictures, so any outside news was naturally devoured with gusto After all, every bubblehead's new-born male was a prospective boat-sailor. The air-conditioning had been humming along nicely. Now, there was great hilarity as they traced the evolution of my message throughout the ship.**

The mess cooks had relayed information from the Control Room and Radio shack in bits as received:

"Gorence's wife finally dropped her kid." "Boy." "8 ½ pounds." "Wife needs rest."

The word was carried in all directions, as each recipient finished his coffee or just got bored with the Crew's Mess and returned to his compartment.

After Engineroom knew the kid was male, pretty heavy, but not sure about his health.

Maneuvering Room and Tubes-Aft couldn't decide whether or not weight had something to with why the baby was dropped.

Tubes-Forward polished the report, and returned it to the Mess Cooks for final publication. They had not been aware of any new radio traffic.

The Forward Battery Steward, sworn to silence by the Officers, could only report in part that he had heard the Executive Officer inform the Skipper, "Gorence's baby had fallen on its head, and was in critical condition; the wife was hysterical and being treated with drugs."

The Communications Officer had taken it upon himself to radio ComSubFlot Two for a helicopter to evacuate the Chief to Balboa Hospital.

The Skipper never after gave me any sign that he remembered being so upset, but I never introduced Mark to him at ship's parties or gatherings - just to be sure.

Since then, Mark has survived automobile and motorcycle wrecks and broken a few bones when the traffic was against him. But like radio, this traffic I never knew about it until it was over. Maybe keeping your eye on the scope is like putting your head in the sand - works for me.

## **Hong Kong** by Ron Gorence

The strip of brine in the South China Sea between Kaohsiung, Taiwan and Hong Kong, B.C.C. ( a British Crown Colony in 1957), was transited entirely on the continental shelf. We were amazed at the strange colors of the sea around us, but the fathometer's failure to record any soundings over a hundred feet beneath the keel was just one more boring aspect of sea-travel at fifteen knots. The ocean was luminous green - every shade of green - and spotted occasionally with large patches of slate-grey, seemingly shadows of non-existent clouds or reflections of phantom underwater reefs. Ralph, the port look-out was also a recent graduate of Submarine School in New London, Connecticut. Between binocular sweeps of the horizon, we pitied the poor civilians who could only drool over Carribbean brochures, and the

Atlantic diesel boat sailors who never stood watch with their sleeves rolled up. We'd watched large fish cruise up and explore our keel. The bow cut through the long waves, and pointed us toward Hong Kong which, we had been informed by the old salts, made San Francisco and New York City look like Hicksville.

"Permission to come on the bridge?" We recognized the raspy voice of Chief Winker, an old WW II submarine vet - the only one I ever met - who was riding the Razorback at the time.

"Ever been here before, Chief?" I asked after the OOD had responded, and he was topside. "Yup," he said as he put his chin on crossed arms resting on the bridge cowling, and gazed out at the pea-green horizon.

Nothing else. He was old. We'd been ashore with him in Kaohsiung, Pearl Harbor and Yokosuka, but he never talked. He'd get drunk, and somebody would carry him back to the boat because he wore a Patrol Insignia under his dolphins and ribbons. No wife, no story, just a lonesome drunk. His Chief's hat was flapping in the wind because he'd taken the stretcher out of it, and he had grey hair around the ears. No one else ever wore a hat at sea. He must have been at least forty. We were surprised when he started mumbling in the general direction of Hong Kong, "Heard a story about a boat that got depth-charged right about here, and the crew got out."

"Here? You mean *right* here where we are now?" The OD and both lookouts forgot their duties. The wind was calm, but he spoke softly, so we leaned toward him.

"Yup, just up there, just south of Matsu Island. A Tin-can came along and found Momsen Lungs bobbing in the wind. No bodies, but they figured some of the boys got out of the boat okay."

We had been taught in Sub School that Blow-and-Go emergency escape methods were far-superior to the old Momson-Lung, but even the instructors regarded both methods as totally worthless. Test-depth for the Razorback was 312 feet. The skipper was not allowed to exceed that limit except in emergencies. Boats with our pressure hull had been known to survive a thousand-foot dive during the war, but many of the diesels which tried deep evasion were never heard from again. Even if the hull didn't crush, the task of opening an escape hatch under four-hundred feet of sea-pressure would be as phenomenal as a butterfly lifting the whole boat out of the water.

The only time boat sailors were in shallow water was in crossing the continental shelf on the way to open ocean. Escape training, like Political Influence, has zero value when you are hovering 300 feet beneath the Pacific. We had all come to believe that Submarine Escape Training was in the curriculum only to pacify worried mothers back home. Winker's story convinced us otherwise. He pointed out to us that a submarine's ability to hide from an enemy in less than a hundred feet of crystal-clear water was limited, so the possibility of escape had to be plausible.



"Of course, we were too busy sweating our trim or patching up equipment and screwed-up torpedoes to think much about those things," he continued. "No WesPac cruises in those days..." Then shifting gears, "What did you think about that shark?" he asked me.

We'd surfaced one dark night just before Kaohsiung, and the Quartermaster damn near broke a leg scrambling up to the bridge. He said he'd stepped on something large and slippery, but managed to grab the TBT, so he could immediately make his report on the 7MC, "All clear forward! All clear to port. Clear around the horizon." After the OOD and lookouts got on station a red flashlight was passed up. They determined that the stink and slippery deck had been caused by large pieces of Hammerhead shark lodged in several places where the sea couldn't wash them free. He had apparently beat himself to death while we snorkeled.

"Quartermaster wouldn't admit he filled his skivvies," I answered. "Good thing that somobitch was dead."

"Well," said Winker, "Most of the life in any ocean lives on the continental shelf. The South China Sea has more kinds of shark and the deadliest sea-snakes in the world."

Not only could the old Chief talk, he apparently had read a book or two.

"Most of the guys who sailed in the old Wolf Packs figured there were a lot of escapes around here." He looked around to make sure none of his audience was distracted by searching the horizon, "We figured it was better to go overboard under an iceburg off Kamchatka than around here; you might last five minutes in cold water."

He turned around and grabbed the cowling over the bridge hatch, "Damn glad we killed that somobitch! His great granddaddy probably ate some poor kid from Iowa. Permission to go below?" Ocean transit is never boring when you have something to think about. There always is. We pulled into Hong Kong the next day, but that's another story.

## **Mary Sue and Hong Kong Too** by Ron Gorence

At the tender age of 17 in the year 1957, I made my first trip to Hong Kong. I was standing lookout watch aboard the USS Razorback (a WW II diesel submarine), when we first made landfall. Actually, in the South China Sea, the approach to land is more like creeping up on a floating garden. Thousands of small islands rise gradually from the horizon in luminous green water. They look like emerald-colored broccoli heads protruding conspicuously from an immense flat putting green. Rare glimpses of brown earth - hidden darkly behind luxuriant overhanging foliage - offer the only evidence that the greenery is not rooted in salt-water. With exception of the

blue sky above and a random van Gogh swipe of lime green here and there, the world is deep verdant green all around the horizon. I imagined tall-ship-sailors of past centuries spending years searching vainly for the mainland.

When we met the Chinese pilot-boat which had come out to meet us in open sea, Sparky, down below in Radio Shack, was in contact with an interpreter on the vessel. We brought the Pilot aboard, cranked up standard speed, and followed her wake through the tiny green islands, which isolated the continent from the South China Sea.

The Captain was on the bridge, but he didn't look like the same confidently calm Skipper we'd just been on patrol with. He looked downright mean. He didn't like giving up the Conn of his ship to anyone, especially at fifteen knots.

"Says right there in the radio message," I whispered through cupped hands to the signal light operator next to me, "the Pilot assumes responsibility for the ship's safety."

"Yeah sure, you dumb shit. The Old Man's gonna go below and take a nap 'cause some commie's promised to take care of his boat," The QM looked down at me, "You gotta be the stupidest non-qual aboard."

I nodded my head, acknowledging the rebuke, "Why don't we just steam in ourselves then? Just radio ahead for permission and go in on our own."

"We gave them our ETA last night," he explained carefully. No matter how disgusted Dolphin-wearing crew members were with non-quals, they never failed to tough-love us until we either bled or smartened up. "If we get a mile off-track either side, or an hour ahead or behind, the Chi-Coms will blow us out of the water." He always smiled whenever I paid attention, "Look closely at those islands; you can tell which ones have cannons on them and which ones don't."

The Skipper turned around and glowered at me. I don't think he'd heard anything. He was glowering at everyone. I decided to pay a little more attention to my lookout duties but I never did identify any islands with guns.

We dropped anchor a few hundred yards off Queen's Pier and were immediately attacked from all sides by a dozen or more sampans, manned by women in black pajamas and conical hats.

The old salts explained that this was Mary Sue's crew. I learned that she was the reason we had stowed tattered and frayed manila mooring lines, pieces of rusted scrap metal and miscellaneous junk in the deck-lockers through all those weeks on patrol. Mary Sue's ladies took every piece of trash we offered. A ten-year-old girl dived overboard in the filthy water to capture a six-foot piece of cotton flax line when I missed the sampan with a careless throw. In return for junk, they cleaned the

engine room bilges, painted any unclassified space we would let them into, and painted our submarine topside from stem to stern. I was overjoyed at the surprise news because normally it was the most junior three men aboard who wire-brushed, scraped and painted topside. In Hong Kong, I was THE junior man, but I was ashore and on liberty not too long after the Captain.

The old timers had primed us for the visit. They had described *genuine* B-U-L-O-U-A men's watches for ten Hong Kong dollars (about two US dollars) that looked just like a hundred-dollar, twenty-one jewel Bulova with a minor spelling error. They had a ladies Timex mounted inside. They warned us to pay only half the tailor's price until after we'd tried on our newly fabricated clothing. We'd seen the Navy's requisite movie with graphic stomach-turning photos of those who had ignored the Navy's abstinence warnings. We unanimously agreed that the Corpsman, who summarized the movie, was lying when he described his bull-head-clap remedy: the affected body part was placed on the After Torpedo Room vise, and puss was then released with a ball-peen hammer. "Only way," he said, "to relieve the pain from the swelling."

Once I had been tracing out a hydraulic line in Control Room for my qualifications, when I overheard the Chiefs talking: ". . . anything you could ever want's in Hong Kong." There was murmured agreement.

"ANYTHING. . . . A clean-shirt-and-a-twenty-dollars-a-day." One of them clasped both thumbs behind his belt buckle.

"Yeah! At's all you need in Hong Kong. Come home with a bad head and pockets inside-out, but damn . . . anything in the world."

Of course that didn't remain a secret long, so when Hammitt, Billie Joe and I left the ship, we were armed with plenty of mediocre advice and two twenties each.

We got from our anchorage to Queen's Pier aboard a British Navy whale boat commanded by a coxswain who swerved, slowed and then gunned the engine dodging through, around, and among two-story Junks, long sleek yachts, and tiny Mary Sue sampans; neither he nor they had ever heard of the International Rules of the Road; it was one of those situations when courage consists of forcing yourself to accept an assumption that he cares as much for his life as you do for yours, so you just hang on. The Star Ferry on our starboard quarter was headed directly at us, but the current was carrying her, crab-like, toward the piers to the right of Queen's Pier. Off to the left, on the island called Hong Kong, several small roads ended at shabby grey warehouses which lined the wharves; at their other extreme were perpendicular roads busy with traffic. Busy cranes moved burdens to and from cargo ships at several piers, and dockside looked to be a very disappointing place.

Careful scrutiny with a lookout's trained eye revealed an occasional faint red neon glow, possibly in the shape of a San Miguel sign. Or Asahi. Anything that glowed

red in the daylight was a possibility. Blurred writing (square, so obviously English) on the waterfront's dominant building - about three stories - finally came into focus. CHINA FLEET CLUB. By now we could see rickshaws and people walking on the streets. In front of the Fleet Club, a sailor, waving a Brit-style flat-hat fell out of a door and into an awaiting rickshaw. We were beginning to get our bearings.

We passed what we decided was an Italian submarine tied up to a pier at Queen's Landing. It would be interesting to visit an Italian boat We were all genuinely fascinated; we each put it on our list of things to do - later. The gate exiting the Queen's compound was manned by a dark-skinned Indian giant in khaki uniform and a light-blue beret. His voice sounded like it came from some little squeaky five-foot Brit with a bowler hat and manacle hidden somewhere inside, but he had a baton the size of a Little League bat, and we did not giggle.

"Roit at the yella, lads," he motioned us out the gate and toward the curb, "Cab'll see ya. Tip a cou' fer me."

"Yessir," we answered and by the time we reached the edge of the wide sidewalk, a small English car with a light on top had pulled up.

There is a psychological sequence of events, unique to Hong Kong, which helps to explain why salty old chiefs (and those who follow behind them) believed that getting yourself completely skinned was one of the better lifetime investments. It begins at the sidewalk outside the Queen's gates.

"How much to a good bar?" I asked, since I was the only one of us not drooling uncontrollably over a tight-fitting chon-sam across the street. (The correct spelling eludes me, but it was a form-fitting ladies' dress, with a small v-shaped upright collar and thigh-high slits, port and starboard - worn properly it pretty-much represented " Everything you could ever want..." that the Chiefs had spoken of).

"Fie dollah. Wan Chai," was the immediate reply. We knew that the Wan Chai was where sailors had gone since time immemorial to get shanghaied.

"For all of us?" I was the only one capable of negotiating.

"Yes, eddyboddy! Gee in." he waved to the open back doors. Damn, I calculated, that's about two bucks each, with tip. Somebody had told me to always get the price before you get in. I managed to get the guys into the taxi.

Amid the dizzying conversation (mean annual temperature and rainfall, cheapest booze in town, history of the Crown Colony, where the best stuff is located, how much further, who's the president of Japan -- Ugh, China -- , how much you want for this taxi, etc.), someone asked if the fare was in HK dollars or American. Missing his chance, the driver answered, "Fie dollah Hong Kong!"

I recalculated: at about six-dollars HK to one US; this trip was costing us about three packs of smokes (at sea-store prices) or thirty cents each. I happily paid the cabby when we got to our destination, gave him a two-dollar HK tip, and he was delighted. Hammitt and Billie Joe hadn't been paying attention, so they shrugged like I was nuts, and promised to pay for the first couple of rounds.

Hong Kong had zapped me. It had tried to extort my hard-earned money. It had charged me more than I would have had to pay in San Francisco. It had taken advantage of me. I had grudgingly and resentfully accepted its extortion. But . . . I had been wrong! I had misjudged. I'd almost had to fight the cab-driver to get him to accept my measly tip. I'd seen hard-working boats, and hard-working people on the streets; but even chon-sams had escaped my calculating mind. I was ashamed of myself, and I loved Hong Kong. I knew then that I always would.

Music to me is sort of in the same category as nuclear physics, but that night I danced and sang with the most beautiful woman in the world. I remember that her leather dress - if it could be called that since it covered only what was between the bottom of her cleavage and the tops of her long thighs - had a shiny parachute D-ring which promised to disengage the entire zipper with one quick yank. My buddies were all jealous of my D-ring, and I danced and felt good. Jean and I smooched and planned to go to her place after one more Cherry-Drink. We did that all afternoon between Tangos. I remember that the Indian guard's big brother carried me to the whale-boat as I described Jean, the D-ringed girl, to him. He couldn't comprehend that "Jean" meant "Shining Star" in Chinese, but he was a good guy.

Hammitt and Billy Joe couldn't see Hong Kong as our whale-boat made its way out to Razorback because they were so preoccupied with pulling me down from the boat's gunwale. The dim white lights of closed business offices and warehouses were reflected gently in the water astern like a thousand yellow moons, but unlike any place else in the world, moonbeams throbbing in the waves danced with glorious green and red neon reflections of humanity at full speed. Apparently, the harbor waters were a bit rough, because I emptied my stomach on Mary Sue's new paint just before I retired to my bunk and slept like a baby.

During each of the next five days in port, one or two sampans visited the ship to collect our garbage immediately after each breakfast, lunch and dinner. The garbage cans were stainless steel cylinders about eight inches in diameter and three feet tall with handles spot-welded on each side near the top. Crew members scraped their plate into the cans, and left-overs from the meal were dumped on top. From on deck, the garbage cans were lowered with a ten-foot tether on the handles, to the sampans, and then hauled back aboard clean and polished. I had mixed feelings of compassion and irony as I watched a young girl scrape beans with a bamboo stick from a half-eaten wiener - to separate two kinds of food which our cook had previously taken great pains to artfully combine. Mashed potatoes, creamed-corn, and corned-beef hash were meticulously isolated into clean tin cans for later use. I never saw a girl eat anything alongside the submarine. An old timer, who said he

could identify Mary Sue, spent several hours on deck watching with me, but he was never able to point her out.

Jean had to visit her sick mother somewhere in inland China unfortunately, but I met several other girls, all equally-endowed, and ended each association with similar results. I did learn that twenty-dollars went as far as forty, with less headache the next day. I bought a Buloua, because two dollars is less than the cost of a Timex, but it only ran for two days. Hammitt's lasted for almost a month at sea.

We wasted some money taking The Tram to the top of Victoria Peak, where *Love is a Many-Splintered Thing* had been filmed and looked at what many folks would regard as the most magnificent view in the world, and we visited the Tiger Balm Gardens once. Mostly, though, we invested our money in the Wan Chai area, and made Friends For Democracy, which the current President had asked us to do. The ship's yeoman got busted by the local police. The report was written in rather poor English, and the Captain called him in and asked him why he had been written up for feeding the pigeons. Took a while, but Yeo was a little drunk standing there, so he eventually admitted that he was at the zoo, and he was feeding pigeons. He taped them up, and fed them to the lions. He caught up on his work in the next few days, because he wasn't allowed ashore.

On the last night in Hong Kong, I attempted to out-drink Yi-Hsiong. She used her Chinese name, which meant *Floating Feather* in Chinese. She was taller than me, and she made David's *Venus* look like a flat-chested fourteen-year-old. I'd carried my load for several hours. I'd borrow ten bucks, buy her a few drinks, go into the head and stick my fingers down my throat to puke, and come back and do it all over again. Hammitt and Billie Joe cheered me on and chipped in a few bucks each because they also wanted to see her drunk. Most of the crew had managed to waste a sawbuck or two on her, and no one had made first base. We'd all had similar experiences in Hong Kong, but she was the world-champion promise-maker; no crew member ever got away from her with a nickel in his pocket unless a shipmate dragged him away by the neckerchief. So we made plans, in collusion with Zio, the bartender, to stack the deck. I guess she didn't share her booty with him.

We staggered out of the bar to a local pharmacist. Zio had told us that you can identify them because there are no dead ducks hanging outside. Inside there are endless trays and boxes of unidentifiable bug parts, strange seeds, and tiny feet and legs wrapped in cellophane.

"We need something that makes a girl less tolerant of alcohol, and more susceptible to amorous advances," we explained to the Pharmacist in enthusiastic sign language and Pidgin English. "Joe sent us."

"Here's what you need, " he answered immediately in the same language. We had hidden a third of our remaining money in our socks and showed him the rest. He took back all but three pills and took most of our offering. When the deal was

closed, he wrapped our goods in an elaborate Chinese envelope, and in the language, we had previously developed, explained to us that we should administer one pill only. Two pills were dangerous. A virgin had once been given three pills and had killed herself on the floor-shift of a '49 Chevy. Now, I knew that a '49 had the gearshift on the steering column, but this was China, so I paid attention.

So we walked back to the *Port O' Call* and sat down in a booth facing the dance floor. Ti came over and sat next to me. We ordered a cherry-drink for her and a beer for me. The guys weren't thirsty, because we only had enough for one more round. Ti had something that looked like red wine in a tulip glass, and I sipped at my beer bottle. When the conversation lagged, Ti asked Hammitt to dance - everyone knew that he was the only real dancer in the group.

While they were on the dancefloor, I dropped one of the pills into her red wine. When they came back to the table, I saw that it was still bubbling in the glass like Seltzer. I panicked and motioned to Hammitt to take her back on the dance floor, and when they were gone, I stuck my thumb into the glass and mashed the pill. She sat down, and said the drink looked funny. It tasted strange. I explained that I had poured some of my beer into her glass. She belted it down and asked for another one. Joe winked at us. She had to go to the ladies room. Billie Joe poured the last few drops of beer into her wineglass and mashed the second pill into it. When Ti returned, he insisted that she drink the beer, before another cherry drink would be on the way. She did, and she drank another cloudy red wine. We all stared at her for a reaction and nursed one bottle of beer among us. Finally, she went to the ladies room, and surfaced on the other side of the bar on a carrier-sailor's lap.

We caught a ride to the pier with five shipmates who were also planning tomorrow's liberty in Hong Kong. We were piled two or three high in the cab, all of us hoping the main engines would need overhauling, and we could borrow twenty dollars for one more day. They didn't, and we sailed out the way we'd come in. Except that we were all flat broke, and I never managed to find a Shore Patrolman anywhere who would accept my shiny sharkskin whites. But one single bad investment in five days ain't bad.

I made a career of the Navy and visited Hong Kong many times during that career (and once during the next) noting no changes other than the skyline. The harbor only reflects glass buildings now. Then, I read somewhere in the late seventies or early eighties, that a resident of one of the mansions on *The Peak* in Hong Kong was a former "junk dealer" named Mary Sue. I was aware that the *Peak* residents, with their private police and fire departments and hospitals, lived on property which made Southern California beachfront appear downright cheap --- some houses said to cost tens of millions of dollars (U.S.). I was flabbergasted, but no one else seemed to be much interested in the story, so I made no note of where I had read this news.

Now after forty years I am still well south of being a millionaire despite a proud history of frugality. I remember feeling sympathy for a fellow hard-worker. Hong Kong had no taxes then, and I hope Mary Sue got out when Britain left. I'm filling out my income tax forms right now, and the news has just announced that Clinton's rent overlooking the Hudson will be partially paid by him. It's OK, because his view doesn't come close to the *Peak's*.

For those of you who might wonder if I ever did make out in Hong Kong, let me just say that I took my wife on the last trip. You'll have to ask her. Now we both love Hong Kong.

## **Horse and Cow** by Ron Gorence

A high-school classmate called me with the news that he was in San Francisco. Right here, right now, today. He'd tracked me and my submarine down somehow through the Navy Locator. I hung up the outside-line phone in Control Room and stepped through the After Battery water-tight door. I was immediately quizzed about the call. I told them about John.

"Another Swabbie from Leadville?" Gears contemplated aloud in the mess deck, "Now we can check out that Beer Can Hill B.S. you been putting out."

"Yeah," answered Rotten Ralph, "probably find out all them beautiful chicks were really Colorado mountain goats. Whole goddamn town's in the Navy now; only one left is Unsinkable Susie."

"Molly Brown, an' he's in the Coast Guard," I corrected. I also informed them that there were almost forty people in my graduating class. Big-city guys tended to be smart-arses.

We then had a serious discussion regarding just where I should meet John this evening. I had to call him right back. We considered the revolving restaurant on top of the Mark Hopkins, but the last time our crew had tried to get in the Mark, the local police had become unreasonable. It wasn't opera season, and my dress blues hadn't been pressed for weeks, so the Symphony was out. We were careful to consider all logistical and social aspects of the situation before we finalized the plan. They came into Control to help me make the call.

"Eighteen hundred. They teach Navy time in the Coast Guard? Six o'clock. Just tell the taxi driver to take you to the 'Horse and Cow,'" I told John, "If he doesn't know where it is, he's not safe to ride with anyway. Get another one."

I had to say most of it twice because I was holding my hand over the mouthpiece most of the time. They were leaning over the chart table with things like, "How much



money does he have? Does he know any wimmen? Can he get a car?" We all went aft to get a shower. Plenty of water on a diesel boat in port, especially in the yards.

The Horse and Cow is difficult to describe from memory. Not so much because it was indescribable, but because it moved at least three times while I was riding the boats. Before now it had been in a stand-alone (because of the noise) building near Hunter's Point, and later I had even found it in a different city. Anyway, at the time, the Horse was right downtown San Francisco, on Ellis Street, in a brick building (despite the noise) shared by a couple of hotels, sandwich shops, and a pawn shop. Inside, though, the decor pretty much endured whatever superfluous exterior changes that time and maritime misfortune imposed.

The large mahogany bar had a brass foot-rail and stools all along one side. At the far end, it had a swiveling pull-out stool, taken from the stern planes station on an unnamed boat, and left religiously-vacant in memory of downed WWII subs. Otherwise the elbow-polished bar was just like all other bars. Nothing else in the Horse was.

The lighting was brighter than other bars. Sub sailors liked to see what they drank and kissed, so several mis-appropriated regulation Navy Type II fluorescent lights, presumably tested to four-hundred feet, dangled from the ceiling, and dim little bunk lights buzzed constantly lighting up whatever corners otherwise might have been dark. Of course, the diesel-boat switch on the bulkhead had been correctly wired so that the duty bartender could give it a twist to rig for red whenever a smooch was imminent. Half the fluorescent tubes in each light fixture were covered with a red plastic tubes. You could develop film under rig-for-red lighting. This was accompanied by the gong-gong sounding of the General Alarm and a chorus of, "Battle Stations, Battle Stations. Man battle stations torpedo."

There were round or shield-shaped wooden ships' plaques on the bulkheads from every submarine that had ever sailed the Pacific, and most of the Atlantic boats too. The plaques had ceramic or brass depictions of sharks eating Japanese flags, Tuna fish with torpedoes in their mouths, cats arched over submarine silhouettes and wolves heads in various nautical settings. Probably two hundred, all different. There were pictures of boats in overhaul, surfacing, diving or just serving as a platform for a crew in inspection-whites, all squeezed in between the plaques. A ragged smelly old bum kept the decorations dusted and clean in return for an occasional bottle of Thunderbird, which, because of its portability, he preferred to bar-drinks. Diesel-boat sailors seldom noticed his odor.

There was a helm wheel with mahogany-colored cox combing, seizing and turk's-heads tied at each spoke; a shiny silver bow-planes wheel, several ships' bells, and oriental dragons embroidered in every color on cuffs detached from dress-blues. There was no wallpaper showing, and the plate glass windows were covered with plywood painted navy-grey, because glass was worthless when it came to hanging things. I may be wrong, but I seem to remember that the insides of the plate-glass

had a large pink pig painted on them, visible from outside - logic says it was a horse or a cow, but seems to me it was a pig - before the plywood had been applied.. Anyway, it was easy to locate our sanctuary no matter what kind of inebriating experience you were returning from. Might even have been a "Horse and Cow" sign out front.

So anyway, we'd caught a ride with a yard-bird, and arrived about an hour early. Rotten Ralph wanted to make sure we were there first, because he thought if John showed up at the Horse and Cow without a submariner to escort him, I would someday have a hell of a time explaining to Leadvillites what had happened to him. We had time to drink a couple before John came in the door. I recognized him immediately, but he had on a Coast Guard flat-hat properly squared above his eyebrows, spit-shined shoes, and a neckerchief hanging (per regulations) at the bottom of his jumper v-collar. Just out of boot. No problem, we could fix all that, but it took me a few minutes to get everybody back to their seats and quiet the cat-calling. Bernie was a little under the weather, so I had to hug him and make him repeat, "Not a skimmer, Gorence's high-school buddy ... not a skimmer."

Barnie fell back into the naugahyde booth and shouted toward the bar, "Gim hshkool budn nabeer." and grinned forgiveness at John.

So after that introduction, John shook hands with Ralph and Gears we and walked over to the bar and sat down and we ran through events of the year since we'd seen each other. Or rather, we started to. About two sentences into our reminiscences, Snorkel Pat came out of the ladies room and approached from starboard. She zeroed right in on the tender new face like a wireguided Mk14 torpedo, and she was grinning big until John screwed up.

"Oh," he jumped up from the barstool, "Am I in your seat, lady?" Gears grimaced.

Snorkel was not a bad looking woman. Pretty old, probably over thirty, but she still had a good shape, and most parts of her face fit fairly well together. She put on her lipstick and make-up with a spatula, and her hair was bright red - not henna - red. She wore several bottles of perfume, but that was probably just a defense against our perpetual diesel-fuel odor.

"You dog-loving somobitchin, goat-screwin, g'dam arshole," and some foul words which I won't repeat, "Who the frak you think you're callin' a lady." Pretty much the standard lecture for anyone who called her names.

"These knees look like I been kneelin' in front of an Admiral?" she whipped up her skirt, and I noticed John was looking mostly at her thighs, or maybe at the tattoos on her thighs, "Ain't no g'dam for'd battery whore!" she put her nose next to his.

The bartender sounded the klaxon and shouted, "DIVE . . . DIVE," The klaxon was the main reason the Horse and Cow generally had neighbor-problems wherever it was located.

Anyway, Snorkel Pat went on to make certain that John understood that she only serviced the enlisted submarine fleet. Grease under your fingernails was preferred, and diesel smell was mandatory. She must have noticed that everyone was going back to their drinks, or maybe she was thinking of making an exception for this tender young non-submarine thing, because her voice tapered off, "Screwed every bubblehead in the Pacific twice, and startin over; might even turn YOU inside out. No more lady-crap! Siddown." John sat. He said, "Sorry, mmmmmff." I'd gotten my hand over his mouth just in time. She didn't like being called "Ma'am" either.

John was returning to normal color, and Rotten Ralph whispered over to him, "She ain't so bad, and she really didn't screw the whole fleet - if she did, she missed me," and out loud to the bartender, "Give Pat a rum."

"Anybody don't drink straight rum is a friggn la..idy," she shouted to the world.

"Last week it was gin, I confided to John. She keeps a hundred-dollar bill in her dresser -- says she'll give it to the first man who's as good as her dearly-departed husband." She spotted Gear's flask of whiskey - he'd gotten bored with us and moved to a table - and John became a dim memory. I was thinking that John had started to look interested, but I couldn't tell if he meant to steal her hundred, or earn it.

It took a while to get back to old times, in fact we never really did. John had seen the regulation stainless steel commode and urinal in the head, and I assured him they really were off a sub, but had been re-rigged to civilian specs so there was no possibility of a back-flush. No danger of getting your deposit back in the face like aboard ship. Flapper valve had been taken off the thunder bowl but the brass plate instructions were intact. John looked blank, so I dropped the subject.

In a few seconds, he brought it up again. He had noticed the centerpiece hanging conspicuously behind the bar among the plaques, equally spaced between a brass chronometer and a barometer, above the booze bottles.

"Why'd they hang a urinal there," he said.

"That's for dolphin-dunking." Man, I thought to myself, John hasn't been out of Leadville long. I tube-locked his neckerchief.

"Submariners have to learn every air system, fuel system on the boat. Hydraulics, electrical, fresh water, salt water, all the valves and switches, and all the equipment." He nodded, really listening, so I went on, "Everyone has to be able to do everyone else's job in an pinch."

**"Watch," I said and raised my voice, "How long is Razorback?"**

**"Three-hundred-six feet, six inches," several shouted above their glasses, "Bu-shit, nearer five inches," from another corner, and an argument ensued.**

**"How many valves to secure sanitary number-two for a blow?"**

**"Seven." said someone.**

**"Eight." came another. More arguments.**

**"Well, they wouldn't be drunk on the boat," I weaseled. "Anyway, when a guy passes his qualification tests, he gets to wear dolphins - he's qualified," I tapped mine on my chest, "but first, he has to come down here and get his dolphins out of that urinal with his teeth."**

**"Yuk," said my friend.**

**"Oh no, it's clean," Rotten Ralph assured him, "That thing has been alcohol-sterilized for years. By the way, we got a guy qualified yesterday and he'll be here tonight. See, when he gets here everybody dumps whatever's left in his drink into the urinal. Bottom's plugged with damage control epoxy. He has to drink most of it before he can see the dolphins - drown if he just tried fishing around for 'em."**

**I pointed out the round bottom. "Dolphins stay right in the bowl there. Red wine's the worst to see through - but don't worry, he'll get some first-class brandy too."**

**San Francisco usually filled with damp fog early in the morning at that time of year, but that night it came in just after sunset. Chilly. John had also just been through some major climate changes. That's probably why he decided, with regrets, that he had to miss the ceremonies of the evening. He wasn't feeling to well and was concerned about getting back to his base or ship or something. We really hadn't had time to talk about whatever it was that he did.**

**Ralph mentioned that he hadn't been in the Coast Guard long enough yet to get his sea-legs because he staggered a little when he went out to the door to the cab we'd called two beers ago. I didn't see John again for several years, and we talked mostly about our wives and kids then, so I never did finish telling him about Snorkel Pat and the Horse and Cow.**

**Let's see... There was the collision alarm.....The easily-replaceable Betty Grable, Jane Russel, etc., etc. pin-up dart-targets where a stray dart going into anyone's drink (the dart area was above the corner booth) was cause for immediate replacement (darts which stuck in a skull only rated a curse, no drink).....The bombed-out but always-spotless heads with their shiny thunder-bowls and empty molly-bolt holes on the bulkhead where some naive fool had once hung a condom**

dispenser. Historical sites can seldom be appreciated in only one day, particularly evolving ones. I'm sure John would agree. Passed by a Horse and Cow the other day by the old Recruit Training Command main-gate here in San Diego. I wonder.... I'm gonna update my data-base next time my wife goes out of town; I'm planning to light off the stair-master tomorrow - gotta get in shape. Let's see, flack jacket, steel-toed boots, drink a gallon of olive oil first. . .

Or maybe I'll just tell another old story (to steal a thought from Dex Armstrong: I don't think Snorkel Pat would have signed Monica's qualifications card - no class); recent role-modeling oozing out of DC has probably taken the fun out of *raunchy*.

## **Trust Me...**by Ron Gorence

The U.S. Military came up in the discussion somehow, and I mumbled something about my personal history. "Submarines? You were on *submarines*?" He squinted and looked directly into my eyes, pausing like he was trying to plumb the soul of a Martian, and stumbled on, "Don't you get . . . ah, y'know, ah . . . takes guts, . . . I could never do that." Did he say *nuts*, or *guts*? Either way, my habitual response was, "It's not so bad. You get used to it. Yeah, claustrophobia could be a problem."

This *Deja vu* conversation happens at Christmas parties and during short airplane flights - anywhere abbreviated autobiographies are expected. It's eventually been part of every one of my permanent relationships. Afterward, I always think, "I wish I'd said . . . ," but then I shrug, "They could never understand."

The problem is, he or she, seconds ago, was trading polite grins with an apparently-normal human being; suddenly, it dawns: Normal humans do not sink themselves in a sewer pipe and then materialize on a far shore grinning because it came back to the surface. It is quite natural to wonder whether insanity is a main prerequisite for, or the result of, becoming a submariner.

Since nuts cannot know they are nuts because they are nuts, I can only hope that by recounting some nearly true personal experiences, I might offer my next acquaintance something more than an unsatisfying shrug.

Starting at seventeen, I served during the cold war with WW II heroes who wore Combat Patrol pins, and later with unappreciated Vietnam bubbleheads on diesel boats. In the Submarine Nuclear Navy, I served with rocket-science-educated Nukes. I admit that all submariners are unique individuals, just as each boat has its own personality, but moving from one group or boat to another was sort of like a kid, in a large family, swapping beds. Nothing to write home about.

The level of psychoanalysis needed for maintaining submarine manpower would have driven Freud nuts. The task requires a bureaucracy in which alchemy really produces gold.

Submariners have always been volunteers, but volunteering in the military has, since time immemorial, been associated with stupidity. Contrariness is a necessity for those who volunteer for something considered not only stupid, but dangerous. For instance, by Navy definition, a "boat" is a craft that can be hoisted aboard a ship. Except for Submarines. Submariners have never, ever, balked at a mission, but when they went, they went "riding their boat." Bravado is also a common trait, but it must survive brutal screening and withstand ridicule. Patriotism - mistakenly regarded, by most screeners, as an infatuation to be outgrown - must be lodged deeply between heart and spine, where it is immune to scorn, not on the sleeve. Self-esteem does not come with mother's milk, but is earned, and it is always subordinate to veneration of brothers-past. New volunteers may not feel a tightening in their chests upon hearing names of missing submariners or those boat skippers who were posthumously-awarded the Medal of Honor in WW II , but they must possess that capacity. This results in an uniquely cantankerous personal honor. They cannot yet know why the names *Thresher* or *Scorpion* cause a submariner to stop dead in his tracks in spontaneous salute to lost brothers, but they must be able to understand why it might. I personally volunteered for the sub-pay. Not for the dollar-amount - a naive Congressional inducement - but because, when they paid me a nickel more than the guy standing next to me, I was up there with John Wayne and Glen Ford manning the periscope. Only a bureaucracy could screw up so successfully.

Selection of "volunteers" begins with psychological testing: claustrophobia tests, personality tests, academic tests, intelligence tests, Rorschach tests, interviews, consultations and interrogations. They asked why I had a tattoo. "Because I had eight hours of freedom from boot camp, four dollars, and two beers." Right answer! Most of us who made it through screening agreed that they had rejected everyone who had passed and kept the nuts.

Physical examinations were intended to eliminate candidates over six-foot-four or two-hundred pounds; they could not have flat feet and needed 20-20 vision. I memorized the eye chart when the guy in front of me read it aloud; we both missed the same two letters on the bottom line and we both passed. I leave flat-footed footprints like a duck's, and I've known many giants riding the boats. As with the headshrinkers' psychological criteria, failing wasn't necessarily failing. The physical was more like the final exam of the psychological testing: those who managed to show innovation and resourcefulness were passed on to sub school. From the late thirties through the eighties, a few men slipped through who were exactly what the silent service needed. I hope things have not changed.

I spent Christmas of '60 on the *Bashaw* (SSK-241), a diesel submarine commissioned during the war. She was in Pearl Harbor undergoing a mini-overhaul. Not enough to go back to the West Coast for a full six-month overhaul, but enough work to keep her off SubPac operating schedules. Yard-birds were installing more sophisticated sonar gear in the enormous bubble which had replaced and disfigured her wave-cutting Guppy II bow.

The Officers and Crew were surprised when I reported aboard as a third-class Quartermaster because the ship had a complete complement of QM's, so there was no billet for me. The Navigator suggested that I might be interested in running the deck gang; if not, he would go through service-records to determine seniority and move another QM. As a veteran boat-sailor, I had no problem with that either. Sub sailors pretty-well agreed in those days that the guy who polished the thunder-jugs in the head was as important as the one who plotted the ship's course. Fear of a VD or Bubonic Plague breeding-site was as frightening as a graveyard of rusting hulls aground on a Pacific atoll. I accepted the deck assignment.

The Submarine Navy conducted informal covert security tests in those days. To ensure that no foreign agent could breach a ship's security, the boat crews continually exchanged midnight raids on one-another and on the civilian support buildings. Daylight excursions were particularly insidious because the perpetrators generally were sober and extraordinarily sly. A ship's nameplate sign hanging on the sail-handrails or painted on canvass and hung from the brow stanchions, were the more common targets used in the constant drive to improve attentiveness among topside watch standers. Mooring lines, heaving lines, ship's logs, below-decks-watch check off lists, and deck wrenches exchanged ownership frequently. A ship's bell was a particularly significant trophy because it symbolized the submariner's reputation for stealth. It was guarded more tenaciously than an armed MK-14 torpedo on the topside deck. One of my seamen, Harly, was a kid who knew nothing of Naval Security before my tutelage. He haunts me now from time to time.

A couple of weeks into my new assignment, the Bashaw's chrome bell disappeared. It had been engraved with the ship's name and hull number so, if we could locate it, proof of ownership would be no problem. I told Harly to go find it. He returned after a full day and shrugged his shoulders. I told the Chief of the Boat that I was certain that we had scouted every ship on the Sub Base. He was busy chewing out someone else at the time, but kindly interrupted himself for my benefit, and informed me that he was really too important a person to listen to sob-stories. He put his hand on my shoulder in a fatherly way (but without fondness) and told me, with verbal punctuation too colorful to repeat, that Bashaw was going out to test our new BQS-something in exactly four days . . . at which time we would have an engraved Bashaw-bell . . . or I would spend the rest of my career in sickbay. Of course I had been anxious to test my relatively-new Third-Class Petty Officer authority, and the leadership skills the COB had demonstrated, so I went topside and grabbed Harly by the shirt collar.

"I don't wanna hear that, 'I did my best,' crap! A fish out of water does its best to swim, but that don't impress anybody! The Old Man signed an emergency requisition. Find out what's holding that up. Get another chit. Talk to somebody in supply. Check with base security. Get a piece of brass and start chiseling," I had to take a breath, "I don't want to hear you say 'can't' again. 'Can't' ain't in your vocabulary. You got until taps tomorrow night to get a bell hung up on the front of the goldam doghouse." Harly was cowering now, "If we ain't got a bell by then, I'm

gonna lend you to the black-gang. You'll spend the next month in the Forward Engine room lower-flats scraping greasy bilges till they shine and you stink." He walked ashore, across the brow, with a look that changed from fear to hate and to what I desperately hoped was determination.

Next morning at chow, someone said, "Nice bell, Gorence. Where'd you get it?" So I scrambled up the ladder to topside and there it was - glistening like gold. Took about ten minutes for Harly to tell me how he'd gotten it. He'd swapped twenty pounds of ground coffee for a pallet of five-gallon cans of zinc-chromate primer. Then he traded for an eight-man inflatable Marine Corps Recon rubber boat -- I lost track somewhere between the guts for an auxiliary-gyro and a set of Fairbanks-Morse valve rings.

The COB got back to nodding in a fatherly way at me again; he was particularly pleased that our new brass bell required elbow-grease to keep it shined -- as opposed to the old chrome model. When the First Lieutenant in charge of the deck-gang asked me how I had managed to do it, I pushed out my chest: "Harly swapped a few tins of coffee for eighty gallons of paint, and then . . ." He cut me off, "Never mind," He put his hands to his ears, "I don't need to know. I never asked you."

Always ready to hone my leadership skills and learn by example, I developed a unique relationship with Harly. Whenever I hinted that we might be able to use a such-and-such, it appeared magically, but I insisted strongly that the details were his business alone and I adamantly respected his privacy. Even when he insisted on telling me, I never heard a thing.

The normal supply channels were cumbersome and slow. The bureaucrats in Washington had set up controls which included incentives to double-order everything and throw mistakes over the side. Erroneously-shipped items required more hours of paperwork to return than they took to order in the first place. Praying that a requisition would get filled before equipment became obsolete was sort of like throwing virgins off a cliff in the middle of the desert hoping King Neptune would calm angry seas. We saved Uncle Sam and Bashaw thousands of dollars worth of clerical time. The term was cumshaw (not to be confused with scrimshaw - a completely different fine-art). Rickover's top-priority nukes were supplied at a snail's pace by comparison. They had horsepower; we had Harly.

Harly tried to tell me one day about a project he was working on in his off-duty time. "You have a periscope?" I normally didn't want to hear, but he'd hooked me, "What do you mean, 'a periscope'?"

"Yeah, it's over in the torpedo shop." He was really proud, "Wanna come see it? You can watch the Marines change guard at the main gate."

"You mean somebody lets you use a periscope for . . . "



**"No." He interrupted, "It's MY scope. Come on, I'll take ya over."**

**I asked him what in hell he wanted a personal periscope for, and he said something about being fascinated with optics. I knew I was getting into shoal waters so I grabbed his arm and said, "No. No more. Don't tell me anything. Nothing. Never." He looked disappointed, but I finally convinced him that I could be proud of him even if I didn't know anything - especially if I didn't know anything.**

**Years later, I read that someone had been arrested for selling diesel-submarine battery cells to civilians from the Sub base. Of course, smuggling one-ton acid-filled monstrosities past the Marine gate-guards had a familiar M.O. Harly haunts me still.**

**Most of my short time aboard Bashaw was in port, with exception of a few sea-trials in Hawaiian waters. Other boat sailors scoffed at the enormous bone she carried in her teeth when she was surfaced, a constant tidal-wave pushed ahead like a Colorado snow-plow in slush, but they had a healthy respect for the fact that she could hear things underwater like no other ship in the world. The "K" in her designation stood for "killer." Killer-subbs hunted other submarines, so the scoffing was muffled. My old boat, Razorback could make over twenty knots in fair seas; I never saw Bashaw make over twelve. Nukes could outrun both of them, but sounded like runaway submerged locomotives and couldn't have sneaked up on a buffalo stampede. Speed wasn't her strong card, but I had learned to appreciate her unique capabilities, and nearly managed to establish myself as a member of an expert crew; I had just begun to look forward to a leisurely six-month West Pac trip, when I received orders to the Swordfish (SSN-579). Apparently, they were shorter on QM's than we were.**

**Swordfish was a fast-attack nuclear boat. The nukes had recently broken through ice at the North Pole and made many transits under it. Several had cruised around the world at record speed so I sensed adventure. The Navy had finally realized that they needed me at the new frontier. I was going to a better place than smoke-boats. I was to be in a more modern Navy, more sophisticated. Maybe I was luckier than these poor diesel slobs, or maybe my hard work and dedication had paid off. I was full of myself and elated - until I found out how rough it was to say goodbye to those proud specialists crewing Bashaw. They were testing advanced sonars only to see if it was good enough for the nuclear navy, and they hadn't even been asked to teach anyone how to use it. The emotional experience convinced me that "better" was not the right word when I applied it to Razorback and Bashaw vs. Swordfish. Twelve, twenty, or fifteen-knots are measures of speed, not importance. I calmed down and accepted that I was just going to a *different* place.**

**I lost track of Harly because if he ever made it into the nuke navy he was either promoted to a Supply Officer or made brig trustee; I didn't travel much in either circle.**

My seniority problem came up again when I was introduced to the Swordfish QM gang. Chief Hart asked if I was on the list for promotion to Second-Class. I was. So was Earl. Same date. The Chief had to verify who had made Third-Class earliest, been in the Navy longest, whose mother was the oldest, or whatever Navy Regs required to determine seniority.

Meanwhile Earl and I went to have a beer at the *Dolphin Club* on Beretania Street. We'd made the mandatory tour of the ship so I knew where to stow my gear and where the mess deck was, so by ten in the morning we were downtown.

Brownie was already in the bar. He was a very large Swordfish Torpedoman with a bad hangover and a nasty disposition. Brownie was too busy to shake hands with me: there was a delicate tulip glass of red wine sitting in front of him, and he was attentively fumbling with a piece of tinfoil.

"Yearrh, " he growled, which meant, "Welcome Aboard."

He finally succeeded in opening the packets and dropped about half-a-dozen Alka-seltzer tablets into his wine. He waited until the pink foam had fizzled down the crystal stem and onto the bar-top before he belted it down and chased it with a double-shot of bourbon. His whole demeanor changed. His eyebrows lifted, and the wrinkles came off his face. His hands stopped shaking, and he turned back to me and said, "Yearrh, " Obviously feeling better.

Earl and I agreed that Brownie would be at home on any diesel-boat, where problems are solved - not complained about - and so we discussed Swordfish for most of the day over cool Primo beer and cold Chinese food. I couldn't get a thing out of Earl when I asked about the fleet-wide rumor that she'd had an underwater collision with a Rusky sub just north of Japan. He was dead serious about classified information and wouldn't budge. He admitted that the boat had repaired periscopes in Yokosuka, but I couldn't find out why.

Swordfish had completed a two-hundred-and-two-day patrol just after he'd come aboard. That tidbit diverted my attention. Made their own water and air, he said. Even had hydroponic plants for salads. He wrinkled his nose talking about that, but I forgot whether he said it was because the food was lousy or just that growing lettuce in a fish tank didn't work. The main point was, "Two-hundred days, completely divorced from the earth's atmosphere." Like in a space ship.

Now here's the way the world normally turns: When you run out of money, you go to sea; then when the boat runs out of diesel fuel, you go back into port, where more money has re accumulated on your pay records. Earl turned my world upside-down. I paraphrased: "The only reason you ever have to go into port on a nuke is if someone in the crew goes nuts." I waited for an argument, but Earl sipped his Primo and nodded, "Yup."

I'd never been much concerned with pecking-order or status, so when the chief made his determination, it became Earl's fault if anything went wrong, because he was senior, and I was as happy as could be. Earl and I were good friends and I soon got down to business re-qualifying on the boat. Most of the valves and switches and pipes served about the same purpose as on diesels, but they were all in different places. They'd inserted watertight compartments where they shouldn't be, and completely forgotten to attach a conning tower to the basic sewer-pipe layout. Astern of frame thirty-seven, I think it was, the reactor spaces were so highly classified, that minimal quals were required. Forward of frame 37 was the nose cone; aft was nuke-territory. I had to know a few emergency things like how to drop lead rods down into the uranium core to stop the little electrons from running into each other uncontrollably. These little guys got so hot and bothered when they banged together, they'd melt a hole in the bottom of the pressure hull if you didn't quickly isolate them with lead. High-pressure steam could only get so high before it made a hole in the other direction, so you had to know those emergency procedures as well. I learned that like the word FIRE on any submarine, SCRAMBLE was a bad word on a nuke. We had to draw diagrams of our reactor, and explain its functions to a qualified nuke, along with all associated systems; otherwise, nose-coners had little to do with anything aft of frame 37. The big exception was standing reactor watch. Everyone below Chief had to put in time watching the reactor do nothing. I spent many a four-hour watch hoping it would do nothing. We all wore little film-badges to see if we had received too many roentgens. ( I am exaggerating; they were really milli-roentgens, and much less nasty). If I got more than my allotment, I would sire deformed kids, and various body parts might fall off. We all shared core-time watches and roentgens. I ultimately fathered three healthy sons in later years - but now that I think about it, they were pretty mean when they were teenagers. I'd never have gotten my re-qual signatures if they'd known then that I have not to this day understood the purpose of reactor watch - although I concede that it must have been important.

The nukes maligned nose-coners whom they regarded as not only incapable of understanding nuclear fission, but also as hicks who thought Einstein was the name of a new model from Ford Motor. Nose-coners looked down on the nukes because they wore poopy-suits and probably had to drink white wine with chicken. Nose-coners genuinely believed that nukes' purpose was providing propulsion so that important people could get to strange places across the seas and do the Navy's work. Nukes would have used phrases like harmless repartee to describe a situation which was simply healthy rivalry. In fact, I saw it exactly that way, and was on good terms with everyone aboard. There was a closeness between groups that none of them would admit to, which I attributed to the taboo incident which had resulted in periscope repairs in Japan. I knew absolutely nothing about it, but I was aware that no stronger bond exists than among men who have faced death together. Someone finally pointed it out to this Pollyanna: the nukes went to one Honolulu bar and the nose-coners to another. There were occasional cross-visits, but there were also absolutely distinct and clear preferences. Unfortunately, I was forced to realize that the solid watertight-door at frame thirty-seven existed just as symbolically as it did

physically. Unconsciously, I was to be a major player in helping to rectify this situation.

Everybody in the navigation business knows that the globe wobbles slightly on its axis. That's why the North Star isn't consistently north. Payroll accountants, however, never recognized such aberrations, and Navy paydays were as predictable as days of the week. But the Nuclear Navy even tottered the unshakable payroll world. Earl told me about the time he'd had more money than King Kamahamaha: they'd just come in from a ninety-day patrol, and then, had to turn around and take the Sargo's turn on patrol -- with only two days in port and no pay. When they returned to Honolulu three months later after two back-to-back patrols, they had half a year's pay waiting for them. They *owned* Oahu.

As a serious aside, I did not witness the deadly catastrophe on Sargo, resulting in her inability to get underway for her scheduled patrol, but with sincerest respect, the story should be told:

The Sargo was loading oxygen from the sub-base pier when an AC motor or a lighting switch sparked somewhere or maybe someone lit a cigarette - there were no witnesses - and the resulting flames shot a hundred-feet into the air from a 3000-degree oxygen-fed blast of fire in the Stern Room. For hours, fire-fighting barges and pier-side firefighters poured tons of water into the flames, but their efforts only created more steam, which mingled with the man-made fog already drifting across Pearl Harbor. Jim Smallwood, Machinest's Mate Third-class, was Sargo's below-decks watch when the incident occurred. He was a bachelor who had taken the duty for a married man wanting to spend the eve of the patrol-run at home with his family. Jim had previously gone through the boat inspecting everything in preparation for loading Oxygen and evicting loafers and sleepers alike from the Stern Room. Earl Palmer, a First Class Radioman, was one of those awakened. Smallwood, a quiet, but conscientious man, was junior to Palmer. He apologetically told Palmer that he would allow no one, not even Captain Nicholson, to stay in the area while loading. Smallwood's uncompromising dedication ensured that he would be the sole victim.

The Captain and his crew, torn between abandoning ship and saving Sargo, took unprecedented action and submerged the after end of the boat alongside the dock.

At one time, both the Skipper and the Executive officer were trapped together in the compartment just aft of the Control Room, unable to open its watertight door. A vacuum had been pulled in the boat to evacuate suffocating smoke from all spaces forward of the fire, and it sealed their door shut. They eventually managed to pry the door open just enough to equalize the pressure and swing the door open. For more than a day, the uncontrolled burn in the flooded compartment boiled the sea water above it; finally the flames died, and a huge floating crane was brought alongside to lift the ship's stern from the muddy sea floor. The crew, including a man they called Sammy, ultimately entered the stern room and found steaming eight-inch I-beams

welded to a hull so warped that a eight-foot section would have to be cut out and replaced. Whatever was flammable was disintegrated. Sammy's good friend, Jim Smallwood watch had already been removed; parts of his body had been found charred and torn to pieces; the torso was jammed into a six-inch space between the deck plates and the pyrotechnics locker. It was a sudden, painless death, and the Navy solemnly gathered up his remains for his family to bury. Sea-lore promises that his soul is has been reincarnated into an Albatross, soaring on ten-foot wings, far out at sea. The President didn't call for a special inquiry in those days; rumor was, he just said a prayer with wet eyes. Our Commander-in-Chief answered to God then, so boat sailors simply nodded and continued with their work. Most of us become silent when we hear the name Albatross; all of us, when we see one.

In WWII submariners surpassed even Marine Corps casualty rates - one-in-three never came back - and although peacetime casualties cannot be compared, he belongs among those who left us that heritage.

But . . . I was describing submergence in large quantities of money.

We were given a week's notice to prepare for a two-month patrol, so we received three-months' advance-pay. It was normal in the Nuke Navy to give married pukes and their wives enough money to survive prolonged separation. Bank accounts had to be padded for future rent payments and grocery bills. Nothing like the riches Earl had bragged about, but it was the most money I'd ever held in my hands at one time. Of course none of the bachelors had rent problems and few of them had bank accounts. We had a week to dispose of it, and we all succeeded.

There are very few nightclubs in Honolulu where a millionaire or a sailor with twenties hanging from every pocket is not welcome. Exorbitant two-dollar drinks were often accompanied by three-dollar tips for a mediocre-looking waitress - but mediocre was rare. Room service drinks and tips were three times as expensive in the Ala Moana Hotel and, of course, regular hangouts and dives were rewarded for the fact that they had loved us in leaner times. Taxi drivers were on a first name basis, even without chauffeur's hats. I never did get my toes manicured, but just about the time I was willing to concede fondness for this non-diesel Navy, we got orders to head for the shipyards in Vallejo for a one-year overhaul and reactor change, with a short visit to San Diego en route. The patrol had been canceled. Our pay records past, present and future were written in red ink. Because of a Presidential decree, an Act of Congress, or maybe our sniveling, the disbursing office agreed to pay us enough each month for soap, toothpaste and cigarettes until the books were square.

We were to be in San Diego for forty-eight hours before heading north, and on the day we arrived, I had to work on our navigation charts for a couple of hours (Earl having been determined to be senior). The latest Notice to Mariners had arrived with several navigation-aid changes in the San Francisco Bay area, so I didn't get ashore until several hours after the rest of the crew. I walked up Broadway and headed for

the first bar where I could hear the jukebox blaring competition with thunderous voices and I found the Swordfish crew. I spotted Earl and a couple of buddies at a table about half way between the front door, which opened from Broadway, and a back door leading to a side street. Classy joint! Inside plumbing and a waitress.

Everyone was already way ahead of me. There was apparently enough money for beer, and obviously no one was saving for toothpaste. Brownie was at one end of the bar, representing the nose-coners; and a giant Nuclear-Electrician-type, called Beef, was taking up a large portion of the middle for the nukes. I had just sat down, and ordered my first beer. Time to relax and light up a smoke. I opened my Zippo . . . TINK . . . put the flame to my Lucky Strike, inhaled and closed it: CHUNK. Then, from somewhere else, BONK . . . FISHHHHH. . . CLANK . . . TINKLE. I turned my head and saw a beer bottle disintegrate over Beef's head. Beef stood up from his barstool, dribbling pink foam - a shade darker than what Brownie produced - and began a slow-motion stalk after a little guy whose head was about level with Beef's dolphin-buckled belt. I was the only one who had the reflexes left to do anything, so I jumped between Beef and the tiny surface-craft skimmer, who by then had grabbed another brown bottle from the bar and was backing away from Beef. I looked up at Beef, and saw that there was a stream of blood trickling from the top of his head and running down his face. It dripped with beer off his chin as he slowly advanced on the little skimmer. Both hands hung straight down at his sides, having assumed his gorilla stance, and his eyes stared about thirty yards past his target. I pushed the midget firmly and took his bottle with my right hand, "Get out," I motioned toward the back door, and he was more than cooperative. "Chicken." some drunk hollered.

My left hand was on Beef's belly button. That, plus the fact that a part of his brain almost recognized me, seemed to confuse him enough to make him stop and grunt. By then a couple of shipmates were there to help me steer him back to his stool. I turned away as they propped his huge body back on the stool with his face toward the bar and arranged his elbows. He was too big for his bloody chin to reach the bar top, so it just dangled from the front of a hunched-over hulk. Someone put a bar rag under the drip and ordered him another Bud, just as three Shore Patrol came in through the Broadway door.

I was on the way back to my table, so I was the only person in the middle of the room. They zeroed in on me, and spun me around, "Alright, what's going on?"

"Nothing," I said nonchalantly kicking a piece of brown glass under the table. Their shoes crunched on the floor as they surrounded me, "No problems here."

"Got a riot-call on radio," the nasty one said accusingly.

I saw him looking at Beef's blood on my white jumper sleeve, "Just had a little nosebleed; it's all better now."

"Lemme see your ID." Said Fatso. Not nasty, just stupid. They were all skimmers. Tin-can sailors.

"What for? I haven't even had a beer yet." Destroyer sailors, definitely.

"You gonna' break it out . . . or you want me to get it for you?" Nasty was getting really nasty.

I mumbled a little something to that effect as I pulled my wallet out. Must have mumbled a little too loud. "Smart arse, huh?" He started putting a handcuff on my right wrist, but I yanked it away.

"What the f-k you doin'? Why you putting cuffs on me." My voice might have been a little on the loud side.

"Drunk in a public place." The four-eyed one said, "We're gonna' take you for a little ride."

"Gadammit, I haven't even had a drink! I'm not drunk." I tried to pull away, but they didn't like that, so they all three grabbed me, put the cuffs on and lifted me off the floor.

Earl came toward them, but Nasty waved a nightstick at him and said, "You wanna' go in the wagon too?"

A shipmate grabbed Earl and said, since I wasn't drunk, they'd likely let me go in about ten minutes. Nearly everyone heard that and agreed, so people went back more important things like Euclidean geometry, empty beer bottles or the location of San Diego wimmin who might be impressed with a Navy uniform.

The Shore Patrol didn't hear it though, because I was screaming, "I'm not drunk. I paid for that gadamm beer. Gimme my beer, I'm not drunk," and I tried to kick the nasty one where it would do the most good, but I missed. I tried to appeal to four-eyes, assuming that he was the lone rational thinker, but his glasses had been accidentally bent above one eye and below the other, so he was almost as irate as Nasty. They dragged me kicking and screaming out the Broadway door and locked me into the back of the SP van.

The Shore Patrol had an agreement with the local police, so there was a handy stainless steel drunk tank somewhere down on the seaward end of Market Street. They threw me in with three reprobates. A civilian and a disheveled sailor, both looked like they were dead. The third guy was puking all over himself and the steel floor. I was stone cold sober, but it didn't help my case when I slipped and fell. I screamed for my one constitutionally-guaranteed phone call. I screamed for a drunk test. I screamed for the American Ambassador. I screamed from sheer anger. After a

while, the puker told me that if I just shut-up, they'd keep me for four hours and let me go. That made me scream louder.

Eventually I got tired and fell asleep in the only place I'd ever been that smelled worse than a diesel boat. I woke up a couple of hours before sunrise, all alone.

After a while, a brig guard came by and I asked when they were going to let me go. "First run is at zero-eight-hundred. Gotta take you to the ship and get someone to sign for you."

*Just over an hour to wait; what the hell, I thought, I've already been here for six hours.* "Where'd the others go?" I motioned toward the empty cell.

"Let them out hours ago, " he said.

"Then why can't you let me go?" I asked logically.

"Report says you're a bad one. Drunk and disorderly, destruction of civilian property, resisting arrest. You gotta' have a signature of somebody on the ship who'll be responsible for you."

I didn't have any screams left, so I waited.

We got back to the ship about nine-thirty, and they signed-over responsibility of me to a snotty-nosed seaman apprentice topside watch with about two weeks in the Navy.

"Yeah, he was about to be promoted to Second Class," little sonobitch played it to the hilt. "We'll handle it from here." He grabbed his portable 1MC mike, talked to himself with a show of importance, and then told the Shore Patrol, "The master-at-arms is waiting for him below."

Then he turned to me, "Lay below, Gorence." A hot damn seaman apprentice . . . Well, like I said, I didn't have any screams left. I don't remember his name, but I'll bet dollars to donuts that kid ended up as the skipper of a sub, or CEO of a big company. Faced with a problem. he handled it beyond the call . . . Kind of reminded me of Harly.

I shook my head and went down to the crew's berthing area to wash up. I had a gadamm civilian stranger's last meal, mixed with Beef's blood, spread all over my whites. I spotted Beef, and I glared at his prone body. He was in his bunk, snoring like a f'n baby ape.

Earl came by, when I was smelling better, and said, "Ready to go over?"

"Na," I answered, "I'm sorta' f'n tired of San Diego."



"OK," he said, but he sacrificed an hour of his liberty-time to fill me in on what had happened after I'd left the party. Seems the midget had found his tin-can buddies and brought a dozen of them back to the bar. The first nose-coner who got punched was immediately avenged by one of the nukes, and then the frame-37 barrier was blown into oblivion while the Swordfish sailors, from fore and aft, swabbed decks with the surface navy.

I spent most of the day topside, with a cup of coffee, enjoying peaceful sunshine and watching nose-coners and nukes return arm-in-arm - some with shiners, many staggering - all smiling.

After that, it wasn't unusual to see a poopysuiter learning from a QM how to navigate with LORAN-C or a mixed group of nose-coners and nukes discussing the salacious details of excited little electrons eluding flirtatious giant protons. Brownie and Beef, between them, could cover a whole square yard of bar-top with little pink bubbles after a bad night, or if they woke up when the ship was getting underway, their hangovers were sweated-out over the torpedoes and nuclear reactions under their care. Incapacity was a mortal sin never to be condoned. Mutual respect floated in the re-circulated air from stem to stern. Except for me. They laughed with great insensitively at my contribution. It's O.K. - I know that heroic sacrifices aren't made for glory, but for a higher purpose.

All boat sailors have experienced "losing the bubble." This bubble, like a builder's level, is an indicator showing the up- or down-angle of the submerged ship. A ten-degree up-angle is a lazy slow ascent to the surface, but no one snoozes when the bubble passes thirty-degrees down because that's the quickest route to crush-depth. I have no memories of insanity ever being a cause, or of exceptional bravery saving the day. The fact that I am relating these stories proves that I was lucky enough to be with men who remained calm enough to apply considerable expertise. They were not heroic; just shipmates. Shipmates are the people I have spent the rest of my life measuring others against. Nuts are the ones I see on the evening news.

Or maybe going to jail for a gadamm unappreciative nuke, just because he was a shipmate, is nuts. Of course, the brain-dead nuke would have done the same for me. So, maybe, like I said in the beginning, "They could never understand." But trust me on this: steel will float in salt-water. If you can believe that . . . \*\*\* *Thanks to Jim Christley, Mike Hacking, Stan Mize, and Sammy who pointed out my Sargo errors.*

## **The Bear** by Ron Gorence

"Bear," he said, "the name's Bear." "But the teachers call you Barry," I responded, innocently believing in the school bureaucracy. "Bear!" he growled. I made a mental note to inform the Leadville High School secretary of her error, and accepted that a guy ought to know his own name. "Anyway," I continued, "they didn't invite

me either. No one gets invited to Skip Day. We all just ditch school and go to Twin Lakes and drink beer."

What I had told him was true - basically. I wasn't one of the in-crowd at LHS because my parents weren't on the list of significant donors to the Annunciation Church's Christmas fund; they weren't related to anybody in city politics, and my school clothes obviously came from Penny's, but I'd spent my young life convinced that I was as good as the high-brows, and considering my habit of discussing pretentiousness and big-city ostentation, I was pretty well expected to show up at most events. Some of the more liberal even invited me from time to time. But I was stretching things a bit.

Bear's mom worked in a bar. Not in Fadiga's, where the lady bartender was an ex-mayor's alcoholic daughter, or the historic family-owned Silver Dollar where Doc Holiday had been served, but in the Miner's Club where loose women were said to congregate and, it was rumored, she often out-drunk her customers. Bear didn't have a father, and he had a surly disposition. Three strikes. And he posed as a hot-tempered school bully. "Naw, I ain't goin'," he said. This was a week before Skip Day.

We spent a lot of time sitting together on various Leadville curbs over the next few days. We talked a lot about joining the service, but most of our time was spent rubbing pennies on the cement sidewalk next to our butts.

"You're not as tough as you act," I ventured. "The only reason nobody will fight you is 'cause you always brag about your knife collection. They think if they face up to you, you'll pull a knife. I know you wouldn't, but you've got them buffaloed."

We scraped the copper coins on the concrete.

"I could kick your ass right now," he stood up, temper flaring, "an' anybody else in school."

I rolled my eyes. I was almost five-feet-eight, and he was shorter than me. "Calm down bad ass; save it for the Marine Corps. I examined the penny he was holding. "Now you gotta roll it on its edge to reduce the diameter." You ain't no bear, you're a gahdam Teddy-bear."

Eventually, we both managed to wear down our pennies to the size of a dime and went to the cigarette machine and bought a pack of Luckies with our counterfeit coins.

Bear and I made many more dime-sized pennies before Skip Day rolled around. On one occasion, we almost decided to start a gang. We would name it Le Morte. French for DEATH. He would be the leader, of course, and he decided I should be its legal counsel. We ticked off names of other recruits but postponed further action

while we evaluated whether or not Leadville was a big enough town to support a gang. We made about thirty fake-dimes.

On the sandy shores of Twin Lakes, someone had figured out a way to supply the beer (we were all under-age), and Bear and I passed out cigarettes to all comers. We were more popular than the Coors distributors on the big day.

Bear had developed so much confidence in his new-found acceptance that he fell in love with the prettiest girl in school - who was beyond even my wildest dreams - and then he made the mistake of telling her so. We'd had about two beers, and three packs of cigarettes, so I was feeling silly and he was feeling reckless.

Apparently, his rejection was unambiguous and abrupt, because all the pain and anger was back in his eyes as we drove home. There was no time for consolation; the half-hour trip to Twin Lakes took eight minutes with him behind the wheel. I just hung on.

Bear never spoke to me again, and a little while later, he left Leadville. The Miner's Club burned to the ground about the same time and his mom left, but I cannot remember if the events were related. I never heard from him again, but I feared that his rebellious tendencies, or his obsession with weapons might have landed him in jail. While I knew his temper was well-controlled, this fact was not obvious to strangers.

Years later, I heard a song coming from the radio of my diesel submarine patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin: *'We are the men of the Green Beret...'* by Barry Sadler - a Vietnam hero. I thought of the coincidental name as I looked through the periscope and watched the bright flashes of ordinance exploding on the mainland. I was sadly aware that each illumination was a visual manifestation of death — possibly of Americans I'd known. The same thoughts occurred on several past patrols in the same area but on this particular one, I stepped into the crew's mess to the sounds of a new tune.

“Good song,” I said to no one in particular as I drained a cup of coffee from the urn. “Yeah, it's by a guy named Barry Sadler. He really is a Green Beret.” Someone answered. “Who?” He'd caught my attention, “Spell the name.”

He did, and I decided that it was just too far-fetched. I managed to push it out of my head for several more watches, but I couldn't shake the feeling that Bear might really be out there somewhere. I finally rounded up the record's album cover and there in bold color was a picture of the Bear! After that I tended to skim quickly — almost guiltily — past the balls of fire blooming on the beach. I was looking for downed pilots, surface vessels and enemy patrol craft, which required a different, less uncomfortable, use of the brain.

Bear died mysteriously years later in Mexico. They say he killed himself. He may have been justifiably bitter about some things in life, family, and love, but he didn't commit suicide. I saw his wide grin as he rubbed skin off his fingers to deprive the government of a few pennies of cigarette tax, and I saw his death defying grimace as he drove so fast that survival was secondary to his pride. I didn't know him long, but I knew him well enough to know he faced problems standing up.

My first thought on hearing of his death was to wish I'd been able to keep him with me to serve the Country in a calmer way. He'd have made a hell of a submarine sailor. Still, his way of focusing internal agonies should be an example to all young men from whatever background; he was solidly American.

An excerpt from an interview with Bear from Guns Magazine (July, 1989) may be particularly timely:

**GUNS:** So your feelings are, then, that the U.S. should have learned from the Viet Cong?

**SADLER:** Absolutely. This massive guilt -- I don't know what it is, politicians get into social relevance garbage -- can't cross a border. Borders are made to be crossed. It's an imaginary line, and if the enemy has access to it, why shouldn't we? I couldn't understand that. It was ridiculous.

## **Once Upon a Time** by Ron Gorence

It was dusk, and the computer screen glared brightly in the dim room. The monitor was blank except for rows of dots and a few words at the bottom, scrolling across the page: *" . . . carefully steering due North, the wind and current set was Westerly; drift, three knots. All courses need adjustment . . . ."*

The periods chased the words across the page making them disappear one at a time at the right margin and reappear on a next line. Conny Shawn's grey head was resting on his right forearm on the desk. He snored gently. His left thumb had pushed up his bifocals until they reflected the bright light back into the screen, and the little finger of his left hand rested on the *Del* key and tirelessly transmitted decimal points.

He was dreaming in the way that only old men can dream: slowly and carefully choosing images from the past and processing the scenes at the speed of light. Children dream of flying above the earth or of being chased by monsters, but old men have already flown to the limits of their ability, and monsters are just old memories, easily suppressed.

*Sara's waist was still so small that he could touch his index fingers together in the small of his wife's back, and nearly touch his thumbs in front. Then, like in a movie,*

*the scene changed: Sean Connery was pouring red wine into a crystal goblet held by a dark-haired child, when an older Sara appeared and yanked the glass from the boy's hand saying, "What are you doing? You know you're not allowed grown-up drinks!" She was scowling at both of them. Sean protested, "It's only a sip; it's good for his blood."*

*But the lady's face changed and she suddenly floated up to the sky and dangled a can of beer, held in sharp claws, just in front of the pursuing child, "You can't touch it until you're twenty-one." She cackled with glee as the boy fell to his knees and sobbed, and she turned into naked Eve, eating an apple.*

The front door slammed shut, and Conny snorted. He moved slightly but did not come fully awake until he heard the business-like clicking of his daughter-in-law's heels on the hardwood floor. He straightened his glasses, brushed back his hair instinctively, and tried to act as though he had been wide awake. He heard her go straight into the kitchen and heard the refrigerator door close.

"Dad? Why's everything so dark in here?" She burst into the den, flicking light switches, and collecting beer cans.

He clicked his mouse and reduced the dotted screen, "Hi Lee. Just gamin' with the guys; don't need to waste electricity for that." He was on his feet now. "Want some coffee or something?"

She stood facing him with her hands on her hips, "Sara called me, and said you'd been on the phone-line all day. Couldn't get ahold of you. I told her I'd stop by and tell you she's working late, so she'll meet us all at Tio's at seven." She turned away and started dumping pipe ashes into the trash can. "You fell asleep on the internet again didn't you?"

Before he could answer, her son charged in through the front door. "Yo gramps, got any Coke?" Danny headed straight for the refrigerator, and then came into the den, put his head on Conny's belly, and gave him a hug. "Hey birthday-boy, let me see if you've got any grey hair like me."

"I'm only ten, grandpa." He shoved Conny gently back onto the sofa next to the computer desk, crawled up on his lap, and poked a forefinger into Conny's stomach, "Kids don't have fat bellies and grey hair. Can I print my Virtua Fighter moves on your computer?"

"I'll print 'em for you later," Conny called after him, as Lee grabbed Danny's hand and left as quickly as she'd come in.

A round of drinks came after they'd eaten the birthday dinner that evening, and Conny's son, Dave, talked to his business partner about golf clubs, the ladies chatted about food and sensible diets, and Danny played his video game until the

waiters gathered to sing Happy Birthday. Conny sang along, but was soon back to swirling his beer around and thinking that the women ought to take up golf, so they wouldn't have to memorize carbohydrate contents. . . and if the men counted calories, they wouldn't have to waste time looking for the balls they'd just banged with a stick. Finally, Sara jabbed Conny in the ribs, and the waiter put the bill in his outstretched hand.

When all the requisite protestations over the bill had been deflated, Dave's partner, Bud Something-or-Other, who'd called his grandson *Denny* instead of Danny all night, gestured across the table to Conny, "So what do you do Mr. Shawn?"

Sara was much quicker with words, so she answered for him, "He watches that Stock Market channel all day, and talks to his internet pen-pals. He's retired." One of Conny's black brows lifted slightly, but he had no chance to say anything because all around the table erupted comments about the price of Dell and Cisco stock, profits at Amazon, and sure-thing IPOs. His eyes happened to meet Danny's gaze and he winked. Danny winked back.

Bud said to the group in general, "I wish I had time to play the market. I think I could make some real money." They all nodded in apparent agreement.

Conny tilted his head downward, lifted both brows and his shoulders in unison, but when he opened his mouth, Bud continued, "Be careful on the internet. Lot of perverts and scammers out there, looking for old folks to take advantage of." Danny was still watching his eyes, so Conny just smiled at the condescending advice. *Like the ones who'd sold this guy a Beemer commensurate with his position?*

"No," defended Sara. "His only buddies on the web are a bunch of old submarine sailors reliving the past. And he does good with his stocks - he loses a lot - but we always seem to come out ahead." *But I keep my stupid job, just in case*, she didn't say. "Submarines? You were on submarines? I don't think I could handle that," said Bud.

Everyone nodded, and Dave said, "Next time we're at the Nineteenth, I'll tell you all about it. I've heard war stories since I was a kid. A thousand tons of Japanese ships sunk."

Turning toward his dad, he asked, "Was it a thousand, or a hundred-thousand tons, Dad?" And without waiting for an answer, "Did some pretty hairy stuff before the big bomb ended it all."

Conny frowned, but saw little Danny frowning harder, so he simply said, "Wasn't in the War, son. I rode the boats in the fifties." He knew it had been his own fault, and he remembered with regret that every time a young Dave had asked something simple like which ocean is the biggest, Conny had droned on with a geography lesson. The kid had learned early-on how to avoid lectures.

"Boats, Ships. . . whatever," shrugged Dave as the conversation lost momentum. "Enough about the good old days, Cheers to the Birthday Boy."

On the way home, Danny nuzzled his head under Conny's arm and said, "How come they're mean to you, and never let you talk, Grandpa?"

"They're not mean. They're just bored with old, old stories." He squeezed his grandson.

"Well, you never told me about submarines. I wouldn't get bored."

When the van pulled up in front of Sara and Conny's house, Conny squeezed Danny, and promised, "I'll tell you all about my adventures someday."

When they were in the house, Conny told Sara that he needed to update his core portfolio and print some game rules for Danny; he'd come along to bed shortly. Actually, he intended to sit down and write a few lines for his grandson as he'd promised.

He booted up the computer and stared at the screen. Conny opened his word-processor and tried to think of something to write - without introducing a ten-year-old to sex and booze. *The best years of my life, and I can't share them with a kid who loves me.* Thoughts raced through his brain, but none reached his fingers. *Nursery rhymes and fairy tales begin with, "Once upon a time . . ."* it was an old Submarine saying, ". . . but sea-stories begin, *"This Is No Shit . . ."* TINS. . .

Everything Conny could remember was in the TINS category, so he forced himself to type, *"Once upon a time, there was a handsome young lad from San Diego . . ."* He left the words on the screen, curser flashing, while he got a beer from the fridge; he drank a few more and gawked at the curser.

Finally, Conny decided to log on, skim his favorite submarine-site for a couple of TINS to relay to the printer, and go to bed. Tomorrow would be soon enough to see if anything came out that was appropriate for Danny to read.

The screen saver brought up an American Flag waving over New York, and as he turned out the lights, the printer whined and hummed. Leaves of paper floated down and scattered around the desk.

The expandable file was open to *QUOTATIONS. . .*

*They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and HIS wonders of the deep. (Psalms 107:23-24)*

*Punching holes in the ocean . . . . Seduced by saltwater . . . . Deadly cold anger of the North Atlantic . . . . (Web AB: Armstrong-Hemming)*

*Same thing, just needs a little sorting,* Conny thought, as he stapled a few sets of printed pages together and put them under

## **Aloha, Haole** by Ron Gorence

Razorback was breathtaking. She was big, black, and beautiful, but the little girl standing on the brow ahead of me said my submarine looked like an alligator.

My first impulse was to sternly inform this annoying copy of Shirley Temple that she was mocking a noble American Ship of War, but at just the time I had decided that an indignant grunt would be more dignified, she looked at me and said, "Are you the Captain?"

"No," I answered, "I am the ship's Sonar Technician," which wasn't exactly true yet, since I was just reporting aboard and this was the first ship I'd ever been on. I thought I'd been sublimely subtle when I implied that my perspective job was more important than the Captain's, but she wrinkled her nose in a perfect expression of doubt.

At her age, I'd been just as obnoxious, and she forced me to remember when I was a six-year-old, like her, jumping up and down in joyful anticipation of going to school with the big kids - until that moment when I had to let go of mom's hand on the first day of school. The little brat looked like she knew I was going through a First-Day right now, even if she couldn't know I had been dreaming submarines for the past six-months.

Six months ago in boot-camp, two of my best buddies were just about to join the ten-percent of those who couldn't 'hack it' in recruit training, and got kicked out. I suggested we all should think about why we had joined. As a result, we made it a point to carefully observe all Fleet Sailors we could find. We watched for them whenever we marched around the perimeters of Recruit Training Command, or when we caught a glimpse of a real sailor while doing the sixteen-count-manual with our plugged-up 1906 Springfield rifles. Then we compared notes in the evenings during smoke-break, and finally concluded that real Fleet Sailors didn't appear to be crazy or stupid; in fact some of them seemed to be downright cool. We gradually convinced ourselves that we were just being tested: if we could learn to march and hold our pieces correctly - which we knew instinctively had nothing to do with ships - and if we forced ourselves to memorize that two plus two in the Navy sometimes equals twenty-two, we could eventually get into the Navy we'd been promised. There was life beyond the gates of RTC. It was a grand revelation, and survival was the key.

In Submarine School the rifles were gone, abuse of subordinates like me - a form of morbid recreation for senior Petty Officers - was halved, and memorization of trivia doubled. New friends replaced old, and since I'd learned that survival was a specific



location somewhere between excellence and failure, I set my sights. One of my sub-school classmates knew more than most of the instructors, while another student couldn't comprehend the idea of water going in one end of a pipe and coming out the other - never mind mastering hydraulic theory. My aim was excellent, and I managed to graduate twentieth out of thirty-eight. I might have done better if seventeen-year-olds hadn't been allowed to drink beer on base, and if my pay hadn't gone up to sixty-four dollars a month. I also might have done much worse if I'd found more places to serve me in downtown New London. I'd shared my survival theory early-on with a new best friend, named Romeo, and he ended twenty-fourth in our class. We graduated into the real Navy together when one morning we both received orders to submarines on the West Coast. We were sent immediately to a civilian travel office with a stack of papers. No instructions or directions - just a couple of envelopes filled with file folders. We began to smell freedom.

I haltingly told the ticket agent I'd like to have a layover in Denver so I could spend one day of my three days' travel-time at home in nearby Leadville, Colorado, "Ok," she said. "Can I do that?" I asked. "Next?" said she. Romeo's hometown in the Philippines wasn't on the way to the West Coast, so I'd invited him to come with me, "Me too?" Romeo asked the ticket person. "Ok," she said, "Next?"

*Damn, I thought. So this is the freedom American Servicemen defend. Government is paying our way, Coach Class, across the whole United States plus giving us time to stop at home! We packed our possessions into our sea bags and headed West for the Pacific Ocean.*

On the plane, while Romeo was gawking at PanAm-embroidered doilies on all the seat backs and velvet curtains on the oval windows, I saw a lone female about where I guessed row twelve ought to be, so I rushed ahead and took the middle seat right next to her. He gave me a dirty look, and then sullenly refused to thank me for letting him have the less-cramped aisle seat.

I straightened the tips of my double-rolled neckerchief as I sat down, and said politely, "Hi, I'm Ron. I'm in the U.S. Navy." She gave me a dumb look and said, "No kidding," and returned her eyes to the window.

I told her that I'd been to Times Square - in New York City - but she appeared to be extremely tired, probably from a modeling session or maybe negotiating a movie contract back East. I told her how cold the snow had been in New London - Connecticut - and she said, "Hmm," and closed her eyes.

About a thousand miles out, the stewardess brought us dinner. I didn't care much for the sandy mashed potatoes, but the Salisbury Steak with little green things sprinkled on it was great. When I told her we only had steak once or twice a month back home, she seemed to liven up, and offered to give me hers.

"You sure?" I asked, "Want my potatoes?" she shook her pretty head while I scraped her meat onto my plate.

"They serve steak and escargot and all that stuff on submarines all the time." I was going to mention that I preferred my escargot well-done, but she'd already perked up, and she interrupted me.

"You are on a submarine?" She'd spoken her first real sentence.

"Yeah, me and Romeo are going to San Diego to catch our boats. He's going to the Menhaden, and my boat's the RAZORBACK." I thought the name sounded cool.

"Must be awful to live in such a small place."

"Nah," I said, "our boat is bigger than this airplane we're in right now." I did my figuring out loud: "Three seats, at two feet each, port and starboard, add about two feet for the passageway - that's twelve an' two; put in another set of three seats, and it would be twenty feet wide, same diameter as a sub. About a hundred people sitting on this plane, and a sub's maybe twice as long with the same number of people; 'course, you gotta put the engines inside. And torpedoes," I added for dramatic effect.

She was wide awake now, so I told her that Pan American Airlines had been able to start nonstop service from New York to London a couple of years ago, flying DC-7's just like this one - only because of its new three-thousand horsepower engines. My submarine, however, has four sixteen-hundred horsepower engines! I looked over at her to watch her amazement, but her head was bobbing against the window again, so I folded up my white hat and propped it between her ear and the plastic bulkhead. *Wonderful gal, I thought, Little dopey though.*

When we were preparing for landing, I told her that I had to get off in Denver, but she assured me that she was in the San Francisco phone book, so I wrote her name down. I never got around to calling her when I got out to California. I'm sure, once she realized that California is actually a pretty big place, she forgave my negligence.

Visiting home had been great, but on the last leg of our journey we were getting a little nervous, finally realizing that maybe the travel time we'd been given was intended to ensure that we wouldn't be AWOL. Our plane was to land in San Diego at 0855, and we were due to report before 1000, local time. We were beginning to appreciate that Freedom could be dangerous, and we worried about being sent back to boot-camp.

Fortunately, at Lindbergh Field, where Romeo and I parted company, I was lucky enough to pick an experienced taxi-driver who knew exactly where my ship was located. "Razorback's got Open-House today," he said, meaning absolutely nothing to me. He drove me to Broadway Pier, at the foot of Broadway, for six dollars, which

seemed steep for a five-minute ride. *Damn*, I thought, *A lot of money - but with my ship right downtown - I probably won't ever need a cab again.*

San Diego's main street, stretching inland from the pier, was dominated by a huge hotel on a hill just to its left, on which a giant neon sign, undimmed by the morning sun, proclaimed, "El Cortez Hotel." On each side of Broadway's automobile traffic was a sea of pedestrians for as far as I could see, sprinkled with many bobbing white-hats and a few flashes of colorful dresses.

The cabbie responded to my comment regarding other cities I'd seen with big skyscrapers, "Yeah, can't build anything more than five stories high here because the city's built on wet sand; there's no bedrock to hold up tall buildings in an earthquake." I probably squinted a bit, but then I decided I liked the way the El Cortez looked like it was defending the bank buildings and hotels on Broadway, like a castle on a hill.

I got my seabag, which contained everything I owned, from the taxi's trunk, threw it over my right shoulder, and walked under a sign on the gate at the head of the pier which read,

**U.S. Submarine**

**USS Razorback (SS394)**

**Open House 0900-1600 (9AM-4PM).**

A seaman handing out brochures at the gate told me to go right through the crowd. So I maneuvered my way, trying to look salty and saying alternately, "Gang way. Excuse me. Coming through," until I got to the gangway, which submariners called a brow, and nudged my way in just behind a guy with orange shorts, a lady with the whitest legs I'd ever seen, and the talkative little girl.

"See mama," she told her mother, "it's mostly underwater, like a gater, waiting for something to eat." The topside deck was only a couple of feet above the water, which lapped the tank tops and washed over the turtleback.

When her father raised his eyebrows, I came to her defense by remembering National Geographic pictures of alligators with eyes protruding just above the surface, "And see that," I said, pointing my elbow at the sail protruding above the deck amidships, "that's where the periscopes are. They're her eyes." I swung my arm forward, balancing my sea bag, "the teeth are right under those limber holes where the water is draining out. There are six torpedo tubes on each side, underwater." I almost knocked my white hat, which was crushed against my head, into the bay.

I got past the little girl and stepped onto the teak deck of my new home, "Yeoman's ashore gettin' drunk," said the Topside Watch, as I put down my belongings, "So ya otta' get your pay records to ComSubRonThree if ya wanna get paid," he informed me as he took down my name and serial number and then told me how to get to ComSubRonThree, which was located aboard a Sub-Tender called USS Sperry anchored in the middle of San Diego Bay. He didn't offer to let me leave my sea bag there.

Following instructions, I rode one of the Nickel-Snatchers, a civilian fleet of little boats with peeling paint, to the Sperry. There, the man in charge - the Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD) - told me that I was supposed to have reported aboard my ship, at Broadway Pier, fifteen minutes ago. "I thought I did," I said, but he just shrugged.

The Nickel-Snatcher got me back ashore, and after a few minutes of high-speed running - my sea bag alternately hanging on my back or dragging behind me - I got to the head of Broadway pier just in time to see my ship backing out into the harbor.

The long-drawn-out foghorn sound from the ship's whistle was the saddest thing I'd ever heard as she slowly eased away from the pier. Then she sounded four short blasts on the ship's whistle, indicating that she was backing into the traffic lanes. The gate guard, whose attitude was much too calm for the situation, motioned sarcastically to me, and then shook his head as he watched me jog half a block back to the Nickel-Snatcher in the next two minutes.

I passed through the anchored tender's starboard and then port gangways onto the nest of subs moored alongside Sperry. I was wearing one-hundred percent wool Dress Blues, perfectly comfortable in Connecticut, and required for travel, but not so good in San Diego. They were soaking wet with perspiration. They smelled so bad that the Sperry's JOOD had just waved me through and wrinkled his nose as though he thought I'd thrown up on myself.

When I told the watch on the outboard boat that I was waiting for Razorback's return, he informed me that the boat underway was not mine. Razorback was still moored at Broadway Pier holding Open House.

"Walcha worried about?" Razorback's Topside Watch said after another boat ride, "Sez here you logged in four hours ago; an hour before reportin' time. Did ya' drop off your pay records on the tender?"

"Oh well, the Yeo'll send 'em over tomorrow." he shrugged, "I can lend ya' five."

Rotten Ralph volunteered to give me a tour of my new submarine because there weren't any girls in the next group of civilians lined up waiting for an escort. Ralph had recently gone through the trauma of reporting aboard, so he ignored my smell. It was all over the boat that the new guy had said Razorback was a big, black ship that looked like an alligator, so for starters, I learned that submarines were called

boats because submariners liked to ignore Navy Regs where they are designated as ships. On the other hand, floors had to be called decks, and ceilings were overheads, stairs were ladders because Navy Regs said so. I should not say "I like my *new* boat," because she'd sailed during World War Two, and to imply she was new was to ignore her war patrols. The boat wasn't *big*; she would fit inside the hangar deck of an aircraft carrier. She wasn't *black*, but mostly Haze Grey; only the places that might be visible from helicopters or planes overhead looked black, which was really Navy Grey #7. Apparently the beautiful part was OK, and he didn't mention alligators.

"Let's go down Tubes Forward," he said leading the way.

Ralph took me down four stairs, a ladder, descending through a two-foot square hole in the teak-wood deck called the Bear Trap with stanchions and safety chains on three sides.

"Dunno why it's called a Bear Trap, but this here's the pressure hull," he said stomping at the bottom of the ladder, "Leave your sea bag over there, up forward of the trunk. We'll get it when the tourists are gone; this is the Escape trunk door."

He patted a two-hundred pound, two-inch thick piece of steel with a spinner wheel on each side for dogging it shut, and a little round window with glass too thick to see through in its center. "Doors open an' close horizontally, and hatches are vertical." I nodded, because I already knew that.

We entered the Escape trunk, with a vertical ladder, and many valve wheels and gages. Ralph repeated information I'd already picked up in school, "Upper and lower escape hatches," he motioned up and down, "Eight men at a time, with the diving bell topside." "I've been to sub school," I told Ralph, "I know all that."

He acknowledged that he had been giving the Open House tourist lecture all day and promised to limit my indoctrination to what would really be of some use to me.

In the Forward Torpedo Room, a Torpedoman named Hoot Gibson shook my hand and welcomed me aboard, "Been to A-school?"

"Nope, just graduated from Sub School, after Boot; but I'm gonna see if I can get Sonar School."

"Sonar Girl, huh? Well somebody's gotta find targets for the Torpedomen."

Hoot showed me the six torpedo tubes in the FTR, all loaded with armed torpedoes, plus eight *fish* for reloading stowed in the room with bunks mounted on top of them. The bunk hanging up in the loading hatch in the center of the overhead was called the *Bridal Suite*.

"There'll be a question on your final quals: 'Who is the most important person on a submarine? Answer: Any Torpedoman.'" Hoot tutored me.

I knew from sub school that the After Torpedo Room was almost identical to the FTR, except there were only four torpedo tubes, and no Pit-Sword (lowered beneath the hull at sea to measure the ship's speed) and no officer's head, but I'd been wondering if Hoot thought the ATR Torpedomen were important too, and he'd clarified that.

Ralph pointed out the glistening brass inner-doors of the torpedo tubes and cautioned me to never touch them; their shine depended on an occasional non-qualified fool who got caught leaving a fingerprint, and consequently spent his next liberty polishing them. Gibson was obviously disappointed that I'd been warned.

Next, we went through a water-tight door into the Forward Battery, where below our feet were a hundred-and-twenty-six, one-ton, wet-lead-acid battery cells. Above the battery well, the ship's officers ate in the wardroom and slept in small compartments. The Captain was the only one to have his own stateroom, which was next to the closet-sized ship's office called the Yeoman's shack. It was big enough to hold an office chair with wheels, but the chair was limited to rolling about eight-inches in any direction. I yawned as I saw my orders sitting on a Formica table about two feet wide, waiting for the Yeoman to get my pay records to ComSubRonThree. I'd had a going-away party in Leadville last night which was still in swing when it came time to start the two-hour trip to Denver. I'd had no sleep on the airplane, and plenty of exercise since, so I decided that my remaining eight dollars was adequate. I'd begun to wonder where my bunk was and when I could use it, as we went through the forward Control Room water-tight door.

A crew member was telling a couple of Air Force Officers that it was extremely important for submarines to surface exactly as many times as they submerge; Control was like a big cockpit where most of this was accomplished.

"Sort of the opposite of what your Airedale propaganda," he said, "We believe that what goes *down* must come *up*." Everyone laughed.

He pointed out two large chrome wheels, larger than bicycle tires, which controlled the bow and stern planes, like ailerons on an airplane; the trim manifold for shifting weight around the ship, air manifolds to blow tanks dry, and the vent manifold to let the air out of the tanks that kept the ship on the surface. Control contained all the valves and switches necessary to connect almost anything, anywhere to everything else. Above was the conning tower, where the periscopes were operated, torpedoes were fired remotely, and the Captain had his Battle Station. The ship's master gyro was under a chart table in the center of the Control Room, where an IC Electrician was talking to a group of civilians participating in open house.

"Look right down there," he pointed through the nearly-opaque plexiglass above the gyro, "See, there goes one now."

"I see it," shouted a young boy, "Right there; A big fish, see mom?"

I looked under the edge of the plexiglass and verified that the barrel-like gyro was really there, with its round viewing window on top. "Looks nothing like a porthole," I started to say, but Ralph yanked my sleeve and whispered in my ear, "He's got a five-dollar bet that he can find a group of three or more people who will agree unanimously that they see a fish. This is the last group. Don't mess with him."

Just then, the lady with the boy said, "Yes, darling. I see it now."

The radio shack was in the after end of the Control room and had room for two office chairs. Several radios and two Remingtons. The next water-tight door aft led to the Crew's mess and the After Battery compartment. Another hundred-and-twenty-six battery cells were below where the crew slept, and where Ralph had said my bunk would be. My eyelids lifted a little at the word *bunk*, so he said, "You look tired."

Little Shirley Temple entered Control from the Forward Battery just as Ralph and I were about to go into the crew's mess. I winked at her when I saw her sticking her head under the chart table and arguing that there could not possibly be fish inside a compass. Her mom and dad saw the fish, but she rolled her eyes and winked back at me. I'd sweated out my fears since I'd seen her topside; she'd apparently gone to lunch with her parents and was on her second trip through the boat. I figured she'd probably be President some day because there was a lot going on in that little brain. I smiled at her and went on into the crew's mess to meet some of my new shipmates.

After the last group of tourists had passed through, the mess hall was set up for supper. We had coffee with a diesel fuel rainbow on top, and Ralph showed me how to hide it with some sort of powdered cream. He confirmed my suspicions that Razorback normally tied up to the Sperry or Nereus in the middle of San Diego Bay, and that mooring at Broadway pier was not usual. He promised to show me later how to catch the Nickel Snatcher. I responded that I was already pretty good at it and didn't bother to ask why they called it the Nickel-Snatcher when it cost a quarter.

I'd eaten good food on airplanes, and I'd been ecstatic on the boot camp train to San Diego when the steward had placed a cellophane package into an oven, twisted a dial, and when a bell sounded, magically served me a steaming ham-and-cheese sandwich. Even with this vast culinary background, I was still looking forward to my first submarine meal. I stowed some of my gear, and then ate my first lobster tail. Unfortunately, I was so discombobulated by my journey, that I was asleep before I had time to properly savor the experience.

The next month or two went by quickly, and I'd been past the breakwater on daily-ops several times but a six-day transit from San Diego to Honolulu was my first real sea time. I loved every minute of it. Up on the bridge, on lookout watch, I reveled in new feelings and smells and sounds. Warm salt-spray blew on my face during balmy sun-drenched daytime hours, and brilliant sunsets enhanced peaceful and brilliantly-cool star-filled nights. As a kid I'd read sailors venturing out under topgallant-main sails slapping romantically in the wind, but the deep sounds of our throbbing low-throated diesel engines, mixed with the lighter noises of sea water splashing against the hull convinced me that reading had given me only the tiniest taste of life at sea. Working sailors of yore had to have working knowledge of a dozen sails sheeted from main-, fore- and mizzen-masts; I had only to know that our three sixteen-hundred-horsepower Fairbanks-Morse, ten-cylinder, opposed-piston diesel engines, while growling and grumbling, would take us to places undreamt of in *Moby Dick*. I appreciated the engines mostly at night in my bunk. Their rumble was a gentle vibration, changing pitch and intensity as the ship rolled from side to side, and felt as much as heard. The lullaby of Mother Morse and the ocean's whisper against the ship a few inches from my ear compelled sleep like a baby's cradle.

I'd completely ignored warnings that oranges, potatoes, milk and such things were nonexistent after a few weeks at sea, because I'd not only eaten my first lobster, but mouth-watering greasy chili on toast called 'Shit On a Shingle' or, in polite company, 'SOS' and Foreskins on Toast. Complaining about food poisoning and blaming the cooks for seasickness was customary on the diesel boats. I was, however, in gourmet heaven, complimenting the cooks, and letting everyone know that there were few places I'd rather be. In my hometown even after the war, oranges only showed up at the grocery store, from Florida or California, about one month a year.

Of course, it is said that if a sailor isn't bitching, he must be dead, so I gradually adapted. I had made the comment, confidentially, that I believed that seasickness was all mental, and only pansies got seasick. Secrets were like the air on the submarine: they floated through the ventilation piping and were eventually shared by all. It didn't take long to learn that my opinion was not held by the majority. I felt it would be wise to say no more about it, and I cut way back on my use of the word *hypochondriac*.

On the evening before we were to enter Pearl Harbor, we were advised over UHF radio that our mooring time had been moved back to 1300, so the Skipper decided to press on at fifteen knots, and then practice snorkeling drills in the morning. Just after sunrise, as we were preparing to dive, I saw a shape on the horizon to the West that I reported looked like a volcano; then, as the OOD confirmed my sighting, a second pyramid-shape appeared.

The OOD called the Quartermaster up to the bridge for a look, and a couple of minutes after he'd gone below, he confirmed on the 27MC, "Bridge, Conn:



**Affirmative on landfall, zero-six-fourteen Hotel time. Peak to the left, bearing 255 is called Mauna Loa; three degrees to its right is Mauna Kia; range to the island of Hawaii: ninety-two-point-four miles. Navigator's being informed. Remarkable visibility, sir!"**

**"Conn, Bridge: Very well," and he gave the growler on the X1J phone a spin to ring the Skipper.**

**We postponed the dive for enough time for nearly half the crew to come up to the bridge, two at a time, to peer at the conical peaks. Most were impressed because sighting land and making landfall at that distance was apparently rare. Some were dazzled that the mountains were almost-fourteen-hundred feet high. I shrugged at the notion, and let most of them know that my hometown, was not only twice as high as mile-high Denver, but that Leadville sat at the foot of Mt. Elbert - which was fourteen-thousand-and-four-hundred feet above sea level. Finally, after I'd busted the bubbles of a dozen hawkers, the QM came up to the bridge, and informed me that there was another fifteen-thousand-feet beneath the sea's surface. Even a mountain man had to admit it: that was a good-sized pile of rock. I mumbled something about the ocean air, not being as cool and crisp as in the mountains.**

**Later, after I got off watch, we submerged to fifty-six feet, the snorkel masts were raised so the engines could breathe, and we commenced snorkeling. If the head valve was closed automatically by a surface wave to prevent flooding, the engines sucked their air right out of our living spaces and we all puckered up a bit while our ears popped. If the exhaust diffuser plate was too deep, the exhaust came into the same spaces. I happened to make a comment, while shoveling down some steak and mashed potatoes, that we were fortunate that there was at least some oxygen suspended in this visible haze of diesel fuel that submariners called air. Oxygen was rare in Leadville, but at least mountaineers didn't have to filter it through their nose-hairs.**

**Doc was sitting on the bench next to me, and after the subject of conversation had changed several times, suddenly tilted his head to the side, and asked me, "O2 fixation?" He grabbed the pulse on my wrist, and everyone in the crew's mess looked on with concern as our Corpsman continued to examine me.**

**"Any sensitivity there?" He hammered my chest with the heel of his fist, and made me cough. "Do you feel any lightheadedness when you hold your breath? Any equilibrium problems?" He stuck the tip of a pen-light in my ear.**

**Despite my insistence that there was nothing wrong, he shook his head, mumbling, "Oxygen Narcosis . . . probably not serious. Just go ask Cookie to give you a packet of *Hace*, and I'll keep an eye on your steak for you."**

**"What?"**

**"H - A - S, Heavy-Atmosphere Scents, Hace . . . ya' know, like smelling salts - He knows what it is."**

**The duty cook who'd heard everything from the galley, sent me to the Chief of the Watch for the keys to the Fallopian Tube Locker where Hace was stored. The COW sent me to the Wardroom to see the First Lieutenant, who sent me to Maneuvering Room where I learned that the Skipper was the only one who had access when we were at sea. I figured my illness must have been apparent, because everyone frowned silently and nodded at me as I made my way aft and then forward again.**

**The Captain looked a little irritated at first, after I had knocked and entered his cabin, but he said, "Look in the Dictionary."**

**"Where's that, sir." I'd genuinely not understood, but apparently whatever he was doing was important, so he became abrupt, "THAT WILL BE ALL!"**

**"What I meant, sir . . . ah . . . is . . . where is the . . . ah . . . Dictionary?"**

**He stood up, and snarled, "Any dictionary!" in a way that told me I ought to leave now. As I went through the Control Room watertight door, I heard him shout, "XO, I need to see you!"**

**There was a chorus when I got back to the Mess Deck, "What did the Old Man say?"**

**And the chorus roared when an IC Electrician who had been in the Forward Battery near the Old Man's stateroom, and had heard the whole thing, enhanced my stammered response:**

**"He's in there, stuttering; askin' the Old Man for a dictionary . . . Ha Ha . . . The Old Man's screamin' Ha . . . Ha . . . made it for two and a half minutes, 'fore the Skipper blew his stack . . . Har Har Har . . . Then the Old Man hollered: 'Executive Officer get 'ur ass in here.'" Har Har Har." He grinned at me, "XO should be heading aft at flank speed any minute now, I'd guess."**

**Finally, Billie Joe, a fellow non-qual, reached to the shelf above a mess table where a few books were stowed next to the RBO radio, and handed me a Webster's Collegiate. They all gave him nasty looks for rescuing me; I found out later that he had recently visited the Skipper while looking for a bucket of electrical-grounds so he understood why the Captain might be upset with me. I took the dictionary into the berthing spaces where I might have a chance to evade the Executive Officer and learned something absolutely useless. I can only assume that my Chateaubriand ended up in the garbage, but it was a small price to pay because I was getting saltier day-by-day. Before we got to Hawaii, I got in trouble again because I refused to look for the Poppet Drain Valve until I had checked with both Webster and the Ship's Qualifications Manual. Fortunately, Rotten Ralph and Billie Joe saved me from searching for Skyhooks.**

Never having been in a foreign port before, I was excited to be pulling into Honolulu, but I was careful not to act like a giddy virgin. We moored at the sub-base in Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, which was actually not even on Hawaii, but another island called Oahu. Honolulu was three-dollars from Pearl and Waikiki Beach was another two bucks by taxi. I had learned from older shipmates that during The War, the Government had completely taken over the Royal Hawaiian Hotel so boat sailors could party, eat steaks and raise any kind of hell they could come up with, on the Government's dime. This made sense because about a third of our submarine sailors never returned from their war patrols - suffering manpower losses as high as the Marines - and the Navy needed a steady supply of replacement volunteers for submarine service.

Ralph and I were both non-rated, non-qualified perspective-submariners, but we had the spirit and managed to get to the Royal ahead of most of the crew. Ralph was my partner in head-cleaning and paint-scraping duties aboard the ship. His whole biography would fit on a post card: he'd come from a farm in Ohio where he'd watched submarine movies, castrated bulls, butchered chickens and thinned beets - then he joined the Navy to be on submarines. He was a good friend, who spoke in short, thoughtful sentences, but seemed not to mind my tendency toward babbling.

The cabbie let us out in a jungle under some palm trees and motioned toward a continuation of the cobbled street that curved off toward the sea, beneath large banana leaves.

"Ala Moana," he gestured slightly to the right, "En a Royal, brudda," gesturing left.

We could see Diamond Head over the surf, right through the hole in the jungle he pointed to, and finally we saw the sign, 'Welcome to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel'. Giant green leaves and monstrous flowers were hiding most of the letters. Ralph and I stayed pretty much to the center of the pathway through the jungle just in case there might be crocodiles or boa constrictors hidden in there. We followed the sounds of Ukelele music around the corner and a stage came into view. I'd been amazed that there were no doors or ceilings anywhere, with everything open to the outside - obviously it didn't snow much in Hawaii in spite of its mountains. There was a giant Banyan tree with a trunk, or rather twenty trunks, growing right down into the middle of the room - or flower-garden or whatever it was. It had been the Banyan that had obscured our view of the gal on stage. Neither of us had ever seen anything like her. Ralph bumped into the tree and had no idea whether we were indoors or not - he was totally mesmerized. I was almost dumbstruck. She wriggled her grass foliage so fast that her navel was a spinning blur.

We had just blown a buck for a glass of beer, and Ralph was not known for being free with his money, but we had half a month's pay, nearly thirty-dollars apiece, so we made our move. I was more turgid than Ralph, so, fully-aware that it might cost upwards of two-dollars, it fell to me to tell the waiter we'd like to buy the hula-hula girl a drink. The big Kanaka immediately corrected me, in understandable Hawaiian-

English: She was doing a *Tahitian* dance. He walked up on the stage and, when he whispered to her, she glanced toward us. Ralph gripped the arms of his rattan chair to keep from sliding off. When the song was over, she started weaving between the tables toward us. It looked like Ralph was trying to hide under his white hat, with only two big blue eyes bulging out.

She arrived as I absently paid two-and-a-half-dollars for a drink called a Mi Tai. Ralph's eyes didn't even blink when the cash disappeared, and I wasn't the slightest bit nervous because I had been rehearsing. I said, "Alooo ha, ma . . . miss," standing up as I'd been taught to do when a lady approached, "Doo yoo, speak the Amariekaan?"

She had straight coal-black eyebrows above dark eyes, and golden sun-browned skin. Her dark hair, woven and mixed with pink and red flowers, was waist-length and it covered her breasts. She looked at me and then at Ralph's hat, where two eyes were fixed on her bellybutton. I took advantage of the two-second interval to look for a bra.

She wrinkled her forehead and said, "Yeah, Jack, I can talk. I'm an English Major from Seattle State U. Thanks a lot for the drink. Aloha."

Seattle Sue walked off and drank her three-and-a-half-dollar Mi Tai at the bar with a local surfer. She tilted a polite salute our way, but her next dancing set didn't seem as exciting to me, probably because I'd determined that there really was a bra; Ralph was too mad at me to discuss it.

We blew the rest of our paychecks on a couple more Hawaiian floor shows around Waikiki, to find out if the experience with Seattle Sue had been a fluke. We found several librarians and school teachers from the mainland who'd smooch - if we could have afforded a dollar a minute for drinks - but who had no idea that there was more to romance than just kissing.

After I'd put aside bus money, I decided to try one of those Mai Tai's in a joint where their cost was just under three-dollars; it tasted like Texaco Ethyl, but it didn't smell as good.

Finally, we ended up at a bus stop, where Billie Joe happened to be waiting. Billie Joe was from Texarkana, Texas or Arkansas. He had a little drop of blood on his whites, and he was just as quiet as Ralph until I told him all about our experience with Seattle Sue. I had to explain that we didn't really know the Hula Dancer's name, but she was from Seattle U, so she was Seattle Sue. That seemed to cheer him up. He'd had a more practical plan than Ralph and I: He'd gone to the Enlisted Men's Club on the Submarine Base for fifteen-cent-beer, had a few there, and then asked a taxi-driver to take him someplace for a "Good time." The plan sounded brilliant to us, and even Ralph perked up thinking about our next liberty. Unfortunately, Billie Joe had been rolled by some local Kanakas, who'd called him a "stinkin' Haole."

He'd given one a black eye, and another his twenty dollars; he had grass stains on his whites, and a bruised knuckle to prove it. He was left with only the money he'd hidden in his sock. I was feeling a lot smarter by then, but the way Ralph was looking at me stopped me from saying so.

The following day, Ralph, Billy Joe and I went to the EM Club with fifteen dollars we'd borrowed, and which we figured would be completely adequate at eighty-five cents a pitcher, even though they had to be emptied quickly, before they got hot. The club was outside like everything else. Eventually, we decided to go to Honolulu, but when we all stood up, Billy Joe announced that he had to use the head. We sat back down with another pitcher. Then Ralph had to go, then me. Because one of us was always missing, much of what we discussed had to be repeated, so we double and tripple-checked our way to a foolproof strategy: We would go to town, and each order a Mai Tai - regardless of cost. Since they tasted so bad, each one would last a couple of hours, which over time could be even cheaper than base beer. An added advantage was that no bartender would ever expect a customer to order more than one. Sandy, a Forward Engine Room oiler had joined us at the table. He liked to drink gillie, White Lightning, Aqua-Velva, Mai-Tais or anything else alcoholic, but he told us our plan was stupid, which we considered to be validation. We drank another couple of pitchers while we did the math: five bucks for a taxi, three dollars each for drinks, times two bars. . . one buck for one beer to pass around for a chaser. . .and the return taxi.

At sundown, we had two dollars and eighty-four cents left, but were unable to find the Main Gate. We staggered back to the ship patting each other on the back, about our wise decision to rest up for getting underway tomorrow and heading for Japan.

"J'pan's 'at way," a white sleeve pointed to the water.

"Long way t' J'pan," someone responded, "Et's gissom spleep."

Sandy was already back, sitting topside on the forward capstan and drinking clear liquid from a catsup bottle.

"Thought you were gonna go see Seattle Sue?" he grinned, reminding me that there were no secrets on a sub.

"Nah," somebody said, "Too 'spensive."

Sandy informed us that booze in our next port would be much cheaper. I thanked him for the information and bragged that we'd also learned a few things on our own. For instance, at the EM club, we'd been informed that workers at the Dole Pineapple factory have water fountains that squirt pineapple juice, and that Kwai was the wettest spot on earth. And we'd learned some words, like Kanaka, Haole, Aloha, and Mele Keliki Maka, which was a valuable phrase meaning Merry Christmas.

"How about the women?" asked Sandy, "Any of 'em say 'Aloha' to you? Did you know that means, 'I love you' in Hawaiian?"

I'd always known that it meant *Hello*, but I was drunkenly contemplating this new knowledge, when Ralph disappeared down the After Battery hatch, shouting, "Aloha," in perfect Hawaiian, which also means "Good-bye."

The next morning on lookout I noticed that the both other lookout watch and the OOD looked nostalgically sad as the Hawaiian Islands slowly receded beneath the horizon. Actually, I was pansy-sick, but I hoped my face showed sadness like theirs, even if it was for a different reason. We each kept our personal grief to ourselves. Nauseating refrains of "Aloha, O . . ." kept forcing themselves into my brain, and putting a lump in my throat, but I managed to resist throwing up.

I warned myself never to forget that vocabulary, unlike romance, is best learned from a book.

## **Sayonara** by Ron Gorence

The submarine's bow severed the sea's steel-grey water, folding its rain-speckled surface into a white froth that flowed aft on both sides of the bow. *She's carrying a bone in her teeth*, I thought, with the vocabulary of an old salt, seasoned, as I was, by nearly a month spent crossing the vast Pacific Ocean, and another patrolling on station. I was the starboard lookout; my duty was to detect the slightest irregularity on the flat horizon before another ship could spot our silhouette first. We were heading southward out of the Bearing Sea, and Kamchatka was no longer in sight, but we still didn't want to be seen.

"Port lookout?" said the Officer of the Deck (OOD). "Complete sweep of the horizon, sir. No contacts," answered Ralph, who was scanning to port. "Starboard lookout?" I gave a similar report.

Before we'd headed out for our WestPac trip, Ralph and I had ordered an Oceanography correspondence course to convince the world that failing to graduate from High School didn't mean that we were ignorant. Unfortunately, many of our shipmates thought it proved exactly that: we had no time for civilian education while we were supposed to be learning every square inch of the boat for submarine qualifications. Even so, I'd completed assignment number four, so I said, "Dinoflagellates gonna raise hell with our night-vision tonight, sir,"

I was referring to the luminescent animals that were already creating a bright glow in the disturbed foam off our bow even before the sun went down. Good vision in the dark required dilated pupils, so I thought a demonstration of conscientiousness was appropriate. Ralph nodded. Mr. Moss must have been miffed because we knew something he didn't.

Being an officer, he had to come back with a nasty response, so he said, "You're a month behind on your submarine quals aren't you Gorence? What's the capacity of Safety Tank?" he asked, completely ignoring my obvious wisdom and deep concern for the ship's safety. "The same capacity as the Conning-Tower, sir; in case of a collision, in which the Conn floods," I answered. "That's what Safety Tank is for. I asked you its capacity?" "About twenty tons, sir," I said. "About? . . . what's about? Submerging the boat and sinking it are *about* the same thing," he snarled, "What's Safety's *exact* capacity!"

I couldn't come up with the right answer, so he told me I was to bring my hand-drawn diagrams to the wardroom an hour after watch, prepared for a quiz on the sizes of all tanks outside our pressure hull. On patrol up North, Mr. Moss had caught me reading a Western paperback in my rack, He'd taken the time to gently explain that were a non-qual to decide that he had time to read crotch-novels, said non-qual was actually announcing that he didn't deem it important to know what to do in an emergency. His shipmates might associate such thinking with a stowaway planning to murder the entire crew during the next dive. Most hard-asses I'd known before him usually shouted things like, "That's an Order," or "Now!" Not Mr. Moss. He had a way with words that made people scratch their heads. I loved to read, but not that much.

I'd been aboard long enough to learn that a good ass-chewing was actually a show of affection among submariners. On the way to Petropavlosk, Kamchatka, we'd stopped in Adak, Alaska where the National Forest consisted of three pine trees, transplanted there each spring, because their predecessors invariably died quickly in the miserable, cold, foggy and damp weather. The Armpit of The World had been my second foreign port, and the only interesting thing was that we'd had a know-it-all type ride our boat from Pearl Harbor to Adak. His big mouth managed to get him on the crew's bad side and by the time the transit was over, all the dolphin-wearing men were shunning him. It was no coincidence that he got orders back to the Skimmer Navy about an hour after we docked. No one even remembered his name. Instinctively, like a kid who'd rather be abused than ignored, I'd managed to get reamed out by somebody at least once a day, so everyone was well-aware of my name. Now, heading South, the rain was warm and gentle, and I watched the sun go down.

Nighttime lookout watches in transit were long, and usually uneventful, so I focused my binoculars on nothing and whistled *La Mer* in a pitch as high I could go, which I thought contrasted dolefully with the lower-pitched sounds of the ocean. *Ulysses had tied his men to the mainmast in order to sail past the Sirens.* I'd face forward into the wind, then swing slowly aft, making my notes drift across the water. The ship was heading directly into the sea-breeze, so my song, along with the deep humming of the diesel engines and swishing noises of water against the tank-tops, wafted fore and aft at the wind's whim. The sea alternately muffled, and then amplified all sounds but her own. Sometimes, I whistled *Ebb Tide*, which was more melancholy, in long shrill notes as I slowly scanned for intruders in our ocean, but

**La Mer** always got more response from the OOD's. Several times, Moss suddenly jerked his head around to see if he could catch either Ralph or me with lips pursed. He was trying to reassure himself that someone else had heard the eerie songs. He never saw nothing but two highly-dedicated lookouts. I enjoyed knowing that my whistling had caused the OOD to doubt his own ears, and perhaps, his sanity. I squinted my eyes at the green luminescence, and let my mind embrace the sensations of my new home at sea.

I'd come from the mountains, and read about the sea, so I appreciated nature's way of fluctuating between awesome beauty and death. The mountains and the sea were like a volatile woman: peaceful tranquility in one instant, and the heart-pounding excitement of a deadly storm the next. Even submerged, in the calm under the weather, the sea was constantly searching for a weak spot in the ship's hull, waiting to crush our steel bubble, so she demanded our respect and determination to keep her at bay; in return she offered immunity from civilization, from taxes and bill collectors, judges and jails. There was no mountain top that high. This unique mental peace expanded a person's ability to think on two or three levels simultaneously: I remembered home; I was in awe of - and enraptured with - the surrounding ocean; I whistled at the same time I evaluated the OOD's reaction, and even kept watch on the horizon. Being at sea afforded me the freedom to romp and soar inside my own head. I was particularly fond of lookout-duty because solitude was a precious rarity in the Sewer-Pipe Navy. Lookout-watch offered a perfect place to be alone and to dream, only interrupted when an OOD couldn't generate enough deep thought of his own to keep himself occupied.

Motherly rocking by the rolling ship at sea made some of my shipmates ill, but I felt comfort. I had basked in the feel and smell of salt-spray on my face during peaceful balmy sun-drenched daytime hours and brilliantly-cold, star-filled nights; there were few places I'd rather have been on that evening. *Ten thousand feet and ten months; I'd come a long way since I'd spent my seventeenth birthday in Golden County Jail.*

My hometown was near the Continental Divide, a concept that I'd had to explain to Ralph: "If I'd taken a leak back home, in Turquoise Lake," I told him, "half of it would have gone down the Western Slope, into the Colorado River and then into the Pacific Ocean; the other half would have entered the Arkansas River to be carried by the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico."

I waited until the breeze was just right, so the OOD couldn't hear our voices. Then I told Ralph, "There's an old Leadville saying: 'Flush twice, California needs the water.' Kind of makes me feel generous - and I was helping you Okies out too."

"Ohio! I'm not an Okie."

"Oklahoma - Ohio, what's the difference? They're all Flatlanders."



Lookout watch forced us to spend a lot of time thinking, and Ralph had a knack for coming up with new material. Once he had told me that a number-two lead-pencil would write a line thirty-five miles long - with average pressure - and that a buzzard's life expectancy was sixty-five years. He waited for a wind shift, so the OOD couldn't hear. I knew another one was coming.

"Sweat from Jesus and Admiral Nimitz, and Hitler and Tojo are all mixed - somewhere up there." He jabbed his elbow at the sky. I looked up, then dropped my binoculars to the end of their tethers and frowned thoughtfully at him.

"All water on the earth is recycled," he explained with a quick glance toward Mr. Moss, "Ocean water evaporates and then condenses into rain - it all comes right back here."

I thought about it for a complete sweep of the horizon, "Makes sense." I digested his words a bit more, "You know how you get tears - when you look into the wind?" Mr. Moss was busy peering dead-ahead, "Well, our tears probably mix with that water blowing outa' the limber holes and go up into the atmosphere. In a couple of weeks, a big grey cloud will drift over the Rockies and drop six feet of snow in Leadville, an' they'll be shoveling our tears off the sidewalks, and not even know it."

He bit his lower lip and squinted his eyes, and finally smiled, "Jeeeeeze . . . Man, that was a good one," he grinned stupidly at me, "Sweat, tears, saltwater and a fine fart - all on the way to Leadville. How long you think before they get my message? . . . and the Arkansas River don't flow through Ohio."

"G'dam pig-farmer," my words had faded into the darkness under a million stars, and I went back to *Ebb Tide* and memories of home.

*Women! Who needs 'em?* I had thought bitterly as I stood at the cash register in Bill's Sport Shop. It was Saturday morning and I was fuming. An hour earlier, I'd been trapped in the alley behind Gabardi's Laundry by five Senior-Class girls. I'd flirted with one or two of them all year long, and they'd seemed to respond, so I'd begun to relax, thinking that I would be exempted from the harassment, called High School Initiation, which was being imposed on my fellow Freshmen. I was wrong. In fact, I was devastated to find that the gal with the sweetest smile was fated to be the most brutal of my attackers. They had thrown me to the ground and pinned me helplessly on the hard-packed snow. Two of them began to fool with my belt-buckle. I got so scared I would have broken a cardinal rule and punched a female if I could have moved anything but my mouth. I prayed for a heart attack if they went for my shorts.

"You've been pantsed by the Senior Class," they announced cheerily as I ran away, "You can come and get your britches off the roof any time you want."

Of course, I hadn't gone back to get my pants. I'd stormed straight home, put on another pair of Levis and picked up my single-shot .22 rifle. Then I'd stopped at Bill's to get ammo.

I walked angrily down Harrison Avenue, past Gabardi's and over Capital Hill. I stormed right past Leadville High and the City Dump. I was still breathing hard when I crossed Tennessee Creek on a Beaver dam. I'd walked fast, and was puffing, so the humiliation was dissipating. Nature has a way of making anger seem frivolous.

Farther down, this creek would blend into the Arkansas River just below its headwaters. However, the meadow in front of me dusted with new snow, was covered with fresh rabbit tracks, so I decided to try my luck there. I hunted seriously for an hour, and didn't see anything, so I began plunking and thinking.

I leaned my rifle against a tree and sat on a stump overlooking the valley. The white-topped mountains glistened against a clear-blue sky of early-afternoon shirt-sleeve weather. It was right here that Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, and other Mountain Men had trapped Beaver and hunted Elk. These rugged men had casually collected gold nuggets, washed from the banks of these same snow-melt streams, and traded them for salt and tobacco a hundred years ago. Once in a while, a woman came along and messed with nature. Right here on this spot, a Ute warrior, Black Cloud, had died with Chipita, . . . *a young mountain flower with eyes softer than a fawn's . . . as . . . she threw her arms around his body and both cast themselves headlong over the precipice. . .* because her tribe, the enemy Arapaho, had mortally wounded him for his transgressions. Snow on spruce and pine boughs, and on the white earth, muffled the occasional sound of a bird's chirping or a squirrel's chatter.

*Nature is mystical*, I thought, paraphrasing something I'd read, *Worms eat dead birds, so they can grow into bugs which are then eaten by other birds. It's so brutal and beautiful at the same time, that man is the only animal with a brain big enough to understand it. Except sex.* I snuggled my butt down into the pine needles next to the stump and leaned against a tree trunk while I peeked around it to see a large buck emerge on the other side of the creek. *It's the reproduction plan that God screwed up. That lazy buck will lose all control when the females go into rut.* It languidly cropped the long grass and became nervous only after a muffled sound somewhere downstream made it prick up its ears. I quietly watched to see if he showed any signs of the mating season yet. *God ought to kick His evolution mechanisms into high gear for a little while; at least until sex becomes as understandable as planting potatoes. Cut up a potato, plant its eyes, and presto! Bucks shouldn't be mock-fighting with tree branches just to impress Does. Thinking about sex shouldn't make a person's face turn red. Women pantsing people makes no sense at all. If I took off a buddy's pants, everybody'd look at me like I was crazy, an' if I took a girl's pants, I'd go to jail.* The buck bounced off through the Aspens . . . *but I lose my pants, and everyone laughs.* I'd begun to suspect that maybe there was something in the water.

I'd admired most of the women in my life up to this time. I remembered that my dad had just shaken his head, but mom had made me sweep out Sayer and Mc Kee's Drugstore for a week because I'd stolen a Comic-book when I was little. That taught me a lifelong lesson: to genuinely appreciate only what I'd earned. Sister Senna from St. Mary's Catholic School, who had busted her yardstick over my knuckles several times, had clearly been instrumental in my feat of earning almost all A's in my Freshman year. I had known most of my classmates since before kindergarten. I knew which girls in my class I could outrun, out-wrestle or outsmart, and I had been comfortable that they were all fated to become either like my mom or Sister Senna - or somewhere between. Still, judging from the shocking behavior of the Senior Class girls, something in God's plan was going very wrong. They possessed body-parts similar to my freshman classmates' as near as I could tell, but they wriggled and bounced them around in bizarre ways. *And they had pantsed me! They were obviously sex-maniacs. Absolutely nuts. If the girls my age followed the same pattern, they'd grow up to be bank robbers and prostitutes instead of nuns and mothers.* Juicy Fruit was popular with the Senior Class, so just in case, I'd quit chewing gum.

As time passed, the girls in my class began to behave more and more like the perverts who had scrambled my Freshman brain the previous year. That, of course, caused my Sophomore grades to drop below C-Average.

In my Junior year, I suddenly *discovered* women. It was the only thing that could explain my D-minus grade in Chemistry, and similar results in other subjects. *How can you discover what's always been there?* I asked myself. *It's not like suddenly finding a gold nugget on ground you've walked a hundred times, I argued . . . or maybe that's exactly what it's like.*

In the late 1870's those who worked their gold-pans in the streams, or who had water-operated sluice boxes, gradually began collecting thousands of minute specks of gold and filling their totes. Occasional gold nuggets had been picked up around Leadville for decades, but the ability to collect pouches of fine gold, and the multiplied value, was a sudden *discovery*. People began to arrive in droves. The gold-hysteria caused the city to grow to thirty-thousand people almost overnight. California Gulch sprouted Oro City, and miners abandoned prosperous California mines to come to Leadville. Streams below the Beaver dams that had been frequented by Kit Carson and Jim Bridger were diverted. Doc Holiday came to cure his pneumonia and participate in the insanity.

Maybe I was like Bridger, who'd wandered this land, not looking for gold, and only bothering to drop a nugget into his deerskin tote if its glint happened to catch his eye. I had been wandering among women, slightly confused but ignoring the glitter, for years. It was the readily-available water that suddenly washed out the mountain hunting grounds and fed the gold-rush delirium. It was testosterone that fed mine.

My first real knock-down-drag-out fight with rampant hormones had come about when I earned a date to a Leadville High dance with the most beautiful girl in the world. Her name was Tania. She usually had sky-blue eyes, but whenever I had stared at her, they turned to a deep translucent grey. I'd also noticed that she wriggled and bounced like the gals who'd pantsed me but, the way she did it seemed more interesting than bizarre. She was so perfectly-proportioned that guys stared at *her* in the movie theater, even when Betty Grable or Jane Russell was on the screen. At least I did. I had dogged Tania unsuccessfully for months.

My macho-attempt had failed: In forty-degree weather I'd rolled a pack of Lucky Strikes in my T-shirt sleeve and then dangled one from my lips like Marlon Brando. I'd ignore tears on goose bumped cheeks - and all I got in return was a pathetic squint. I had tried Cool with no luck. Clever and Witty had gotten me nowhere. Amazingly, after a particularly embarrassing last-ditch attempt at groveling, Tania suddenly and incomprehensibly said yes.

The school dance was held on a beautiful warm evening. Mt. Elbert was dusted and white-capped from the first winter's snow and dressed below in rich Autumn reds and yellows. Romance was in the air. I gratefully accepted four spots on her dance card and did minimal damage to her tiny feet with my new Wingtips. She was hot and cold; friendly, and then aloof. I drifted happily with the bewildering winds of love.

After the dance, on Beer Can Hill, the stresses of a long and arduous courtship finally reached the boiling point. I had never considered myself a novice, and I could talk French Kissing with the best of the guys, but when she lifted her chiffon dress and put one knee on each side of mine on the Buick's bench-seat and started kissing my ears - my pressure-relief-valve blew. It was like sneezing, with ten-billion synapses all going off at once. If the car had been moving, I'd have run it right off the road. A flash of lightening suddenly illuminated the starry darkness outside. In an instant of brightness, a gust of wind picked up thousands of snowflakes, sparkling brilliantly like diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, and mingled them with golden aspen leaves, swirling just beyond the windshield. It was as if all the Fourth of July fireworks I had ever seen were detonated in a single second of time. A moment later, thunder shook the earth beneath us. The violent blast echoed through my body and turned it into a limp dishrag. The stars were mountain-top-bright, and their blue-white light exploded inside me. I couldn't move. It never occurred to me that there might be more to this - it would have been like being in heaven and wondering stupidly what's beyond the horizon. Actually, I was vaguely aware that it would have been better if I'd had the presence of mind to unzip my fly, but a shortage of cranial blood had barred that possibility. There must have been some blood going to my ears though, because they glowed in the dark.

Finally, Tania said simply, "It's time to go home." *Bored*, I surmised.

When the blood got back to my brain, I gathered enough strength to turn the key and press on the gas pedal.

A couple of weekends later, I really did run the car off the road with Tania. I was a little more rattled than usual, so I asked her to marry me. Her best girlfriend was with us and, as usual, had an opinion - which she shared:

"You're barely seventeen years old and have never had a real job. How you gonna support a wife?"

Since I hadn't given that much thought, I didn't have a good answer ready. Tania's beautiful grey eyes were wide open as though my question had surprised her, but the corners of her pink lips kind of pulled back in agreement with the comment.

Her helpful chum then asked Tania, "You're not pregnant, are you?"

Tania simply frowned and spoke softly, in a voice as chaste as an angel's, "Hell, no!"

I, however, had a lot to say about that: I was violently indignant at the attack on the honor of my prospective bride; I was also proud that someone had recognized my studliness, and pained that Tania had dismissed the whole idea so quickly. While I wrestled with the wording of my answer, Tania gently grasped my right hand with her left, and pulled me into a more private corner.

"I think you're one of the funniest and sweetest guys I've ever known," she whispered delicately, "but I'm not going to get married until after I'm twenty-one." I admired her even more for having thought about marriage so carefully. I'd always been awed by deep thinkers.

*So far, so good*, but when she saw how well I had been taking it, she continued, "I hope that we can always be friends," and squeezed my hand. Handshake-hard. *Like clenching another guy's hand in a manly way*. We stopped dating after that, if one stupendous date, one car wreck, and a proposal-rejection can be called dating. But we remained friends.

I'd gotten off watch, managed to convince Mr. Moss that I had a good grasp of the ship's Main Ballast tanks, and was well on my way to developing a drawing of the Fuel Ballast tanks and their piping systems.

Mr. Moss had repeated what several school teachers had told me: "You're smart enough, if you'd just apply yourself," but somehow he didn't sound as sincere as when he was chewing me out.

Just after that, I said, "Excuse me," when I stepped on the Chief of the Boat's shoe, and he just frowned, "Okay."

The COB always had spit-shined shoes - even at sea - and the guys had thought it was humorous when I did something clumsy to make his face red. He'd just frowned at me, and it occurred to me that I might be getting dangerously close to being ignored. For the next two days, I skipped meals, stood my watches in silence or in asking questions about the ship, and slept less than four hours at a time. I busted my butt to get my qualifications up to date, and finally, after I'd eaten, and been rocked to sleep by the diesel rock-crushers, I was back on the bridge feeling better, and whistling *La Mer*.

My boyhood comic book punishment had kept me pretty close to the Ten Commandments for years - until a set of questionably-unrelated coincidences occurred: at about the same time as my hormonal overload, I'd gotten my driver's license and my parents got divorced. Mom and I had moved to the city.

"Nice coupe," Roy said as I parked mom's car at the curb at Denver's Barnum Park. It was the first day of my first job, watering Barnum's lawns and plants every evening. Roy opened the driver's door for me.

"My name's Roy. I'll show you around. How come you've got stock hubs?" he asked.

"Can't afford Moons," I replied with my best big-city demeanor, "That's why I got this job, to fix up my car. Mom's gonna give it to me when I'm making enough money to pay the insurance."

Roy showed me how to walk my route, turning on the sprinklers in the right sequence so that shutting them off on the return trip resulted in exactly the correct amount of water. "Ever heard of Midnight Auto?" he asked. I couldn't think of anything to say, so I said, "No."

"Tell your mom you gotta work late tomorrow night, and I'll show you," I nodded because I couldn't look like a mama's boy, or worse, a hick.

Roy knew the lawn-watering business well, but he was absolutely the smartest guy I had ever met when it came to cars. In less than an hour of driving around, I'd popped off a set of Full-Moon hubcaps that fit my Ford exactly, and, to my surprise, they'd come off a Chevy. My dad had often mumbled things like, "six-seventy-by-fifteen tires," for my benefit, and I had even helped him change tires or put on snow chains often. However, it was always in the background of Fats Domino or whatever was holding my attention, so I had barely known the difference between a tire and a wheel.

"Guy's gonna be mad when he wakes up in the morning," I said about the Moons.

"Nah," Roy said, "Insurance will take care of him. Gotta go. See you after work?" Roy was my age, but had been around, so he supervised four of five other guys with jobs like mine.

Roy liked Fats Domino too, and played him loudly, but self-interest had focused my attention and Roy eventually taught me how to hot-wire most of the new '55 cars on the market; older models were a piece of cake. Within two months, my little '50 Ford coupe had a V-8 engine with dual carbs, a leaded-hood and re-chromed bumpers. We'd had to shop around the nighttime streets a bit to find the right accouterments, but the chicks said my rod was cool. Mom too was impressed with what I had managed to do with a dollar-twenty-five an hour from Barnum, plus money from my fictitious job at a drug store, and she was pleased with my new hobby of dismantling and reassembling cars for "friends" in our garage at all hours of the night.

With Roy's talents, and my entrepreneurial bent, we were soon selling parts to most of West Denver's hot-rodding teens. I had owned clothes so fancy that I'd had to change before I went home at night - I'd purposely forgotten to appreciate only what I'd earned. It was summer time, after Junior Year. With no school, and a long way from Hicksville-Leadville, life had seemed good; fate had been treating me well.

One Sunday we met two girls. I bet Roy five bucks that the redhead wore at least a size-fifty bra. When the girls said they wanted to go to some kind of social-function dance the following Saturday, Roy and I figured that would be a good time to settle the bet, so we proposed a double-date, "What kind of car would you like to go in?"

The '55 Merc was a gorgeous car, so Roy and I had gotten the girls a gorgeous white convertible with red leather upholstery. Although I had to pay Roy his five dollars, I was still considered the brains of the outfit; I had predicted logically that a car stolen at noon was probably going to be reported to the cops in less than an hour, but one taken from a driveway after six or seven P.M. was usually good for the night. Probably and usually, but not always.

The Judge, upon hearing my "Innocent" plea, assured me immediately that I was guilty of being both bad and stupid, and set a court-date to go over the details. Fortunately, in cellblock conversations, I'd rambled on and on that I'd once stolen a comic book, and a silver dollar from mom's jewelry box for a cap-gun, but otherwise, I'd always been honest - except the past two months, when I'd gone nuts and hot-wired a few cars - and I didn't think the situation was fair, because I had not actually taken the specific '55 Mercury with which they were charging me. Roy had hot-wired it, and he'd never been busted for joyriding before. It was my second arrest, and all I'd done was talk Roy into delivering it because I'd had to water lawns until five P.M.

A jail-mate, Blackie, who was professional crook, told me I talked too much, and that he didn't think I had what it took to be a pro. Blackie's wife was a gorgeous lady. She came to visit him in a big black Cadillac, and always wore red high-heels and a mink coat. Whether it was because he appreciated the way my eyes and mouth opened wide whenever his wife arrived, or because he didn't want me in his profession, he took me under his wing.

He taught me how to beat lie-detector tests: "Just force yourself to think of stealing that silver dollar when they ask you your name and age. If you establish their baseline as a lie, everything else will record similar irregularities. That's all the machine registers: irregularities from the baseline."

He had also advised me to smile whenever possible to demonstrate respect for the court. I didn't bring it up at the time, but Blackie could have used a manager. I'd have advised him to specialize. As it was, his wife picked out jewelry she liked, so he'd hit a jewelry store. If she liked a mink, he'd wait until dark and knock off that furrier. He had never robbed a bank or thought to steal money to buy her things. I'd have told him that she needed some shopping discipline - that she didn't need *that specific Cadillac*.

The D.A. backed down from my insistence on a lie-detector test, so the Judge looked me straight in the eyes, frowning as though he was addressing some sort of grinning idiot, and offered me a choice: Military Service - provided I could get any service to take me - or hard time for Grand Theft Auto (and ten or twelve minor offenses in three states).

Soon, having had my transportation options seriously hampered, I took the city bus downtown and made my way to the Denver Post Office in search of my first choice, the Marine Corps Recruiting Office. A helpful Navy Recruiter in the marbled foyer informed me that the Marines' only recruiting office was on the other side of town. He kindly offered me a cup of coffee, directions for catching the appropriate bus, information on transferring to other busses, and generously handed me a large stack of Navy pamphlets to read while awaiting connections.

"Should be able to make it well before dark," he assured me, "Just call me 'Boats'."

Then Boats had complimented my patriotism, and particularly my pluck in choosing to eat K-Rations in a muddy Korean foxhole, as opposed to cruising into Paris or Rome - wearing thirteen-button blues - on a Navy Destroyer. *Cool-sounding thing to call a ship*, I thought. I was not aware there were no saltwater ports anywhere near Paris or Rome. The recruiter tried to reassure me that his admiration for my "pluck" would not diminish if I happened to choose the United States Navy - if my mom would sign some papers for me. I immediately and enthusiastically expressed confidence that she would. I naively told Boats that she would be tickled-pink about the idea of me being discharged the day before my twenty-first birthday and that she feared jail even more than I did. The recruiter finally relented, and let me take the entrance tests. Before sunset, I had returned mom's signature to him, and had been informed that I had six days to see the judge and pack. I wasn't sure if it was brains or luck, but I felt quite clever to have avoided being lost somewhere in the dark nighttime vastness of Denver, holding a handful of Navy pamphlets and bus transfers. The Judge's pile of papers for my signature had been higher than the Recruiter's, and he was obviously so happy to get rid of me, that he smiled.



When I first saw the Great Salt Lake from the train to San Diego, I thought it was the Pacific Ocean, but an Elvis look-alike put his arm around my shoulder and corrected me. He made friendly comments about how people from small towns like Leadville needed someone to take care of them. Elvis taught me my first Navy word: the bathroom on the train was called a *head*. He then escorted me to a crap game going on in the head, and at his recommendation, I plunked down a five-dollar bill and picked up a ten. He seemed very upset because I couldn't see any sense in playing again. I arrived in San Diego with almost twenty-dollars.

I had volunteered to go to Submarine School from boot camp even after my Company Commander told me that having the requirements for submarine service was no big deal. In fact, the CC had called submariners pig-boat sailors; he said they lacked discipline; they thought they were hot stuff because they didn't eat standard Navy chow; they never shined their shoes, and they smelled bad. Submariners pulled liberty in small, dark, isolated ports, where a decent-sized destroyer or cruiser wouldn't even fit. I had agreed wholeheartedly because the CC had tried to kill me several times for doing much less than ignoring his advice. He'd thrown my perfectly-good body and brain into the trash-can, and then took out pieces and remolded them the way he thought they ought to have been arranged. His main purpose in life had been searching for things that I "couldn't do" and then making me do them over and over again. A recruit probably could have survived calling the CC's mother a whore, but there was a rumor that he had once killed a recruit for saying, "I can't," one too many times. The CC had kept my adrenalin level high enough that I doubted I had any hormones left. One day he marched our company to a place where Marine Corps recruits were doing calisthenics on the other side of the fence. The CC hailed a Gunnery Sargent jogging in place with his formation, and the DI had smiled back.

The Company Commander said, "Anyone who screws up from here on out, gets loaned to Gunny Jones for a week. Anybody hankerin' ta' be a gy--rene?"

Gunny had stopped his troops, and had them do pushups until most of us Navy recruits, watching from our parade-rest position, were about to pass out from exhaustion. Most of us had gotten the message. When we got back to the barracks, one guy told the CC that he was queer; he was on his way home in an hour. The rest of us competed to be the most squared-away recruit in the company. If the CC said jump, We asked, "How high, sir?" on the way up. I was promoted to Recruit Petty Officer, Third-Class, by dint of hard work and fear.

When it had finally come time to sign up for post-boot camp "A" Schools where Electrician's Mates, or Fire Control Technicians were trained, I looked around to see if the CC was watching, and then sneaked a checkmark into the Sub School box. I had been a little nervous, but I'd known there wasn't enough time left in my boot training for the CC to send me over the fence for a week with his Marine buddy. Besides, I could do a thousand jumping-jacks without sweating, and my adrenalin-hormone imbalance was beginning to fade. The CC had just rolled his eyes, amazed

that this tiny bit of contrariness on my part had survived two months of his loving care. Fate, or King Neptune, or whomever God assigns to take care of stray dogs and drunken sailors, had reached out and taken charge again.

After Submarine School graduation, I had another shot at Leadville on the way to San Diego and my first ship. I took a classmate, Romeo, home with me. We arranged a stopover in Denver on the way to our West Coast assignments, and our orders allowed two days' travel-time before we had to complete the connection. Romeo was the best dancer I had ever known, because he'd learned in the Phillipines from his sisters. Apparently, Tania agreed, or maybe she was dead-serious about the friendship thing, because she wouldn't stop jitterbugging with him for long enough to sit with me.

Fortunately, and for reasons unknown, in a place with less than three thousand citizens, Leadville had more beautiful women per square foot than any other location on the planet, and there happened to be an extremely desirable blonde, named Ashley, in the group. She'd never met a sailor before, and looked curious, so I decided to teach Tania a lesson. We practiced marathon-necking for about thirty hours and it's entirely possible that I missed something, but Tania never batted an eye. I tried to make the best of things, and nearly had Ashley on the mat a couple of times, but time evaporated and suddenly we had to catch our plane. Romeo went to the Menhaden and I went to Razorback, where most of my serious hormone-management training would take place.

The ship had been steaming at fifteen knots on the surface, for three days, rigged for dive. Safety Tank was flooded with twenty-three-and-a-quarter tons of seawater and would only be blown dry if a collision or another emergency caused the Conning Tower to be flooded. The Conn, the highest point on the submarine, was most likely to be damaged in submerged operations. Negative Tank was flooded to give the ship seven-and-a-half tons of immediate negative-buoyancy whenever the other ballast tanks were vented-off for flooding during the dive. All trim tanks had been filled during the last dive to the point where the ship's weight was equally-distributed fore and aft. On patrol, nothing had been taken aboard or offloaded, and nothing during transit on the surface had been moved from one location to another without mathematical adjustments to the fifty-four tons of water in the trim tanks. The trim dive would test the math.

The OOD said, "Clear the bridge," and sounded the diving alarm, "Oo Gaaa, Oo Gaaa," followed immediately by the word, passed on the 1MC announcing system, "Dive, Dive."

In the Maneuvering Room, Electricians on watch shifted propulsion from the main engines to the main batteries. Men in the engine rooms shut down their engines, and closed engine air intake and exhaust valves. The Chief of the Watch, in the Control Room, closed the Main Induction valve, blocking out all air from the earth's atmosphere, except the torrent of wind screaming through the upper conning tower

hatch to satisfy the last dying gasps of the main engines. Simultaneously, I tucked my binoculars into my shirt, to prevent them ricocheting between my teeth and the rungs of the two ladders I had to clear on the way to my diving station. I grabbed the rails above the upper-conning-tower hatch, and dropped down ten feet into conn, "Starboard lookout down," I shouted as I spun around to my right, grabbed the lower-conning tower hatch handball, and dropped down another ten feet to the Control Room. The port lookout was immediately behind me, "Port lookout down."

The OOD, who took two seconds to ensure that no one was left topside, heard the hissing of Bow-Buoyancy Tank's whale-blow as air gushed from the tank to make room for thirty-two tons of seawater, and then the noisy gurgling of air rapidly escaping the Main Ballast tanks. Three-hundred and sixty tons of seawater forced all the air, which had been keeping the ship afloat, from the buoyancy tanks through their vent valves.

The Quartermaster (QM) squeezed his body against the upper-hatch cowling, dodging the OOD's boots. The OOD dropped loudly onto the conn deck plates, holding with both hands onto small wooden handles on the steel lanyard attached above the hatch dogging-wheel, "Bridge clear, last man down," He shouted, as the lanyard pulled the hatch shut.

The QM reached over his head and dogged it down with the speed-handle on the wheel. "Three men down," he confirmed.

After he had closed the Main Induction valve hydraulically from his station, the Chief of the Watch (COW) had waited until he heard the second dive command and then pulled the levers opening the vents for the main ballast tanks. He glanced at the hull-opening indicators, and shouted, "Main induction shut. Green board," just as the OOD hit the Control Room deck on the opposite side of the main-gyro chart table.

"Main Induction shut and locked," shouted the duty cook squinting into the red-lighted darkness of the Control Room through the After Battery watertight door.

Fifteen seconds after the command to clear the bridge, I had pressed the switch to rig out the bow-planes and was sitting at the stern-planes.

The OOD acknowledged the COW's report, and said, "Full dive, both planes," to Ralph and me.

Shouting up into the darkness of the Conning tower, he said, "Submerging to six-zero feet. Pressure in the boat."

"Very well, Mr. Moss," came the Captain's voice from above, "I have the Conn."

Razorback was at fifty-eight feet, periscope depth, forty-nine seconds after the diving alarm had sounded. Mr. Moss pumped a thousand pounds of seawater from forward trim tank to sea, and the ship was in trim. Her weight in the water was nearly zero; she had reached a point almost exactly between a bubble and a rock. On the surface, she displaced more than two thousand tons, so when that amount of water was allowed inside her buoyancy tanks, she was capable of moving smoothly up or down at the slightest speed with the aileron-effects of her planes.

Honolulu and Adak hadn't impressed me, so I was naturally alert whenever the old salts talked about liberty in foreign ports. The Chief of the Watch was arguing with an older chief, "You're too goddam skinny to appreciate oriental women." My ears perked.

"Shit, I was charting Japanese bars when you were still in diapers chasing coon-dogs," came the quick reply. "There's this gal in the White Hat Club named Kieko . . ."

"Ain't got nothin' to do with your longevity. Point is, your skinny ass ain't wide enough to stretch it tight. Might as well be doin' Snorkel Pat back in Frisco." Interrupted the COW.

I had been doing a very good job of holding the ship at my ordered half-degree down-bubble until then, but the conversation required more concentration than I was capable of, and I wasn't paying attention; Ralph was having trouble holding depth with the bow planes because of me.

"What's he talking about . . . stretching?" I whispered to him.

"Put some dive on your gadam planes, you've got a two-degree down-bubble," he snarled. After I had made the adjustment, he said, "You know, their slanted thing-a-ma-bob . . . There you go, she's coming up."

I guess I had a blank stare on my face, because he clarified, "The vaj-na, Hillbilly; you know, slanted, like their eyes. Stretches tight the more they spread their knees."

The Skipper hollered down from the Conn, "Scope's under. Get me up!"

I'd managed to let the ship get down to sixty-five feet, so the diving officer growled, "Watch your depth. Five-eight feet!"

"Hey Cherry-boy," the Auxiliaryman on the trim manifold asked as soon as we regained our ordered depth, "Never been to Japan before?" Trying to whisper something confidential to a friend on the bow planes on a submarine was exactly like being nonchalant about flatulence in church.

The COW on the vent manifold and the Interior Communications Electrician both shook their head somberly. I wasn't really a bad planesman, and I wasn't that naive, but the conversation was all about this thing I'd never actually seen, so I managed to get chewed out several more times by the Diving Officer for not paying attention to my bubble.

"Prepare to surface, three engines," finally came the command over the 1MC.

"All ahead full," said the OOD.

*Wait, Wait, I was thinking, we ain't done yet.* Suddenly I was back on lookout watch not remembering how I'd gotten there. I shook my head and got back to earth, *Turns for port! I'll be in Japan for my eighteenth birthday . . . seems like yesterday I was on Beer Can Hill.*

It had been a dozen years after WW II, and my only memories of wartime were being taught how to ski by the men of the Tenth Mountain Division, who were training there, and throwing up from overeating green ice cream. Peppermint ice cream - all a person could eat - had been free to kids in Leadville on VJ-Day. I vaguely remembered posters saying, "Let's Sink This Yellow S.O.B." below Tojo's picture, but SOB's, being male by definition, weren't on my mind. The crew members who'd sailed these Nipponese waters before had never so much as mentioned the existence of a male Japanese population. They spoke endlessly though, of uniquely *magnificent* females, all of whom could turn a guy every which way but loose.

*Slanted eyes, and vaj-nas, I thought, Only people who are prejudiced judge people on differences in appearance, I'd been taught that, but still . . .* Our wake trailed out aft like a straight line cut in the ocean, and the waters turned deep blue as we entered the Kuroshio current and the bone was a contrastingly brilliant white.

On my first day in Japan, not being in a liberty section, I was priming bare spots on the bridge near the upper Conning-Tower hatch. Submarines normally used local yard birds from the base shipyard to scrape, prime, and paint the ship when it returned from a long patrol, so there were several of them aboard. I was up to date on my quals but the Chief of the Boat thought I might as well do some voluntary painting so I would remember not to get behind again. Glancing enviously at some shipmates getting into a taxi on the pier, I absently kicked a gallon can of zinc-chromate primer and it dumped down the hatch onto an old Japanese man who had been working on the ladder below. He was covered from head to toe in green paint, and bowing as though he was apologizing to me for his carelessness.

Just moments ago, I had been wondering. *Could the old guy have been a Zero Pilot or a Japanese sub-sailor during the War? And, more philosophically, Was he ashamed or angry about what his government had done to his country?* I tried wiping the paint from his eyes, but he backed away, bowing. I attempted to wipe green paint from the cabling in the Conning Tower bilges, but the guy went to his

knees in front of me and wouldn't let me clean up my own mess. He had a glistening gold front tooth, just like the picture in the poster, as he smiled and bowed his head. *Had he hated Americans then, as much as he apparently feared us now?* I felt like a reluctant slave-owner. I had a knot in my gut because my slave was half my size and twice my age, and he kept grinning at me because I'd poured paint in his eyes.

I felt funny about the incident, so later that day after I got my Emergency Lighting drawing signed off, I mentioned it up in the Crew's Mess - where any problem could be presented, if not solved, by whoever happened to be there drinking diesel-scented coffee. Every submarine has a guy who reads the dictionary at sea instead of Louis L'Amore paperbacks, so "inscrutable" was inevitably defined. That didn't impress me too much, because I already knew that I didn't understand my reaction to the Japanese guy's reaction. Then some twidget said that the Japanese were the most polite people on earth; therefore, I should never confuse courtesy with inferiority. I was aware, by that time, that a twidget was an ordinary person who had been repeatedly hit on the head with Class "A" School books until he saw tiny little birds revolving around in his skull. Those who first made the mental leap to orbiting electrons were made Electronics or Sonar or Fire Control Technicians and sent to submarines. Twidget said specific things like, "Ahh . . . Ha," or, "Eureka," when they fixed broken equipment; they had astrological opinions about everything else. Not everything in the Crew's Mess made sense, but I knew that wisdom sometimes lurked there, so I listened to it all.

A Torpedoman, who knew what "sailing the Horn" meant, said that any sailor who gives a shit, about shit like that, ain't worth a shit. Finally, an After Engine Room snipe, who'd sailed all seven seas, advised me that softening up the local gals with oriental politeness could buy almost as much affection as money. I thought that the notion was either as simplistic as its source or a trap, but it had served to bring a useless discussion around to females. The conversation evolved to Japanese females, and finally, to Japanese female anatomy.

Now that we were at the pier, the subject having been brought up again in the Crew's Mess, previous discussions of oriental body parts were revived and became ever more detailed. Nevertheless, unlike the watchstanders in the Control Room at sea, these guys were obviously sincere, and in possession of real knowledge, judging by the great detail with which they described the inconceivable. I decided to put on a poker face for the time being - *I'd find out for myself soon enough*. By the time I'd hit the rack to rest for tomorrow's liberty, I was feeling more assured about Japan, having completely forgotten that males existed - and particularly the one I'd painted. It was never clear to me whether I had learned profound life-lessons in the Crew's Mess, or had just witnessed mountainous problems being hammered into insignificant molehills.

At long last, I made it ashore to the Starlight Bar in Yokosuka. A dozen girls, possibly because of my anticipation, completely erased any memory I had of Leadville's finest. One gal, aloof in her floor-length Kimono, was named Sacheko. I

suddenly understood *magnificent*. She exuded the promise of long thighs and firm bosoms - which the other girls openly displayed - *but her Kimono hid the enchanting mysteries from all eyes but mine*. I was in love. She made my ears burn. I could have written poetry, but couldn't think of anything to rhyme with vaj-na. One shipmate commented that I looked as horny as a two-peckered owl, which helped the others recognize my state, and they backed off compassionately. They even loaned me money and guarded my privacy in a booth where I impressed Sacheko with my Colorado-cowboy background.

"Hell yeah, I'd rode horses . . . killed me a bear when I was three."

We smooched passionately - as if I had been a millionaire and there were no tomorrow - because I was a non-qual. I had not yet earned the right to wear Silver Dolphins on my chest, so I had to be back at the ship at midnight.

When most of the money I could borrow was gone, Sacheko decided that we should go to the Navy Exchange and get her a bar of Ivory Soap and then take a cab to her place. We walked, holding hands, for nearly as long as we had ridden in the cab. Her Kimono's silk swished beside me and her wooden shoes clicked on the cobblestones. We strolled up narrow streets and down dark alleys, across long wooden bridges and small boards over sewer-filled binjo ditches. I had time to think briefly of my old Company Commander. *Destroyers never came into isolated ports like Yokosuka. Eat your heart out*, I mumbled. We walked through other peoples' back yards and their houses until we finally came to her room. It was about the size of the Crew's Mess, with paper and bamboo sliding-doors on all four sides. There were spotless straw floor-mats and a tatami. A dim light glowed on a small dresser. I put down the shoes I'd been carrying and was finally alone with Sacheko. I was surprised that paradise was so small.

She daintily untied her Obi, and removed several layers of Kimono, folding each item neatly and placing it in a pile. Half dressed, she poured me a drink from the bottle of Grant's we'd bought with the Ivory soap, and before I could finish it, she had signaled with her tiny fingers that it was time. I'd been chanting, *check out the vaj-na, check out the vaj-na*, but when I looked into her deep almond eyes, I forgot to. Once her splendidly-naked body was in drool-inducing Technicolor, unlike my wildest black-and-white imaginings, I forgot my name. She pulled me gently down onto the tatami. All the fireworks I had ever seen were detonated in a single second of time . . .

When we had been rolling together on the straw mat and wrapping ourselves in each other's arms for about fifteen seconds, she said, very slowly, "What time - you have - be back? It - is - yevan tuttie." Fifteen seconds is much, much, longer than it sounds.

Sacheko called through a sliding door for someone to help us find a taxicab while I struggled with my thirteen-buttons, and tried to get my socks on in the next fifteen

seconds. I made it back to the ship about fourteen seconds before midnight, all buttons buttoned.

The boat went to sea the next day, and visited several other ports where I was fortunate enough to appreciate that even a blind pigboat sailor sometimes finds an acorn. Female affection in Hong Kong was a little more expensive than Japan. Subic Bay was a little cheaper. Nowhere was it free. Booze was about the same cost everywhere. My only bad investment was a forty-dollar, does-everything camera in Okinawa with three lenses, with which I took two-and-a-half rolls of film, and then sold for ten bucks. I was learning to slow down a little and smell the roses, but I'd left my heart in Yokosuka.

Our submarine got back to Yoko about two months later. On the way to the Starlight, I spotted a gal, in a short tight dress, with the kind of calf muscles that grab a guy's eyeballs and makes him run into things. She'd stopped most of the sailors in Skivvie Alley dead in their tracks - but not me. She walked right past the Starlight's door, and I slowed down. Nevertheless, I stuck to my mission, turned left, refocused for darkness, and walked on in.

Another submarine had just come in from Northern patrol, which explained why our *Welcome Razorback* sign was gone, and why the other ship's younger guys were throwing five-dollar Scrip Notes around like Monopoly money. I had carefully calculated that I had only two-weeks' pay, minus what I owed for shenanigans in Subic Bay, but I still managed to underestimate the competition. Sacheke was sitting with an older guy from the other boat, so I ambled over to her table and said, "Howdy, I'm back." She didn't seem to recognize her cowboy. The guy frowned, and her face was blank.

I thought that she had recovered nicely and was extremely polite when she introduced me, but when she told him my name was Arthur, I had a real problem maintaining my poker face. The old petty officer frowned again, so I figured I'd better get a beer to plan my next move and patch up my damaged heart. I went to the end of the bar nearest the door and ordered a beer. Before it had arrived, they had walked right past me and out the door - arm in arm, together.

Two and a half beers later, I was still revising battle plans when the gal with the calves came cautiously into the Starlight. She had been blinded by the bright sunlight outside, so I jumped like a rabbit to her aid. It wasn't that I needed consolation, or that my hormones were in back in gale-force mode; it was just the gentlemanly thing to do, since I happened to be closest to the door.

Except for the over-packed sweater, she could have been called petite. An older woman, about twenty-two or twenty-three, she wanted to be called Mickey. We hit it off right away, and I allowed myself to be consoled. She repeated my name, "Lawn," several times sweetly, and our relationship developed smoothly. I bought her several bars of Ivory in the next two days even though she never asked for it and I



had no idea why it was considered so valuable. She wasn't my first love, but I recognized that she appreciated me far more than Sacheko had, because she let me keep enough of my paycheck for Lucky Strikes and toothpaste. She had marvelous legs, and great chest muscles too. When she wore anything more low-cut than a turtleneck, she could make a sailor dribble beer on his neckerchief and give his dog tags away. I had no problem with that though, because no one ever wore them on the boats anyway. Submariners weren't likely to need battlefield identification.

The ship ran through a typhoon on the way back to the States - which was another great adventure - and I had finally finished my qualifications and earned my Dolphins. I wore them on my next trip to Leadville where they seemed to impress Ashley, who was still blonde and beautiful. Ashley asked me what my Dolphins symbolized, but I only had a week's leave, and a one-track mind, so I never got around to fully explaining their significance. I had a great time, while trying every devious trick and offering every promise I could think of, but by the end of my leave I could feel my virginity growing back.

She wrote to me for about six months after I returned to my submarine, but since I was back in the Western Pacific, my outgoing mail wasn't too regular. I had written passionately and sincerely enough, but apparently, frequently would have been better. After I'd been in three or four ports in a row with no mail, I complained through the mail. A month later, I wrote and told her I'd bought us a set of Noritake China, and was really trying really hard to be faithful. Her answers took a while, and she finally sent me a "Dear John, I married a guy in the Air Force," letter. It ended as I'd expected: "I hope we can still be friends." At least she hadn't said I was funny.

I never did discover how Ashley managed to find a fly-boy in Leadville, but the next time I went home, Tania was married, Ashley was gone, and my mom was extremely proud of court receipts showing I'd paid back all the auto insurance companies, and my pending award of a Navy Good Conduct medal - which she reluctantly believed had more to do with not getting caught than behaving well. She was ecstatic about the Wheat Pattern on her Noritake.

## **Yankee Clipper** by Ron Gorence

On the TV screen, the prospective father seemed to shrink to half his size on hearing his wife's news, "We were just beginning to save some money," the actor-father looked pathetic, "I hate working at the plant! What will happen to all our plans if we have a baby now?" The Hollywood wife sobbed loudly behind him as he stared morosely at the rain-drenched streets of New York through his prop window.

Bert wanted to show that he was paying attention, so he absently mumbled what he thought was a correct response, "Asshole."

He had spent most of the movie thinking about some work he'd have to do in preparation for a week of local submarine ops beginning in two days: Charts had to be corrected, periscope cameras calibrated, watchstanders assigned for coastal surveillance drills - a whole host of last minute preparations. It had only remotely occurred to him that this movie was surprisingly similar to the one that Jane had insisted he watch last night. Except that in yesterday's movie, the actor-father had fondly kissed his wife's huge belly, promising to change his evil ways forever; at which Bert had mumbled, "Crap."

Jane seldom insisted that he watch these predictable sob stories, but she'd seduced him two nights in a row to sit on the sofa and watch almost identical movies. The popcorn, cold beer and a short nightgown had slowed down his thinking, but the coincidence was too much to ignore. He pushed the Sabalo and related submarine thoughts out of his consciousness and recalled that Jane had recently been putting on a little weight, although she still looked like a model; within seconds, he thought he knew what was coming.

"Are you pregnant?" he asked. "Yes, the doctor says April or May." Her long brown hair swept around her neck as she turned from the TV and stared at him. She didn't look surprised, but she did appear to be waiting for a Hollywood reaction.

"That's good," he said controlling his emotions to avoid whatever effect the movies were supposed to promote, "He'll probably be born just before our next WesPac run. You feeling OK?" Bert was visibly relieved that he would not have to finish watching the movie.

"That's it?" she exclaimed, "You only care about your precious submarine and your deployment to the Western Pacific? I hope I'm not disturbing the Navy's plans too much by being pregnant." He'd assumed that he'd convinced her a long time ago that his calm demeanor, whenever she was overly disappointed or joyous, was not the same as being indifferent.

Apparently, he had not convinced her. She whimpered, "You care more about the Sabalo than you ever cared about me." "No!" he said, "You know I love you, babe." Then he put one hand on each of her shoulders and said, "Do you love me?" "Of course I do. It's just that sometimes . . ." she said with a frustrated frown. "And you love your dad too?" he continued, "How is that possible? I hope you didn't have to stop loving *him* to marry me."

She forced a smile and nodded her acceptance of his logic. Bert hugged her until the droning movie put her to sleep on the sofa.

Months later in the delivery room, with the newborn in her arms, Jane suddenly started sobbing out loud. Bert wiped his smile off and attempted to reassure her, "I can build a bunk bed when he's older." He outlined a square in the air, "A sheet of four-by-eight plywood with two bunks on one side, and one on the other." He

chopped an imaginary room in half with his waving hands. "See? Like a room-divider. I'll even repaint the bedroom."

He assumed Jane was confusing him with Hollywood fathers again. "Honest, hon, you don't need to worry about anything," he comforted.

Suddenly, Jane tried to cut through the fog of his naiveté, "Bert, I have been pregnant for four years straight!" And with tears swelling in her eyes, shouted, "Four long years." "Yeah, so?" Bert said stupidly, trying to figure out what the point was. "Things don't smell right when you're pregnant," she hissed, "and food all tastes the same." She was begging him to understand, and the tears had stopped, "I don't even remember how my body is supposed to feel anymore."

"It feels just fine to me," joked Bert softly so that the Navy nurse tending Jane's roommate would not hear.

Suddenly, the nurse, who could have blocked for Notre Dame, yanked the curtain hanging over Jane's bed around on its track. "OK, Bucko, time to give the lady a little privacy," she sneered. She saw Bert's mouth begin to open and grabbed his elbow and pushed him toward the door, "You can wait out there," she said, showing that she would tolerate no argument. He ambled dumbly toward a sofa in the waiting room and sat down.

Bert resented the nurse's actions, but he was also relieved because the interruption gave him some time to think about Jane's strange mood. He had to reluctantly admit to himself that his spontaneous responses hadn't exactly solidified him as her hero. *Maybe Jane's sadness had nothing to do with comparing him to Hollywood fathers, he thought; maybe the nasty nurse with the lousy sense of humor had caused the whole damn thing.* Gradually he began to wonder how anyone could feel tortured because things sometimes smelled and tasted differently. It struck him that, although he'd never thought much about it, it was part of everyday life on the boats. All submariners had experienced extreme variations of taste and smell, and Bert conjectured, *maybe there's more to it than Hollywood, post-delivery blues, and a grouchy nurse.*

Bert slouched back and let his mind explore the possibilities. Taste was the simplest to understand. Sabalo, like all diesel submarines, was alleged to have the best food in the Navy, but that was true only until after a few weeks at sea when the last of the potatoes turned into tasteless rubber. About that time, canned Spam, creamed-corn and all other foods designed with an extended shelf-life inevitably began to taste lousy. Memories of crisp lettuce, crunchy apples and firm bananas became so vivid, that any man aboard would have swapped a case of sirloins or lobster tails for one bite. It was true that diesel boat duty was often something less than a gourmet picnic but, as the men grumbled, they were also aware that their taste would immediately revert to normal whenever their environment did.

Smell was a different matter: Cooks, mess cooks and the Corpsman were the only crewmembers allowed to take daily showers and going a month or more was not uncommon for the others. The air conditioning system was designed, not for comfort, but to cool electronic equipment, so it was left on all the time. Air was conditioned to be cool, not clean. During daylight hours the submarine was required to remain hidden, submerged and completely isolated from the earth's atmosphere. In the dark of night, whenever it was safe, the boat snorkeled to charge batteries. Until then, any odors or gasses created from past activities were completely captured and preserved in the atmosphere they breathed.

The men joked, "Passed gas and past gasses are passed around." The waste products of digested food was flushed into sanitary tanks and then vented back into the ship. Flatulence, also a byproduct of digestion, made its contributions more directly to the air which floated fore and aft through the ventilation systems for everyone to share. Submariners not only breathed their own natural smells, but air mixed and diffused with low viscosity fuel and lubricating oils, diesel exhaust, cigarette smoke, burned insulation and unburned fuel oil, minute asbestos fibers and the results of a thousand other chemical reactions.

The air inside the pressure hull actually became visible whenever an engine exhaust valve failed, a fuel leak worsened, or the temperature dropped suddenly enough for water vapor to condense. It often contained too little oxygen to keep a cigarette burning. But the air was dependably and consistently malodorous. Snorkeling during the dark hours offered some relief because the running engines sucked the odor of dirty underwear, and a hundred unwashed bodies, out of the men's lungs and replaced it with relatively fresh air.

Bert could remember several times when he'd opened the conning tower hatch, after a long time submerged, and retched at the sickeningly-sweet smell of clean air. It made him realize that he'd become so accustomed to his lair that he'd forgotten what oxygen-rich fresh air smelled like.

And Bert's wife had told him, through her tears, that she had been pregnant for four years. *How must it feel to have your sense of smell and taste chemically altered for four years?* Bert was beginning to understand how she might feel: like someone on a submarine patrol for four years - without snorkeling.

The scope of Bert's problem began to crystalize as he recalled the doctor's warning that another immediate pregnancy, without giving Jane's body a rest, could be very serious in combination with the heart palpitations she'd had since childhood. He remembered that when she'd delivered the second baby, his mother-in-law had jokingly showed him her cleaver, waving it toward his groin, and saying she knew how to save her daughter if it became necessary. Maybe she hadn't been joking.

Bert was a little slow when it came to understanding the female mind, but was a man who tackled problems like a hungry dog gnawing a bone. It was sometime between

the baby's birth and the day the boat left for WesPac that Bert first heard about a Japanese man known as the Yankee Clipper. Like a bloodhound identifying its quarry, he investigated every clue, tracked down every rumor and followed up every piece of scuttlebutt until he knew as much about the Clipper as any man stateside. When Sabalo cast off her lines, and headed for the Western Pacific, Bert was ready.

Underway, whether in the Crew's Mess or in the Control Room, Bert managed eventually to turn most conversations around to his mission. Bert spent much of his underway time visiting with whoever had the Diving Watch on the main vent manifold. It was usually either Mac or The Bee, and if the ship was transiting on the surface, there was little else happening. When rigged for dive, there were always a couple of other watchstanders and a few old salts hanging around the Control Room with nothing better to do than tell sea stories until the ship submerged. Nothing was sacred in these submarine bull sessions, and no subject was off limits. Divorce settlements and marriages were planned, problems with car engine diagnosed, and "Dear Johns" answered. Any independent thoughts introduced were hammered, chewed up and mulled over, until the bearer submitted to the group's consensus, successfully defended his concept, or was forced to carry the stigma of being a little weird; many nicknames, like "Preacher" or "Thumper" (short for "Bible-Thumper") originated in the Crew's Mess.

"What's the big deal?" asked Stet one day while leaning on the gyro table, "Hell I had three kids before I was twenty-two." Several men weren't sure if Stet was telling the truth but nodded and waited for Bert to answer.

The conversation was interrupted as The Bee picked up the 7MC mike and said, "Bridge, Control: Sounding: two-four-zero fathoms,"

When the bridge acknowledged, The Bee hung up the microphone and answered Stet, "Bert's had her pregnant since the day he got her drunk enough to marry him. Hell, every time he comes in from ops and throws a pair of dirty skivvies across the room, Jane gets pregnant again. He's tryin' to make an old lady out of her."

"Yeah," confirmed Bert, "In four years we've had three kids, three miscarriages, and a tube-pregnancy. And I was on six or seven-month WesPac deployments three times; that's over a year and a half I wasn't even home."

A facetious comment, implying that Bert might have had some outside help, was ignored because of both Bert's serious countenance and the fact that everyone knew that the kids were almost clones.

"And Bert has about as much finesse with women as a jackrabbit," Mac interjected, "Last time Jane had headaches every night for a month, it was because the dumbshit told her that not being there when number two was born - because the boat was out - was no big deal."

Bert nodded an affirmation, so Mac went on, "What was it you told her Bert, 'The Ruskies don't stop building H-bombs and missiles just because some Navy wife is having a kid?' Smooth-mouthed devil! Sorta like telling her you love her *almost* as much as this pigboat."

"Who you think you're fooling?" Bert shot back, "We're all volunteers on this ship, and there isn't anyone aboard who's spending half his life fighting to keep seawater out of a stinking sewer pipe just for the adventure of it. We do it because we're Americans, and there isn't one of your wives who understands that." The Bee rolled his eyes, but everyone else kept quiet and waited for him to finish.

"I may be wrong, but I usually feel the same about being a husband or father and having children, as I do about being a submariner," he looked around and continued, "But right now, I'm thinking that maybe my wife is *more* important. Finesse might help her understand why we do what we do, but that's not what's important."

They were interrupted by the 7MC, "Control, Bridge: Five-minute blow of the main ballast tanks with the low-pressure blower." "Five minute blow, Control aye," responded The Bee.

After many similar conversations, six thousand miles, and nearly two months, the boat rounded Najimo Saki Lighthouse, and tied up at Pier One in Yokosuka. Bert had posted a long letter to Jane from Hawaii explaining his plans in detail, and he decided to dig through his incoming mail for her answer before going into town. The first three letters contained lists of broken toys, windows, and pieces of furniture; there were itemizations of automobile and appliance repairs and a complaint that his budget was too complicated, so she'd gotten a waitress job. Finally, he found one short sentence addressing his intentions: it would likely be a mortal sin and she disavowed any ownership of the idea and God knew what was best.

There was a good sized crowd in the Starlight Bar. Almost everyone off the boat who didn't have duty stopped off there on the way to somewhere else. There were extra bartenders and a dozen or more "hostesses" had congregated from most of the surrounding bars for the occasion. The arrival of a boat fresh in from patrol was a momentous event because all the sailors had at least a month's back pay; most of them were willing to get rid of it in one or two days.

"Hey, Bert!" The Bee hollered when Bert walked in, "Been to see the Clipper already?" he turned to Mac across the table, "Or changed your mind now that we're here?" The Bee began clucking like a chicken.

"You look a little shorter," a voice came from the back booths, "Let's hear you talk soprano;"

"Leave him alone, Auggie," Mac growled, "You're just egging him on."

"Naw, I'm still in one piece," answered Bert, "I need to get a beer and some directions first. How about some Asahi here?" Bert handed a thousand yen to one of the girls and motioned toward his shipmate's bottles.

The Bee said, "Got some Crown Royal behind the bar."

"Sounds good, but I don't think I'm supposed to drink." Bert answered, "You talk to Papa San yet?"

"You're really serious? Let's finish this beer and I'll go find him," promised The Bee.

"What about the Church?" Mac asked softly in spite of the surrounding bar noises, "How's Jane gonna take it if you get evicted, or whatever Catholics call it?"

"God helps those who help themselves. She'll die if she gets pregnant again," shrugged Bert. "Screw the Church. . . I'll just go to confession later."

"Yeah, but Jane thinks you'll go to Hell if you go through with it," countered The Bee.

They'd been over the same ground for hours in transit and on patrol, but his shipmates wanted to review all the options one more time, because they knew that seeing the Clipper was an irreversible move.

"Look," Bert said, "She thinks I'm mostly an atheist anyway, so what's gonna change? Everybody agrees that eternity's a long time, but I'm planning for many, many good years before eternity even starts."

Bert didn't speak any Japanese, so he needed The Bee to make arrangements for him. After they had rehashed all the pros and cons over several beers without changing Bert's mind, The Bee finally arranged a private interview, and translated that Papa San, for a few hundred yen, could send a messenger to talk to a nurse who, for a few hundred yen could introduce him to a taxi driver who for a few hundred yen might know where the Yankee Clipper had his office. Papa San said the Clipper would "plobly" take care of Bert for thirty or forty thousand yen.

After a few hundred yen had been distributed, and a few more beers downed, Bert was informed that the taxi driver was waiting for him in front of the bar.

"You really gonna go?" The Bee inquired.

"Screw it, let's have a real drink. You can go tomorrow," persuaded Stet.

"Don't forget to get a manicure," somebody in the back who knew about the plan, yelled as Bert approached the door.

"And then do something about that hair, sweetie. It looks like crap," said another, who then added cautiously, "I'll be happy to tell Jane all about it if you want." Bert gave him a nasty frown and regretted the fact that personal secrets were never safe in the Silent Service.

The taxi went out to the main street and drove past the Yokosuka Naval Station's main gate. Bert had never gone this way before since the White Hat Club, the Starlight, Skivvie Alley and most of Yokosuka, were all in the opposite direction. The cab wandered on a curved road around a small tree-covered hill and passed several large stone houses which were very different than the Japanese homes he'd seen before. He could still see Yokosuka Bay and the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force Academy. He could not quite see his ship across the bay from the Academy but felt comforted that it was so near.

Despite his familiar surroundings, Bert held the matchbook nervously. The taxi driver had given it back to him when he'd inquired about the address which was written on it in Kanji. His hands were sweating in spite of the chill air, and in case the driver was lost, he didn't want to ruin the writing. It was not unusual that there were no door handles in the back seat - all Japanese taxi drivers had a switch on the dashboard to open them - but now Bert glared at the knobs where handles should have been and began to perspire. Just as he began to wipe his forehead with the back of his hand, the driver turned up a steep circular driveway which curved around what looked like a carefully-raked sandbox, and pulled to a stop in front of two gigantic mahogany doors with shiny brass levers for door knobs. The building was built of huge grey stones, each bigger than the car, but the sides and roof were hidden by dense green leaves from the surrounding jungle. The driver popped Bert's door open, walked into the shady darkness near the door and twisted the doorbell.

An elderly Japanese man, in a black Western suit and black tie, spoke a few words to the taxi driver, who bowed, jumped back into his cab and disappeared quickly down the drive before Bert had had a chance to change his mind. The old man, behaving very much like a butler, bowed and motioned for Bert to follow him up a curving stairway. Except for the mahogany banisters and carpeted stairs, there was absolutely nothing else in the large dark room into which the front door had opened, and there was barely-audible elevator music coming from somewhere. At the top of the stairs Bert was led into a poorly-lighted room on the right, where another elderly man, similarly dressed, but much older, was playing Chopin on a polished grand piano. The pianist seemed not to notice the intrusion and continued to play while Bert was directed to a small loveseat and motioned by the butler to sit down. The butler bowed and left. In a few minutes, the pianist picked up his sheet music in the middle of a piece, and seeming to have never noticed Bert, left the room through another door.

Soon, a man who looked a little like the butler, but who was wearing a blue tie, came into the room, bowed, and stood in front of Bert. Bert didn't like bowing because



he'd learned in the past that bowing back only caused more bowing; besides he was sitting down. He smiled at the blue-tied butler, and was surprised to hear him speaking fair English.

"You are married?"

"Married? Yes."

"Has your wife's agreement with you?"

"Yes."

"I must tell you. The plot can not be undone. One in one-hundred is possible, but only a small chance. Do you understand? Has your wife agreed?"

"Yes."

"OK, I leave you alone. The doctors say you must think for plenty of plenty-five minutes. Is serious decision. You think, I come back plenty minutes."

"OK."

After wondering for at least fifteen minutes what the hell he was doing here, Bert went to the door by which he had entered, and quietly tried the handle. *Locked*. He quietly tried all the other four doors and found them equally secure. *Crap*. He sat back down to contemplate his next move. He decided that the first thing he would do was to holler to get someone's attention, and explain that he'd changed his mind. Next, if that didn't work, he'd try to kick one of the doors down. They were all solid mahogany, shellacked and trimmed with gold paint, but he calculated that the latch would be a weak point. He tested a large stone base holding up the bust of some dead European, and found that he could lift it. *Yeah!* It was heavy enough to break through almost anything, but would make a hell of a mess. *Too damn bad*. He had just begun to ready his voice for the loudest yell he was capable of, when a door opened and the doctor walked in.

"You think enough? You sultan?" Bert knew it was the doctor because of his white coat.

"Yes. I am certain!" He had been waiting for a long time.

Bert was then led into a sterile-smelling white room. Everything but a narrow stainless steel table was white, and the lighting was almost blinding compared to the other parts of the house. The doctor, whose shoes were also white, motioned for him to remove his clothing and lay on the stainless steel. When he had finally brought the steel up to body temperature, and his shivering had subsided, two short fat Japanese girls, dressed in white came giggling into the room. They bowed and then hid their teeth with their hands as they continued to giggle. Bert had never

seen young short fat Japanese women before, so he snickered back. They were about four and a half feet tall, and about half as far across. *Twin cherubs. Good thing they're nurses; they could never make a living in Skivvie Alley.*

The girls stood on each side of the table, bowed and began to scrub Bert's private places. He decided that they weren't insulting him, since they had been giggling long before they concentrated on his manhood. He was staring intently up at the ceiling when the doctor addressed him, "All you comfolt?"

"Yes."

"Elleting OK?"

"Yes."

He frowned and shrugged his shoulders as though he didn't believe Bert, and then directed the girls to mop the sweat off their patient's forehead, which made them giggle.

"All you soo you all comfolt?"

"Yes."

The doctor shrugged again, mopped up more perspiration, and rubbed Bert's scrotum.

"You feer dis, a ritter plick," the doctor said.

Bert almost panicked in his struggle to translate what the doctor had said. *It must have been an insult, because the girls were no longer giggling . . . Bam!* His eyes slammed open like watertight hatches under pressure. The sharp jab was quick and painful, so he immediately forced his eyelids to shut and squeeze the tears out. He was not sure whether it was the pain's intensity or its location but his fingers tightened into white-knuckled fists.

The doctor was repeating gently, "No mole hult. Pain finish. No mole. You OK. OK? You OK?"

"Yes," said Bert as the girls giggled and wiped his forehead and the outside corner of one eye.

The physical pain was gone, and Bert could only feel the doctor pulling and pushing around the area of his otherwise numb family jewels. Mental agony was another thing. The gigglers could hardly keep up with his perspiration, and though he wasn't cold, Bert had to force himself to stop shivering . . . but he couldn't stop thinking. *What if Doc had been in the war? What if he wants revenge for what we did to his*

*father or brother at Iwo Jima? Maybe he gets together with his friends over a Saki and brags about how many Americans he ruined today. I gotta jump up right now and grab my clothes and beat it out of here!*

His thoughts were interrupted by a tightening sensation in his groin. The doctor's hands and face had been below his field of view, so it surprised him when the physician suddenly leaned back and tugged firmly on Bert's intestines. The intestines were apparently attached to his tonsils at one end, and to his toenails at the other, because he felt a cable, made of gut, being pulled out of his rectum and turning his body inside out. The muscles behind his molars ached, his brain was coming detached from his skull, his Achilles tendons went limp but his toes curled toward his chin. He felt that his buttocks were at least a foot above the table, and finally after a few seconds - or eons, depending on who was measuring the time - the doctor dropped his body back to table level and held a pair of forceps halfway between a gold-toothed grin and Bert's eyes. In the forceps was a limp quarter-inch piece of soda-straw which he insisted on flopping back and forth until Bert nodded acknowledgement.

When the doctor repeated the forceps display, Bert finally realized that he had just been shown incontrovertible proof of his vasectomy. The doctor grinned, and the girls began to giggle again.

Bert had dressed in fifteen seconds, but he had a mandatory half-hour's wait in the now-silent music room as the doctor quietly watched him like he'd watch a chipmunk in the park. Finally, after much fidgeting, Bert's taxi arrived to take him back to the Starlight Bar.

"He's back!" Shouted Mac, as Bert crashed into the bar and made his way to the closest beer. The engineman at the bar, who'd paid for the beer, started to react appropriately until he saw the look on Bert's face. He wasn't a Sabalo sailor, but he apparently understood that Bert needed it more than he did.

"You did it!" Mac and The Bee were standing at their booth. "You actually did it!"

"Can he sing soprano yet?" came from the darkest corner as Bert accepted a second beer and a shot chaser, courtesy of the understanding engineman.

"Nah, you never made it to the Clipper, did you Bert," asked The Bee, looking Bert over from head to toe as he approached, "You just went to a bar. . . or a skivvy house, din'cha?"

Bert shook his head, but was unable to speak with the glass firmly tilted to his lips.

"Where's your kimono," Stet inquired, joining them at the bar, "Can you still pee standing up?" and turning to the bartender, "Give him an Old Grandad on me."

Bert had half a dozen shots of Scotch, Vodka, Bourbon and miscellaneous hard liquors plus three bottles of beer before his friends finally nudged him over to the booth where they had been sitting. He had an Asahi in each hand as they bombarded him with questions: what part of town he'd been to, what the Clipper looked like and his name, how much it hurt, how much it cost, the preparations, the procedures, the amount of blood, the smallest details, but Bert would do no more than nod until the large Asahi bottles were completely empty. Then he ordered two more, and then began to tell his tale.

"The Yankee Clipper told me I should not drink alcohol for forty-eight hours, and should stay in bed for twenty-four." He slammed his bottle on the table, "Screw that!"

"He was the biggest Japanese man I've ever seen. Bigger even than Ollie Olson! Makes Ollie look like a kid. He's got round black-framed glasses that reflect like mirrors and giant gold teeth. I had seven nurses with the biggest boobs I've ever seen," Bert said, carefully limiting his exaggeration because he recognized that he was slurring some words, and so couldn't defend anything too far-fetched, "Pro-bly forty-nine and a half D's."

"Ah, bullcrap!" interrupted The Bee. "You never even went there; you been sitting, drinking at some skivvie bar all afternoon." Mac nodded agreement.

Bert calmly slid across the booth to the end of the Naugahyde seat, staggered once, and with a slight nudge from Mac, stood up. He dropped his trousers and shorts to his ankles, and pointed to a single piece of medical tape as he lifted up his scrotum. "See, one incision's all - for both sides."

They were wide-eyed.

Then Bert sat back down and unrolled a piece of wax paper from his breast pocket showing them two small tubes that looked like they'd been cut off a ball point pen refill, "Trim pump still works like new, but all sperm's been redirected to the bilges."

They were silent while they emptied and replaced beer bottles, and he continued, "My taxi driver told me that the Yankee Clipper was a doc before the war. He signed up for the Kamikazes, but his plane ran out of gas, so they demoted him to his old job, and now he specializes in vasectomies for Americans." Everyone frowned and there was silence.

"Yeah, I get it," The Bee said suddenly. "If he can neuter every boat sailor that comes through Yoko, he'll eliminate more Americans than Tojo ever dreamed of."

"It's not. . . I'M NOT neutered!" countered Bert, "I'm still the same, but just . . . sorta . . . just. . . just tired," and he put his head on the table and went to sleep. Mac and The Bee followed doctor's orders and sent him, with a trusted taxi driver, back to the

ship to rest and avoid booze. On the way out, he mumbled, "Lil fat Angels. Tee-hee. Flying round my head. Tee-heee." The driver was instructed to ignore anything he said, and to turn him over to Sabalo's topside watch.

When the ship had tied up at the pier back in San Diego, Jane, dressed in a wonderfully short skirt, kissed Bert passionately, and then asked him whether he wanted her to drive, if he wanted to go out to dinner, take a shower, or what? Bert squeezed her hand and grinned, "Never mind what I want to do first, but the second thing I'm gonna do is put down my seabag."

That evening, after the kids were in bed, and after a very passionate welcoming, Bert rolled over and lit a cigarette, "Jane, you are the most beautiful, wonderful, smartest, sexiest woman in the whole world. The way you kept things together while I was gone, and the way you looked today on the pier - I really try hard, and I may not deserve it - but I will never, ever get enough of you."

Jane cooed, and snuggled her head up under his arm, as warm and content as she'd ever been in her life.

"And now that I'm shooting blanks, we can have sex for breakfast, lunch and supper. No more stupid movies and boring dances so you can break the 'I'm pregnant' news."

Jane rolled over to her side of the bed.

"I won't ever have to buy flowers and take you shopping to make you feel better about getting fat because you're pregnant-not ever again. Yahooo! We got it made, babe."

Jane pulled the pillow over her head, and Bert snored with the contentment of someone at total peace with the world, or a dog that had finally gnawed through to a bone's sweet marrow.

Jane's heart murmur eventually went away, and her senses of taste and smell improved completely, but her headaches never went away. Occasionally, she had them at breakfast, lunch and supper, but mostly at bed time.

## **Submarine Painting, Made Easy** by Ron Gorence

The Razorback (SS-394) had been on Northern Patrol for 36 days, and finally, the Quartermaster's log read: '0830 - Moored starboard-side-to Berth 1, Yokosuka Naval Facility, Yokosuka, Japan. Present are various units of U.S. Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force.'

Liberty was down upon arrival for all hands at the discretion of department heads, except for a third of the crew which was in the duty section. The Quartermasters had departed about five minutes after the Old Man and their boss, the Navigator, had gone ashore, along with the Yeoman and most of the Torpedomen. Snipes would work 'til about noon, to line up for shore power and get their preordered repair parts aboard, and then they too would hustle into Yokusuka for, as they put it, a little R & R before the pending ship's move to a dry dock and some major overhaul work.

An hour after Razorback had tied up and a few necessary stores had been loaded by all hands, most of the compartments below decks looked deserted. Topside, the deck gang was bustling, having been told that all areas with barnacles, sea-scum, rust and damaged paint would be scraped, wire brushed, and primed-ready for painting-before liberty call. There were three of us: Hal, Indian and I; we had over a month's back-pay in our pockets from having been on patrol, and a comparable abundance of testosterone, so we worked like there was no tomorrow. The most exotic ports we'd visited so far were Honolulu, where all the women hated sailors, and Adak, Alaska, where there were no women - but we'd been assured that Yoko would be different. Since none of us had been aboard long enough to be qualified, we had Cinderella Liberty, which meant that whatever time we got off, we'd have to be back aboard by midnight; we were unanimously prepared to remove barnacles with our front teeth if necessary.

Even Gunner Meecham, the WW II First Class Gunner's Mate in charge of the deck gang, had been chipping and scraping, and by ten-thirty, we'd already rolled the ship to port and then to starboard by carefully opening the Main Ballast tank vents on one side to expose the other side for scraping, then blowing the water out with the Low Pressure Blower, and repeating the whole procedure to expose the opposite tank-tops. Most of the moss and sea-growth had been replaced with zinc-chromate primer and a hand-painted coat of black. The tank-tops were looking great.

I had outlined the numbers 3, 9, and 4 with masking tape on both sides of the sail for painting in the ship's ID number with white paint and black shading, and had moved on to chipping rust around number four cleat. We weren't naturally meticulous in our work, but Gunner had already taught us a couple of times that doing something right was always faster than doing it twice, so the ship's exterior was looking better by the moment.

"Let's get all those white spots wire-brushed and primed," shouted Gunner up to Hal who was hanging above me on the side of the sail on a bosun's chair. "An' make sure you get all that dried salt off and rinse it with fresh water before you prime it. It'll show through as soon as the paint dries if you don't."

He stopped by the Forward Torpedo Room escape-trunk door, where Indian was working, and pointed out some rust in the trough where the tanks meet the pressure

**hull, "Make sure you dry out that before you prime those spots," he mumbled to Indian, "I'm going below for a minute."**

**It must have been about 1100 when Gunner finally came back topside in full dress whites, top-heavy with dozens of war ribbons and a submarine patrol pin.**

**"Okay Gorence, looks like you got things under control; I gotta go check up on some supplies - I may not make it back. Tell the men that if they get everything done by 1230-1300, they can take off-and I mean not a bit of rust or salt showing anywhere topside."**

**"What supplies?" I asked cutely, "We've already got all our stuff."**

**"Gotta sign some paperwork!" he snarled back impatiently.**

**"And make sure those knuckleheads stow all the gear properly, or I'll make you do it when I get back."**

**"Does this mean I'm the Leading Seaman now?" I asked.**

**"No. It means I think you might be smart enough to tell the other two that nobody goes anywhere 'til topside looks decent! Okay?"**

**"Nobody goes anywhere . . . but you," I mumbled - fortunately he was already out of earshot across the bow, hailing a taxi.**

**After I'd delivered the message, we all worked just a little harder, and shortly after noon, we had used red-lead or zinc chromate primer to hide every minute blemish visible above Razorback's waterline. I was taking one last look around, as I started gathering up scrapers, wire brushes and the tools and Indian and Hal cleaned paintbrushes, when the 1MC announced, "Gorence . . . lay to the Wardroom. Gorence . . . lay to the Wardroom, on the double."**

**Lt. Speer was the Duty Officer, and he informed me that the XO had just called, and said the CO had been pleased with the look of the ship so far, as he'd gone by on the way to Squadron, and wanted to make sure it would be finished today.**

**"Yessir," I proudly responded, "We're just cleaning up now."**

**"No, not primed, PAINTED," Lt. Speer calmly corrected.**

**"But the Weapons Officer, Mr. Montross told Gunner Meecham that we only had to get her ready for painting later in drydock . . . we're gonna . . ."**

**"PAINTED, Gorence," and he stared at me to see if I finally understood.**

My mouth was still trying to form a protest, so he continued, "Skipper even told me last time you guys had done a great job feathering the paint between the black horizontal surfaces and the grey vertical ones. He said if you couldn't finish that part today, tomorrow would do; except for that, he wants topside painted today."

The news up on deck didn't go over too well. "How we gonna paint 300 feet of submarine in five hours? Sun goes down about six," complained Hal.

"Eighteen-hundred," corrected Indian. Nobody could ever remember Indian's name, so he wanted to be called Indian.

"Yeah, I know," I responded, "Mr. Speer said he'd authorize the yardbirds to rig some floodlights if we needed them; I gotta let him know in a couple of hours."

Indian went down to the After Torpedo room and brought up the paint pot and all the hoses while Hal and I hauled five-gallon buckets of paint from pallets on the pier onto the deck just aft of the sail. I covered up the newly-painted hull numbers and the bridge Plexiglas bubble and windows with newspaper and masking tape while my coworkers began spraying the top of the sail. By the time we'd finished painting the sail grey, with the top of the sail and the horizontal bridge areas dull black with all edges blended into each other, my Timex said it was 1535; sunset was just over two hours away, and we hadn't even started the bulk of the painting, which was the main deck.

"Better go tell Speer we're gonna need lights," said Indian.

"Yeah, I guess... if we could just get a new spray gun. We've spent more time cleaning the gun out than actually spraying," I responded.

We had two guns, and had cleaned one while the other was in use, but we'd seldom managed over a few feet of coverage before we had to switch again.

"What in the devil is Hal doing?" I motioned to the turtleback back aft where our third member was swinging a mop over the after bullnose, "Swabbing paint?"

We both made a beeline to Hal who was sticking the business end of the mop into and around the large guide for mooring-lines. Hal looked up at us both and said, "Let's get busy. I've painted this thing in ten seconds; a brush would have taken ten minutes."

Mr. Speer was walking a non-qual officer through the battery-charge line-up, so he seemed relieved when I interrupted him with the XJ-A phone and informed him that we'd be able to finish the painting without lights.

Then, Indian and I shifted into high gear and raided the below decks compartments for every foxtail, broom and mop we could find, and found two push-brooms up on



the pier. One of us dumped paint while the other two spread it in and around cracks. We soon discovered that the trick was to find a flat place to dump paint so that it wouldn't all drain immediately into the superstructure. In tight spaces, a one gallon bucket was dipped into the larger container and emptied with enough force to ensure complete coverage.

Just as the sun settled behind Honshu and the ex-Japanese Empire, we declared our job finished and disposed of paint buckets, cans, most of our tools, and all of our clothes into the Dempsey-dumpster on the pier. Razorback glistened beautifully in the reflected harbor lights as we scrubbed our bodies down with Methyl Ethyl Ketone wherever the paint showed, and with Ivory soap wherever it didn't. Finally we went ashore, smelling even worse than the other diesel-boat sailors, but with pockets full of money. We ordered large Asahi beers by the pair.

Heavy drinking and later events would render the night's liberty much less memorable than we had hoped, but the next morning dawned as one that none of us will never, ever forget:

I was awakened by the Below Decks Watch who shook me awake, "Gorence. Get up. You better get up topside and take a look!"

Twilight was just breaking through a fog over Yokosuka harbor which was thicker than any I'd ever seen. I couldn't see the top of the sail, less than 20 feet away, but the visible paint job and her hull numbers looked fine. I immediately looked around the deck near the After Battery hatch for a spot we might have accidentally left unpainted, or a patch of yellow-green primer we might have failed to cover, but except for a few spots that looked a little more like tar than black paint, nothing really looked too bad.

One of my fondest memories is of sleeping on a submarine was the sound of waves just outside the pressure-hull gently lapping against the tank-tops. On this morning, however, my eyes went to the water a few yards away under the fog, and then to the tank tops beneath where I stood. The waves were not lapping, but instead, splattering against the ship through a scum of black rubbery bubbles and congealed black paint. It clung to the ship and then oozed its slime back into the sea. I noticed that Hal and Indian were next to me, silent.

Just beyond a patch of fog, and sticking up like a periscope, were a couple of feet of broom handle, the business end of which was held beneath the surface by an invisible glob of paint. Indian took off to go get the boat-hook from the bridge to retrieve the object, but by the time he came back Hal and I were pointing to several rags and paintbrushes, also floating on the paint scum which covered the water in every direction.

Between the time of our early reveille and scheduled morning quarters, we managed to retrieve and hide several slimy brushes and swabs in the superstructure, but as

the crew gathered on the pier for muster, and the sun brightened, we all looked up and saw the COB, Chief Sensney, breaking through the crowd, and peering over the edge of the pier with a scowl I will never forget as long as I live.

"Do NOT come to Quarters," he hissed, "Clean it upppp!" He waved his arm in a semicircle indicating everything in every direction away from the pier as far as the eye could see, apparently including our dungarees, which by now looked as bad as the painted clothing we'd discarded last night. As he spun back around to the assembling and grinning crew, he rolled his shoulders as though something, having thrown his posture out of whack, needed major adjustment. "Fall in," he growled at the rest of the crew, whose grins faded to smirks as they lined up.

Our eyes followed the sweep of his gesture, and we began to look beyond the small area from which we had been fishing for flotsam. The mooring lines had obviously slacked enough during the night to dip into the blackened sea, and were dripping blobs of paint. So were the pier's pilings and our fenders. The ship's anchor and both bowplanes were trimmed on the bottom with delicate black lace, dripping and reshaping itself as we watched. The limber holes were similarly draped in black.

The Academy for the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, directly across Yokosuka harbor from Berth 1, was a group of white buildings behind and upon a stone wall, which had been covered with brilliantly-white plaster. The wall emerged from the harbor's North shore, and Indian, having claimed to have the best eyes on the ship, said he could distinguish black lace at its waterline. Hal and I assumed he was lying to scare us, because the whole crew had been warned over and over about 'International Incidents.' We had never understood what might be classified as an International Incident prior to this, but Indian apparently thought that painting the Academy's wall might qualify. We all suddenly remembered, from boring lectures, that Status of Forces Agreements stipulated that criminals would be subject to arrest, trial, and conviction according to the laws of the host country. We all prayed for high tide, and that it would cover the evidence.

During the next week in Yoko while we were *voluntarily* restricted to the ship, Gunner did a lot of work on our vocabulary. He taught us that *speed*, though often critical, was always dangerous without direction. He taught us that *meticulousness* was important to a point, but that it could be overdone, and he convinced us that the cliché, 'doing something right was always faster than doing it twice' was not just a cliché. Unfortunately, during whatever liberty we had the following week, we managed to handle our money with almost exactly the same intelligence as we'd spread our paint, but Gunner let us learn that the hard way. The tides were favorable.

However disrespectful our treatment of a Man of War may have seemed, I am proud to report that the Razorback ultimately received the most carefully-inspected and precisely-applied external paint-job of her entire career during that period of time; having shown Gunner our disdain for spray guns, we meticulously painted

every inch, top and bottom, of her teak deck boards with a tooth brush and pipe cleaners. We slowly scraped away five, five-gallon cans of paint, and then carefully reapplied two. We painted her numbers with fine artist's brushes, and merged her blacks and grays until they faded imperceptibly one into the other. We received many compliments on the excellence of our second paint job, although never without comments on our first try.

I coincidentally served two, two-month tours of mess-cooking during Chief Sensney's tenure as COB, and another tour under his relief, Chief Mason (even though I had never asked Sensney for referrals). I was also subjected to the constant and nearly merciless harassment of my shipmates for a long time; their comments helped direct the process of growing up.

As I began to write this, nearly fifty years later, I was aware that I would probably have to hammer on the keyboard late into the night until I was finished. I know that laboring over a sea-story until it develops into a literary masterpiece is beyond my limits; but neither would I allow myself to be distracted or cut it short because of time constraints. I can count the half-assed jobs I've done since Razorback, on one hand.

I believe Gunner Meecham would say at this point that this story is, "Good enough." For him and for each of us who sailed on her, a part of our soul, a fraction of our lives, will forever lie somewhere beneath her exterior coats of paint. It was a good place to grow up. .

**And to get a perspective from the SSN 'Fast Attack, Never Come Back' side of the house, Steve Gentry shares a few of his experiences**

## **Murmansk is our Playground** by Steve Gentry

### **FOREWARD**

Skipjack (SSN 585), was commissioned in '59. New hull design, 5-blade screw, she was maneuverable as hell, real fast (40+ knots submerged), but awfully noisy... like a Chevelle 396 with glasspacks and the AM/FM radio cranked up. We were cool!!! But when we were turning an 'All Ahead Flank' bell, you could hear us coming 1/2 an ocean away... At least by today's standards.

So, Fast Attack warfare tactics were rapidly changing... The original Hunter / Killer mission of the hull design and 5-blade screw (rapid hit-and-run tactics and speed) were giving way to the need to remain undetected and to implement a more stealthy strategy. Skipjack was kinda caught somewhere in that vast middle-ground between evolving sonar capabilities by the Rooskis and the inherent advantages of remaining undetected. As all of us who rode the boats know, once detected and

triangulated, you had a very good probability of kissing your ass goodbye. Thus, our normal outbound patrol strategy was to pull the plug when we hit the 100-fathom curve and not surface again until reaching a similar point when inbound. (I.E. Remain Undetected)

Two thirds of the Skipjack crew were 'nuclear power trained'. An elite group, schooled without regard to cost, honed to a fine edge, then cast upon the waters to make the rest of us 'forward of Frame 44' pukes envious of their lofty position on the food chain. Most crew interaction was based on 'Frame 44'... Those who worked forward or aft. I worked forward. I was a certified line handler, mess cook and planesman... And I also got to drive that sonuvabitch!

Our normal program consisted of occasional 3-5 day ops, lots of 7-20 day ops, all intended to be shakedown preparation for 60-80 day patrols off Murmansk... These patrols were what SSNs were all about. Because we were a nuke, there weren't many good liberty ports that allowed us to come in and visit anyway, and it seemed that constant pressure was placed on us to get out there in the Rooski's front yard and wait for something interesting to happen... Pursuit of targets of opportunity!

Fast Attack boats have one crew... None of that Blue/Gold stuff. Unbeknownst to us at this time ('67-'69), there was a lot of pressure being put on the navy by Congress concerning the cost of upkeep of SSNs and their frequent need for overhaul. Consequently, SUBRON 6 had put us on an OPS schedule that seemed to have us at sea all the damn time. The navy needed to get more bang for the buck out of the SSNs and logging max hours at sea was the solution. (Remain Undetected!)

You can see I'm going somewhere with this 'Remain Undetected' bullshit, huh? Well...'This is a no shitter...'

## **THE THRILL OF THE CHASE**

It's May '67 and the memories of Dunoon, Scotland are still fresh in my mind. I'll never forget my first sight of the USS Hunley (AS-31) as we rounded some spit of land that jutted out to meet the sea in the Firth of Clyde... This is the Holy Loch!

We're running on the surface, got the safety lines set up on the fairwater planes and 10-12 of us are standing on the planes getting our first look at Scotland. We'll have line handlers on deck in 30 minutes or so, but for this brief period of time I was able to just soak in the jagged coastline that juts from the sea, the sounds of the captain on the 21MC as he calls rudder angle changes to the Diving Officer or speed changes to the engine room on the 21MC... The snappy responses...

"Con, Bridge... Left 20 degrees rudder." " Bridge, Con... Left 20 degrees rudder, aye." " Bridge, Con... Rudder's left 20 degrees, sir."

A few minutes later, we spot the tugs who will bring us the harbor pilot and steer us the rest of the way to the tender, where we will berth for a couple days and venture out into this small town of Dunoon. For this young kid, these were some pretty heady times... Driving a submarine, seeing Scotland, drinking dark beer and scotch that nearly made me puke. Damn!

It was late May and the weather was brisk... Summer-like, for the folks in Scotland. I learn later that winters are long and cold, and the wind that sweeps down the fjords will chill you to the bone during the long winter months. But, its nice weather now and all the new stimuli are making me feel excited and full of anticipation. I've heard all the sea stories about going on patrol and now I'm finally on my first.

F\*ckin A, this is big time!!! "Kildin Island... *MARK!!*", the officer on the scope calls out. The QM reads back the bearing, marks it on the plot map, and records it in the Ships Log. Kilden Island is a navigation light on a small island just to the northwest of Murmansk.

I'll hear 'Kildin Island... Mark!' at least a couple thousand times during the next couple years... Yet, right now I'm driving the boat and absorbing every new detail of patrol off the USSR's major North Sea Naval Port. We're finally here and this is what its all about!

It takes a couple weeks to really get into the routine of being on station... Mostly just cruising around at 3-4 knots looking and waiting... Looking and waiting for something, we just haven't found it yet. Oh, we observe a number of coastal merchantman and Rooski naval ships... In fact, over the course of a week or so we have detected several man-o-war ships (subs and skimmers) that have fallen in behind a couple of them and shadowed them briefly, but whatever we were looking for, they weren't it. We'd just reverse course and return to that same 'ol location off Murmansk.

One morning, sonar reports a contact... Determines that its a man-o-war surface ship and we fall in behind this contact. We don't raise the scope any more than necessary, especially when other ships are in our close proximity, so sonar provides the bulk of our info. On this morning, there is a lot of chatter between the sonar shack and the con... The OD, XO, and captain are exchanging a lot of glances and from their discussion, its apparent that this contact *MAY* be the one that we have been waiting for. Its apparent that our 'sit and wait' game plan has now changed to 'follow the Rooskis'.

For about a day and a half, we follow this ship northeast of Murmansk. At some point in time, the captain decides that we have been shadowing the wrong ship and that we will return to our position north of Murmansk. We've trailed the wrong ship for a about a day and a half and must hurry back to station. Whatever we are looking for, must be important and there is concern that our objective may have left Murmansk while we were tailing the wrong ship.

We reversed course, went to about 400 feet and hummed along at about 25 knots to get back on station. Making some good time without letting everyone know we were here. At 25 knots, sonar was pretty marginal... Our own noise and the rush of water across the hull made it difficult to listen very far ahead, when the routine business of the control room is interrupted by,

"Con, Sonar... Contact bearing 075!"

The OD orders "All stop!" and asks sonar if they can identify the contact. Sonar says that they can't yet, BUT there are additional contacts bearing 015, 270, and 330... "There are a bunch of them, sir."

The OD calls the captain to the con and things swing into action. Pretty soon we got us a full blown plotting party going and the control room is full of folks. The contacts are all identified as man-o-war and they are all around us.

We work our way up to periscope depth... 250 feet, wait a bit... 100 feet, check the baffles... And we come to periscope depth to take a peak. Holy shit!! The captain is raising and lowering the scope every couple seconds observing a Rooski ship, lowering the scope again, and describing each ship that he observes! We have accidentally stumbled right into the midst of some Russian Fleet Exercise!

For 24 hours or so, we maneuver amidst the Russian fleet. Some real interesting activity and the descriptions that are being relayed from sonar to the con and the Captain/OD to the QMs, is the stuff movies are made of... And there we were, right in their midst and them Rooskies didn't know it! We were totally full of ourselves. The chatter amongst the crew was high energy... Stories were handed down from watch-to-watch as such interesting episodes continued to unfold. We are the Silent Service, we are the hunter, and damn, we are good!!

## THE WORM TURNS

Well, one must always guard against over confidence and complacency. If you are a crew with relatively little experience, this warning magnifies about 50 times! Such is the lesson to be learned for Skipjack.

Have you ever heard good 'ol US Navy types tell stories about some poor unfortunate Rooski boat that is detected by our surface ships and is literally hounded relentlessly? Dogged to the point of exhaustion, utter shame and embarrassment? Well, we must've come pretty damn close to being the Russian Navy's version of that scenario.

Into the 2nd day of moving more or less at will through the Rooski ships, everyone was getting tired. The excitement kinda faded due to fatigue (sleep loss) and the adrenaline flow had subsided. The more senior officers were catching a few winks with instructions to call if or when anything unusual came up.

A junior officer (LT or JG, not sure) had the deck/con by himself and we had the boat positioned a couple miles from the main Rooski activities. We were just tooling along at 4-5 knots (no wake from the scope) and from this distance the officer (Lets call him Mr. 'L') was making random observations through the #2 scope and the QM's were making log entries. At odd intervals he'd raise the scope...

"Up scope... Bearing *MARK!* Light cruiser 10 points to starboard... Down scope!"

"Up scope, (quick turnaround to scan the horizon)... Bearing *MARK!* High speed patrol craft... Down scope!"

"Up scope... Bearing *MARK!* I see several ships in the distance... Superstructure only... Just over the horizon... Down scope!"

"Up scope... Bearing *MARK!* Destroyer... Looks like a helicopter lifting off the stern... Down scope!"

Moments later...

"Up scope... Oh, F\*CK!!!"

" DOWN SCOPE!! FLOOD NEGATIVE!! MAKE YOUR DEPTH 400 FEET!! ALL AHEAD FULL!! SOUND BATTLE STATIONS!!"

'*CLANG, CLANG, CLANG...*'

" CAPTAIN TO THE CON!!"

Things have just turned to MAJOR SHIT! The helicopter lifting off the Rooski destroyer moments earlier had taken up position right on our periscope!! Thus began 6 hours of the most gut-wrenching, escape effort ever undertaken in peace time!

We attempted every evasive maneuver known to man... Go deep, go fast, go slow, go quiet, go quieter!! Reverse course, noise makers, F\*CK!! They were on us like stink on shit! Pounding us with practice depth charges, pinging on us with such volume that I'll never forget that sound... Just as we thought we'd gotten away, they were right back on us again! I very vividly remember the increasing gap of silence as we finally managed to escape their grip.

I sure would have liked to be a fly on the wall in the wardroom when the captain's debriefing took place. Mr. 'L' sure was rather sheepish the remainder of that patrol... Must have been a pretty major ass chewing. I have a feeling that Mr. 'L' got a remedial lesson in the benefits of *REMAINING UNDETECTED!*

Well, that sure humbled us a bit. From being 'king shit' one moment, to 'eating shit' the next. You can guess that the remainder of the patrol was rather uneventful. We were so shell-shocked that we kept our distance and you gotta know that them Rooski's knew we were in the area and just ran about PINGING the shit out of things. Well, lacking alot of confidence and bearing the scars of near-battles lost, we finally rounded the coast of Norway and started the long transit back to Norfolk with these words echoing in our muttled little brains...

**REMAIN UNDETECTED!**

If you hung with me through that without giving up or falling asleep, I'll share another Skipjack Moment with ya'll later. Radix Nova Tridentis

## **Skipjack Moments** by Steve Gentry

### **ANGLES AND DANGLES**

Since completing shakedown following our period in Charleston Shipyard (SubSafe Upgrade) we have moved to Norfolk D&S Pier 22, and have put in some hours at sea (20-30 days total). Having worked the boat through the paces (lots of drills, deep, quiet, slow, fast, and angle/dangles) the crew is becoming proficient and us new folks are getting certified at their watch stations. I'm just a boot FN who has been certified on the helm and planes and I am logging enough hours at the diving stations that I pretty well know the operational characteristics of the boat... Holding depth (especially at periscope depth so as not to broach the sail), certified as battle station planesman, making depth and course changes smoothly, and of course the ultimate... Angle/Dangles. For Skipjack, high speed and large up/down angles in conjunction with large rudder angle changes, is what the boat was designed for. We were designed to maneuver at speed, pursue the target, launch our fish, and get the hell outa Dodge!!! Here's a special story that I recall...

I was working the outboard position on the diving station. I had control of the rudder and the stern planes and my buddy had the fairwater planes on the inboard station. We sit side-by-side facing forward, the Diving Officer sits in a tall chair between us, the Ballast Control Operator (BCP) is just behind and to our left, and the Captain, Cmdr Tomb, has the Con from a slightly elevated position at the periscope stand just slightly aft and to the right. We're all close together... Takes up about an 8-foot radius.

Captain Tomb has been aboard Skipjack for several years and has worked his way from LCDR, to CDR (Captain of the boat). He is one sharp officer... Rhodes Scholar, fits a uniform well, and knows the boat from top to bottom. He projects confidence and authority and is just the kind of Captain you want to have... Well regarded by the entire crew. He'll be the HMFVIC during this memorable day!



**“Now rig ship for Angle/Dangles”, the Captain broadcast on the 1MC.**

**After giving the crew several minutes to stow what you don’t what broken, we begin to maneuver. From the Con, the Captain orders several course/depth changes as we work our way from Ahead Two-Thirds, Ahead Full, and then Ahead Flank. As we increase speed the fairwater planes have a tendency to cavitate, so I’m controlling depth and headings from my outboard station. Man, this is fun and I’m getting pretty damn good at rolling out precisely on the new course and holding bubble/depth assignments as instructed. I’ve got my seatbelt pulled snug and sitting low in the chair to keep myself braced in nice and tight. When we do the big angles everyone has to hold on for dear life... It’s like an ‘E’ Ticket ride at Disneyland!**

**I’ve learned that the boat has a rather unique characteristic when doing big rudder angle changes... Because of the torque of the screw and the slightly off-set rudder/stern planes, the boat behaves differently when turning left, or right. At a Full/Flank bell, when applying right full rudder, the boat will tend to raise its nose up and you must keep applying a little bit of ‘down’ on the stern planes to keep the nose down... Just a little! BUT, with left full rudder, the nose will raise very slightly and will then fall off into a nose down position... A delay of a couple seconds before you need to put some rise on the stern planes to keep the nose up. Got it? Right turn... Use a little ‘down’, and left turn... Wait a couple seconds, then use a little ‘up’.**

**Enter the new Diving Officer trainee...**

**We’ve done a series of depth/course changes and all has gone well... The Captain has called the orders, the Diving Officer (sitting between the planesmen) has relayed instructions to us and insured they are complied with. The Captain now instructs the new officer, LCDR W., to take the Diving Officer position for training purposes. This is Mr. W’s first opportunity to train as Diving Officer, but he is projecting confidence as he assumes the position.**

**The Captain calls several instructions, which are promptly responded to by Mr. W. and we begin to increase speed and depth/rudder angles. The boat begins to bank into the turns and she begins to perform like the sport model that she is! We ultimately are cranking along at a flank bell and make several depth changes... Then, a little rudder angle is added. We are starting to rock and roll as the Captain calls for Right Full Rudder!**

**“Right Full Rudder, aye.”, responds Mr. W.**

**I crank in the rudder, report the rudder right full, Mr. W. relays this back to the Captain...**

**“Very Well”, the Captain responds.**

The boat begins to bank to the right and the nose begins to rise a bit... I bump the nose back down with some dive input on the controls. We hold assigned depth pretty well (within 20-30 feet) and roll out on the new assigned course. Everyone is happy! The Captain then orders Left Full Rudder...

“Left full rudder, aye.”, responds Mr. W.

I crank in the left full order and report to Mr. W. that the rudder is left full... He relays that to the Captain.

Within a second or two, the nose begins to rise, as it always does, with left full rudder and Mr. W. tells me to watch my bubble... It's getting nose high. I start to tell Mr. W. that it'll drop off into a nose down posture in just a second, BUT Mr. W. wasn't listening! He said,

“I told you to take that bubble off!”

And he reaches past me and pushes the controls forward. He pushes the controls forward at the same instant that the boat started its own nose-down attitude. The flank speed, hard left rudder, and Mr. W's pushing the nose over placed us into the most radical dive and turn that we'd ever been on!!!

The boat cranks in a huge bank to the left and a steep down angle... I'm holding the controls pulled back against my chest (maximum 'up' input), got the rudder cranked in left full, and I'm falling out of the seat because my seatbelt has come loose. A 'hush' has fallen over the control room as the boat does a 40+ degree port roll and 40+ degree down angle and we are out of control... Doing max speed in a big giant spiral!

The depth gauge is chattering off depths so fast (click-click-click-click) that I only make out every 50-100 feet. I am scared to death and I'm holding the rudder left full and full rise on the planes and we are diving FAST. Suddenly, the Captain's cool voice says,

“Rudder Amidships...”

Mr. W. relays the instructions, and I comply. The boat immediately rolls out level, I've still got full 'up' in the stern planes and we start UP! I release the full up on the stern planes and the Captain says make your depth 100'. Mr. W. relays the assigned depth and I acknowledge.

I'm watching the depth gauge and I keep bumping some of the 'up angle' off the boat as we continue our climb back to 100'... We are going so fast!!! At some point, I realize that I need to apply lots of dive to level off at 100' and I apply 20-30 degrees 'down', then full 'down' on the stern planes to try to level off. Hell, we are going so fast that we fly right on past 100' and pop clear out of the water... We then plunge

back into the water and dive uncontrolled back down to 300' while I am applying full 'rise' on the stern planes!! Finally the boat is back under control and we slow to Ahead 1/3.

Everyone is totally in shock... We have just been through the most hellish ride you've ever seen. I swear that while we were doing that death spiral, I would have sat right there, frozen in position, had it not been for the Captain's calm instructions to bring the 'rudder amidships'. It took us all 10-15 minutes to get our heart rates returned to normal, relax a bit, and think of the mess in our skivvies.

I recall overhearing the Captain exclaim, "Mr. W., let that be a lesson to you... The planesmen know how this boat handles... Just relay my instructions!" "Aye, sir", responds Mr. W. Skipjack was a real motor scooter!

## **Another Skipjack Moment** by Steve Gentry

### **INBOUND TO FORT LAUDERDALE**

These fancy nuke boats sure pull some piss-poor liberty ports. I don't know if the locals are afraid of getting zapped, or when you use the word 'nuclear', images of mushroom clouds fill their heads, or something! Whatever... You just gotta know that whenever we were scheduled for liberty in Ft. Lauderdale, it was 'Party Hearty Time' and anticipation was high. So, lets pick up this story about an hour and a half east of Ft. Lauderdale...

We're running on the surface... Have been for an hour or so. We don't spend much time on the surface and its a beautiful day in south Florida waters. We've got the safety lines rigged on the fairwater planes, and everyone sorta rotates from below decks to topside to get some fresh air and see the coast line in the distance.

We've got some Admiral onboard... One of them SUBRON SIX heavyweight guys... Really a nice fellow who was friendly with everyone throughout the cruise.

The radar is turning and we're picking up costal traffic in the shipping lanes as the quartermaster takes a couple fixes on the #2 scope and cuts us a line direct to the mouth of Port Everglades. Up ahead of us a few miles are a young couple in a private fishing boat with lovin' on their minds. Unbeknownst to them, they are about to have one of them once-in-a-life-time thrills... Me, and about 8 other sailors standing on the starboard fairwater plane are about to laugh our asses off.

We're working inbound on the extreme right side of the channel... Pretty close to the channel markers (ummm, red on right- returning!?) that pass a couple 100' off to starboard. Quite a distance ahead, there are occasional private boats puttin' around or tied to a marker doing some fishing. One such boat was just a speck in the distance when we first noticed it. As we continued inbound, that small boat became

more and more visible... There didn't seem to be anyone in the boat!! That's strange... We could see folks fishing, or drinking beer, or whatever, on the other boats, but nobody is in view on THIS boat!

We are hugging the right side of the channel, doing about 12-15 knots, super quiet, and I'd guess we're 50'-100' from the marker as we approach this fishing boat. It's a 22', open cockpit number, rocking back and forth with the swells. Nobody is in it! We will pass right next to this fishing boat, about 30-40 feet off to starboard and from the fairwater plane you can look right down inside this small boat.

We'll, I'll be damned!! Just as we pass abeam the fishing boat, looking right down in it, we see some naked bodies scramble to cover up and their eyes are full of disbelief! We'd caught them in a slightly compromising position... All of us let out some whoops and hollers!! It was so funny! The look in their eyes as this submarine quietly cruises by... All us horny sailors doing cat calls!!

I'm sure that those two are still telling that story to this day! And, as usual Ft. Lauderdale was very very good to Skipjack!

## **Skipjack Moment, Type II, Mod 3** by Steve Gentry

### **FLEETEX**



Though my mind is a little fuzzy on the dates, it seems it was in later '67 or early '68 when we had the big FleetEx on the East Coast. Hell, seems that everything that could float was ordered out of port to participate in this one.

Skipjack was assigned the roll of the bad guy... Let the fleet leave Norfolk, give 'em a few days to get lost in the big ocean, and then head southeast to see if we can score a hit on the carrier America's battlegroup (see picture). We sat there in Norfolk... Shit, we must have been the only boat left in port! Bell's bar was like a ghost town and Thelma just wouldn't keep her hands off me!! It's tough to be left at home when the fleet is out!

Several days pass, and finally its time for us to get underway. We cast off and head out of the Chesapeake Bay looking for blue water... We've got some catching up to do so we put it in overdrive and go deep.

A few days later, we stumble across some walking wounded surface ships... They must've had some mechanical problems and were bringing up the rear... Probably awaiting approval to RTB (return to base) Norfolk. We brushed them aside and continued our search for the Big Kahuna... Somewhere out there is some major tonnage with our name on it. This was real science... Lots of dice shakin' and lady luck gamesmanship in order to actually rack up a victory (a kill). The rules were plainly spelled out in the FleetEx brochure.

A few days later, we came upon a target of opportunity... Some big Oiler. Hell, we quickly disposed of her with a simulated torpedo launch, broadcast on Gertrude, fired our flares, and rolled the dice. Bingo... We sunk that mother! Now, off for bigger game! We had a succession of contacts and kills... An occasional unlucky roll of the dice and the target escaped... BUT, we were doing remarkably well and confidence is high!

We finally make contact with the battle group... America is our #1 objective and a strategy is developed to get us inside the screen of destroyers and cruisers which protect her. We patiently await our opportunity.

We are at Battle Stations and we are plotting all the ships in the group. We quietly penetrate the outer screen of ships and are now inside of her defenses... We maneuver into position and simulate the launch of torpedos! We broadcast on Gertrude and fire our flares! One roll of the dice and she is ours!! We await the result of their roll of the dice.... .... America confirms the kill! Yes!!! We have done it!!! The next day, the Admirals Barge comes alongside and our Captain is invited to attend lunch and a debrief on America, with the Admiral. We are HOT!!! Damn, we are GOOD! Just another day in the life of a Skipjack sailor.

**Custom Built by ORION (AS-18)** by Steve Gentry

#### FORWARD

One's memory begins to fail after all these years. It seemed like I'd vividly recall the dates and times forever, but I should have written this down many years ago. I want

to be accurate, because this is important in Skipjack's history. As I first began to write a little 'sea story' about our adventure off Murmansk back in '68, I found myself struck by the significance of this event, and also by what little I really knew about it. I decided to contact a few shipmates who I knew would have some interesting insights. There assuredly are others, who would contribute, but I couldn't find them, they didn't respond, or I didn't ask. I don't mean to slight anyone.

I don't pretend that the situations captured herein are totally accurate; They are only an accumulation of some real time experiences, captured in the fuzzy context of normal 'human frailties', without benefit of the transcripts of the investigative hearings that followed this event, and many years have passed. What I'm saying is- I made an effort to be reasonably accurate. No more, no less.

One other point- Fast Attack boats had a special utility when conducting 'information gathering'. It was not uncommon for SSN's to get real close to USSR ships/subs and Naval Bases. Occasionally, it is rumored, the SSN's may have even violated Territorial Waters of other Nations. Now, I'm not saying that Skipjack ever (EVER) ventured into such waters~ but, ya never know!

We were on station, some miles east of Kilden Island. It was winter in the North Atlantic, 1st couple weeks of November crawled by as we continued our repetitious movement north of the mouth of the river entrance into Murmansk Naval Base. Usually at periscope depth, nothing much to see, the boat is rigged for red, and the seas churned as storms came and went, and what little daylight existed was in hues of gray. Occasionally some Saint Elmo's fire to view on the masts.... that was the extent of 'periscope liberty'. Every few days the storms got bad enough that we'd descend to 300'-400' to ride them out, rolling port to starboard, ice forming in the torpedo room and in the bilges, return to periscope depth and do it some more. A sonar contact would peak our interest from time-to-time, and we'd maneuver to investigate but not much is going on.

This tedium grated on the majority of the crew, same ol' shit day after day. Just to keep us on our toes, field day was scheduled often and we conducted drills just for the sake of doing something. We'd have preferred to crawl in our rack and wish this patrol were over. This was the bleakest I'd seen things... We had a good crew and the officers tried their level best to keep the boat moving in a positive direction, but it wasn't happening. Boring, except for those who really knew what we were doing. It's remarkable that so few of us, coexisting on this small boat, actually had knowledge of what our operational objectives were. Most of us just did our jobs, watch on/watch off. I wish I had known more, because I would have appreciated the accomplishments and shortcomings so much more!

On this patrol, I was stuck with alternating watches in the CO2 Scrubber Room. A tiny space with a couple of machines which scrubbed crap out of the air so we could breathe, barely enough room to sit, although I did find a way to lay horizontal and catch a few winks but it was a noisy dungeon of an existence. The scrubbers,

oxygen bleeds, and lithium hydroxide candles, were the ingredients necessary to keep us submerged. We did not use the diesel to ventilate once we arrived on station, for fear of being detected.

When off watch I'd usually play cards, watch a movie, eat/sleep, drop by the control room/sonar shack to see what was happening, drop into the torpedo room where there was usually someone hanging out. I'd help someone who was doing ships quals, and if really bored I'd do a tour aft to see what was going on with the guys at the Reactor Plant Control Panel. (Note: do you guys remember the unique smell as you open the tunnel hatch through the reactor compartment? Weird!) Just let the next 30 days go by as quickly as possible because I really don't want to be here! We're working 6 on/ 12 off, I got relieved in the scrubber room and after moving around the boat for some exercise, and a change of scenery, I reposed to my rack to reread some crotch novel and see if I could sleep away another day.

### WHAT THE HELL?

I was startled awake by the boat lurching heavily to port, which rolled me out of my rack, a heavy jolt and shudder, and a terrible crunching sound of crumpling steal, and the Collision alarm was screaming. In a couple steps I had reached the ladder that leads from crews berthing to mid-level Ops. Compartment. I met a couple other wide-eyed mates right by the gyro at the foot of the ladder (by the Goat Locker). We just silently looked at each other, mouths agape, listened to the noises, felt some real fear, and tried to comprehend what was going on. I expected to see water flooding into the boat and my 1st reaction was to pull some mattresses off of the bunks to cover the battery access hatch. I'm not sure why. Within seconds, it became evident that we weren't flooding, there was, however, water coming down the periscope wells. I immediately moved up the ladder into the galley area and saw the torpedo room hatch was dogged so I rushed up the ladder into the control room to see what had happened.

Flooding (more like a leak) was now controlled after pumping some grease into the packing glands around the masts, and there was water on the deck around the periscope stand, the diving stand, and the 400-cycle switchboard. We flooded negative tank in an effort to put some distance between us and whatever we had just hit, simultaneously descending to 250 feet and started making greater headway. As our speed built up we turned toward the north to get the hell out of there. A banging sound was intermittently heard from our sail area. Apparently the #2 scope was bent over and was clanking against the sail, which made quite a bit of noise. There was concern that the packing glands would leak more than they currently were. Our forward speed was limited because of this clanking noise, and we haven't been able to assess the extent of our damages, but we were still breathing. That was a possitive sign! What the hell had happened?

**SONAR DESIGNATES CONTACT - 'MASTER 125'**

For several hours prior to the collision, Sonar had been monitoring some contacts moving in our area. These contacts were a mix of small Russian civilian ships: i.e., coastal merchantmen, tankers, etc. navigating the shipping lanes in and out of Murmansk. Sonar would give each contact a unique identifier, a 'designation', for their tracking and analysis purposes. One of the contacts, a large tanker, had been tagged 'Master 125'. As we maneuvered around these various contacts 'Master 125' would come to our attention, as we would cross courses, or be on a converging course, with this tanker several times.

It was time for the change of watch in the control room, 0400! The planesmen complete their musical chairs choreography and settle in, while the BCP and Diving Officer assume their responsibilities. The change of watch for the Officer of the Deck (the Deck and Con positions were combined) was more complex and the oncoming officer was getting a briefing concerning the various contacts that we were tracking. As the change of watch briefing was completed the oncoming OD wanted to do a visual check (periscope) to reinforce his mental picture of just what we had going on up above. So, shortly after accepting the Deck/Con we began an ascent to periscope depth for a look around.

As the OD orders us to climb from 250 feet to 120 feet sonar notices that 'Master 125' is once again a factor and advises the Con that the tanker's course is closing on our track. The OD acknowledges this information and a few minutes later the OD orders us to periscope depth (58 feet). Sonar again notifies the Con that 'Master 125' is close and converging. As we proceed to the assigned depth the tanker runs right over the top of us. The big screw of 'Master 125' augers across our sail and destroys, or renders useless, all of our masts. No periscopes, radio antennae, no ECM, no radar, no snorkel, no nada! Zip Zilch!

### WE HIDE OUT FOR A COUPLE DAYS

Our escape from the shipping channel takes us north where we try to become very small in a very big ocean. During the next 48 hours we'll hear Rooski war ships searching for us with their sonar's pinging as they methodically scour the area. We must just sit still for a while and try to disappear. If we headed for open water around Norway that is probably where them Rooski's would be looking for us. Although we can't appraise the extent of our damages until we can surface, we know we are dragging a broken periscope that makes a loud racket. We need to chill for a little while!

### TIME TO MAKE OUR BREAK

We move as stealthily as possible and as we approach the SOSUS hydrophones off Norway's northern area we make the prescribed shaft RPM's to allow the folks back home to identify us using the fingerprint system. Hopefully they'll know we are outbound before our scheduled return date. The periscope banging against the sail should have added a little intrigue as they were noticing some changes to our



signature sounds. We round Norway's land mass and reach open north Atlantic waters. Finally, as sea conditions permit, we are able to surface at night to take our first look at the damages. The top of the sail looks like someone took one of those old can-openers to it, jagged metal, and the #2 periscope is bent over to the port side of the sail at about a 110-120 degree angle. We use the cutting torch to clean up as much as possible and then once again submerge for a few days. We had no radios; except for a small UHF with limited range, so there was no communications. We'd need to wait for a while before we could contact anyone. Eventually we do establish communications on the UHF and after considering a hasty trip to Faslane, Scotland for repairs, we are ordered back to Norfolk.

A plan is developed that utilizes black rubber deck pads to drape over the sail to obscure our damage and we proceed back home on the surface. We camouflaged the crumpled sail pretty darn well and it would be doubtful that any observer would notice the damages from a distance. We are given a very slow speed of advancement (SOA) for our transit back to Norfolk but this allowed us the opportunity to rig the safety lines on sail planes and get some fresh air.

One mid-morning (about half way home) it is gray and a thin fog is obscuring our vision as we putt along at 10-12 knots. Suddenly, through the fog a strange shape begins to materialize... There are several large yachts that are part of some TransAtlantic race from England to Bermuda. It was such a surreal circumstance to emerge from our adventures off Murmansk to find ourselves in the midst of a sailboat race. If we could have only told the crewmembers of those sailboats what we had just been through! HmMMM.

#### ARRIVAL AT D & S PIERS

As we arrive along side the tender, Orion (AS-18), they quickly cover the entire sail with an enclosure (tarps) and the crew of Orion rebuilt the entire crumpled superstructure and replaced all the broken masts/periscopes. As they (Orion) were completing the job they placed a small plaque (about 3" X 5", up in the clamshell area where all might notice) that read 'Custom Built by Orion'. I hope this story, and that plaque lived on with the boat and every crew member which rode her, knew what had happened and appreciates it!

#### CLOSING THIS TALE

There was a Navy Board of Inquiry that was convened to review all the facts concerning this mishap, as there are for all similar occurrences. Unfortunately, when these things occur officer's careers can be damaged. I'm sure that that occurred due to this unfortunate situation. I was just a boot sailor, 3-points lower than whale shit, but I remember and treasure all my experiences with the ships' company on Skipjack and I regarded everyone as pretty damn special people.

**Still another 'DBF'er has two tales to add to the 'collection' here. Dave Eberhart was an ST1(SS) who served on a number of 'smokeboats' including BLENNY, CORPORAL, WAHOO, and TIGRONE.**

## **Visiting Ship** by Dave Eberhart

Delby was a Torpedoman. I know that should be enough said, but Delby was a Topedoman extraordinaire. He loved his forward room and took great pride in showing it off to tourists. Whenever we got stuck with visiting ship, and Delby had the duty, he would deliver the tour the entire day.

He had a system: First he would station himself at the forward 'crotch-watch' post as the guests were loaded aboard, making sure that each female guest was given a hand to steady her feet on the ladder. I won't bother to mention that he frequently got some very disturbing looks from the male companions of the female guests... Something to do with the position of his face and hands as he helped them aboard. Next he would slowly circle the room explaining various components of interest. He had a way of making the most ordinary piece of equipment, such as a signal ejector, seem like a delicate, hi-tech piece of precision machinery. His crowning moment however, was his description of tube-loading a weapon. He turned a simple evolution into an erotic tale. He would stand by the nose of a MK-14 as he would tell of the wondrous explosive power this weapon held. He would gently caress the warhead and begin to tell how the men would carefully grease - and this is where the subtle change of the word 'torpedo' became 'shaft' - the entire length of the shaft. Making sure that all areas were covered in grease to protect the shaft from moisture and help it in its penetration of the dark, moist tunnel. At this point, he would open the inner door as he explained that it must be wide open so the shaft could enter correctly. He would then describe how the men carefully inserted the tip to make sure that it was properly aligned before they rammed it home and locked it in place.

By the time he finished this tale, every woman in the group had both hands firmly gripped on their companion's arm and were casting longing looks at the honeymoon suite below the loading hatch. The COB once made the comment that Delby should give his talk in the after room so the ladies could get the men off the boat while the iron was still hot. Delby had talent.

One warm summer evening, a day or two after we loaded 4 or 5 middies aboard, the 1MC blared out,

"Now rig ship for lady visitors..." and just a brief second later in an almost whisper we hear the word 'skirts'. It seems that one of the midshipman had found his way to Conn College and rounded himself up a couple of heifers. Being a lot cheaper to impress them with his very own big, black submarine than by buying them a drink, he made that choice and brought them aboard.

**Delby had the duty. On that particular evening, a room watch was assigned to the forward room for reasons most of you are aware of. Delby dived below the deck plates with the life jackets, chain falls and other paraphernalia that belongs in a torpedo room, wiggling his way around in preparation to gluing an eyeball to the finger holes in the deck plates. The room watch quickly took the position of 'crotch-watch' and helped the ladies down. Our young middie began describing the room in bullshit terms that even impressed Delby just below. He pointed to a MK-14 and told how that 10,000-pound weapon could wipe out an entire convoy and the smaller ones (MK-37) were used when 'his submarine' had only a single target to attack.**

**(I think he never graduated from the academy, but became an advisor for hire on submarine movies... That would explain a lot of the bad movies, now that I think about it).**

**You could hear Delby rustling around just below as the middie strolled about the room, with girls in tow, giving his outrageous explanations. Suddenly, without warning, he reached down by one of the girl's feet, jabbed his fingers through the finger holes and proceeded to lift the deck plate as he stated, "And under here we have..."**

**And there was Delby's grinning face, having just barely avoided being blinded by two fingers. There was a pause and a startled look on the middies face, but he recovered quickly and slammed the plate down with a loud, "...a sailor working." He grabbed the girls and literally drug them through the hatch into the Forward Battery.**

**As he breezed through the compartment, he mentioned something about berthing quarters and the wardroom, but it wasn't much. He continued on through the Control Room which he called the 'combat-info-center' and pointing to the belowdecks watch with a reference to a 'sailor on alert', charged into the After Battery - right into the arms of about eight of your finest, deep-water gentlemen.**

**Completely rattled, he mumbled something about a gathering place and everything else on the submarine was a security area so they had to leave the boat here, meaning the After Battery hatch. A bit flustered by such an audience, he wasn't entirely sure of how to exit gracefully. Leroy solved his problem. He stood up and placed himself by the ladder and suggested to the middie that he go topside and assist the ladies as they came up. No other way out of this, he agreed, knowing full well he had just placed the rat in charge of the cheese.**

**Up he went and Leroy helped the less comely of the two up the ladder like any gentlemen would. Putting forth his best imitation of a soft southern drawl, he offered to take the other one's hand and help her get started. She said something about this ship smelled so 'manly' as she started to climb. With Leroy's hand on her leg and his head practically half way up her skirt, she actually looked down and said,**

"My number is --- ----" and continued her exit. The final score for the evening... The room watch got an eyefull, Delby was almost blinded, Leroy got a phone number and the rest of crew got a new story to tell. Sleep well America... All is normal on the river.

## **A Journey of Yesterdays** by Dave Eberhart

The old man leaned back in his chair and stared at the wall looking at, but not really seeing, the photos of the boats that had been his home in his youth. Unfamiliar emotions raged through his mind. He'd just watched his son pack a marine corps regulation 70 lb studio apartment suite (God only knows why they call it a pack) into the back of his car and head for the base. Four in the morning - the military always swings into action while the rest of the world slumbers on in peaceful dreams - times have not changed.

The hardest thing he'd ever done - watching his son go off to war. Be proud. Don't show fear - only his wife is allowed to shed tears. Proud - obviously, worried - absolutely. It is one thing to be young, dumb and bullet proof when you are young, but quite another when it's your son's turn. What an amazing young man his son had become. Always looking for the toughest nut to crack, the highest mountain to climb and the biggest obstacle to overcome and a thirst for knowledge that seemed unquenchable. He'd excelled in sports and gotten straight 'As' all the way through graduate school. He'd joined the Corps while in graduate school. He'd wanted something to do with his summers. Gah dammit - why couldn't he have just played baseball all summer.

Without realizing it, he caught himself staring at a photo of his first boat. It suddenly occurred to him that he needed to see and feel a real one. He poured a thermos of coffee, kissed his wife goodbye (not a good time to leave but something he had to do) and hit the highway.

He arrived at the museum and paid his fare, went out to the pier and gazed at the beautiful old girl as he waited the 30 minutes for the next tour start. In his mind he watched the fuel gang taking on diesel and the working party loading stores. She was getting ready for her next great adventure.

He gradually became aware of others gathering near him and he moved away as he waited. He wanted the boat and it's ghostly crew to himself and his memories.

The tour guide came out, formed up the group and started the herd headed on deck. He waited to be last.

What's this? A stairway going down into the forward room? It makes sense, but he had been looking forward to climbing down the ladder through the escape trunk one more time. After a disappointing arrival in the forward room via the stairway, he moved to the after end of the room as the guide discussed the fwd tubes. He looked

around at the array of valves, switches and gear and realized that he still remembered what each and every one of them did. He also saw all of the gear that was missing. He glanced at the skids and watched the torpedoemen muscling the 4000 lb 'skimmer killers' around the room. Shoving them out and in the tubes for maintenance and hanging the brass 'TUBE LOADED' sign on the door. He glanced at one of the few remaining bunks and thought about the times he had casually sat on one with a .45 tucked under the pillow, guarding a tube-loaded Mk 45 while the boat suffered through another day of visiting ship. He looked up at the overhead where the top of the ladder should have been and remembered the lucky torpedoemen that were assigned the fwd ladder watch during visiting ship. Their sole purpose being to assist any shapely young ladies with thigh length skirts, making sure no well-turned ankle missed a ladder rung and both feet landed firmly on the deck plates. Yeah right. He remembered the Northern Runs with the sterilized milk cans frozen in the bilges. Only the room watch occupied the room and he was wrapped in a goose down comforter with fog coming from each breath. He remembered his first dive as a student. He'd been assigned the Fwd Room where he and five other young kids were told to "Sit on those life jackets and don't move." With the sound of the diving alarm came the hydraulic whirring of the bow planes rigging out. Quickly followed by the clunk of the vents opening and the gurgling of water into the tanks as the boat nosed. He was in love. This was it. This is definitely what he wanted to do.

He followed the group through the hatch into the Fwd Battery. It was a little humorous seeing how many different positions these people could take to get through a simple hatch. Past the Goat Locker, wardroom, staterooms, radio and the yeoman's shack. Not many memories here except the time the steward filled the Captain's vinegar curette from a special bottle of vinegar the cook kept in the galley. The Captain was a little surprised at the not unfamiliar flavor of his new salad dressing - bourbon. The cook got the word mo-scosch and emptied the bottle before the skipper arrived at the galley to inquire as to source of this not unpleasant taste. Naturally said mass manipulator of 5-way beef denied any knowledge of its origin. The skipper just chuckled and turned away - he'd accomplished his mission.

He followed a pair of stretch pants that lived up to their name and whose tinsel strength was being severely tested. "WIDE LOAD should be stenciled on that bulletin board," he muttered to himself and followed it into the Control room.

Here were shadows. In his mind he heard the diving alarm and the room came alive. Vents were pulled, masts were lowered and negative was flooded. The board turned green as the upper conning tower hatch slammed shut and main induction closed. The lookouts dropped down from the bridge and took their stations - manning the stern planes and rigging out the bow planes. To his dying day, he will swear he heard the cook yell "Main Induction shut and locked," from the After Battery. The whole process of taking a ship underwater went smoothly and perfectly as his boats had done hundreds of times That's not to say nothing ever happened. He remembered the time Main Induction failed to close as she slid under. Everything

but the Mess Cook was blown. The boat had shuddered and shook as she fought to regain the surface. A successful surface was quickly followed by the usual rounds of morbid humor to relieve the tension. We didn't pull any more high-speed crash dives after that. As a Guppy III, she had simply outgrown being that nimble.

And then there was the time a Nuke ET was assigned to the boat to get qualified before being transferred to a Nuke. Apparently, the Navy, in all its infinite wisdom, figured that it was cheaper to lose a Diesel than a Nuke if they screwed something up. The Nuke did. He couldn't remember just what occurred, but the Nuke was on the stern planes as the boat approached test depth. Something happened and the Nuke panicked and jammed the stern planes into full dive. The down angle was instantaneous and severe - so severe that no one was left standing. Everybody and everything surfed forward. A quick-thinking radioman clambered out of his shack in the after end of control and hand over hand, made his way to the HP manifold where he hammered bow buoyancy blow open which took the angle off and allowed the crew to regain control. The inclinometers had to be unscrewed and the bubble tipped out of the riser. He couldn't remember if the Nuke ever qualified but he remembered the new nickname 'Bubbles'. 87 guys figured the radioman should have gotten a medal. He didn't - quick thinking and swift action are simply expected and received from the men in the Submarine Force.

He looked at the Control room table and thought about how he learned to spin a tack on it and the cockroach races in the clear plastic cube designed to be a maze for a marble. Someone took a piece of scotch tape, put peanut butter on it and stuck it to the bottom hole of the cube. He then dropped a roach, probably a bunkmate, in the top and watched the roach find his way to the peanut butter. Next, of course, came the quarter gaskets stopwatch and cockroach racing became a sport. Everybody acquired a stable of thoroughbred racers and TA-DA Downs came into being. He remembered the waterways being stuffed with cans of food and then the deck covered with boxes of canned goods to walk on. All those extra food stores came in handy on those long, cold Northern Runs.

About this time, unbeknownst to him, the guide had been watching him and came over to where he stood. He wanted to know if he had served on a submarine. He answered affirmatively. He was asked if he would like to guide the tour. He declined. The guide was apparently a very astute young man and suggested he take his time as there wasn't another tour for an hour. God Bless that young man. The group went to the After Battery and he stayed behind.

The sign on the lower Conning tower hatch said 'CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC'. So what - nobody's around. He climbed up and looked around. There wasn't much to see. The chart table was there but the TDC and radar were gone. The helm was there. How many hours had he spent driving a 321 ft tube through the ocean with nothing but a revolving dial to guide him. He turned, sighed and dropped below.

By now, the After Battery was vacant. He sat down at a mess table and looked around. Yep, there is port and there is starboard Safety Flood Valves. He looked at the deep sink and remembered the messcook from Texas that claimed to be a quick draw artist. He claimed to have one notch in his gun from quick drawing against a tree and shot himself in the foot. Oh yeah, how about the new kid on board that was mess cooking during an ORI? An inspector placed a piece of paper on one of the tables that had the word FIRE written on it in big letters. The mess cook was supposed to see the paper and yell, "FIRE IN THE AFTER BATTERY!". The inspector returned to the Control Room to wait for the alarm and observe the crew's swift action. When this did not occur, he went back to the After Battery to see if the mess cook might be blind. Instead, what he found was another sheet of paper on top of his with bigger letters spelling WATER. The Inspector was hopping mad and the young man instantly became a member of the crew. So much for taking drills too seriously. Real fire and flooding happened all too frequently. Just a part of life on the old boats.

He remembered the Engineman that had eaten twenty-seven lobster tails and claws in one sitting. He thought about the surprise the cooks got upon lowering the AB doubler hatch after a Northern Run and finding a bag of rotten potatoes. We were tempted to taste it to see if it could possibly be Vodka. Fortunately, common sense overcame that idea and it went, un-tasted, over the side for the fish. He thought about nights of celebration upon their return from another successful mission. He could still feel in his mind the sore shins from the combination of clambor, slide, fall and trip his way down the After Battery ladder, landing with a solid thunk on his ass on the deck plate - a deep sigh of glad to be home and staggering off to his bunk for a good solid two-hour nap before the day started again. Oh yes, what about movie marathons in the AB for the weekend duty section prior to getting underway? All the single-johns stood that duty. He would sleep the first three days at sea with no concern about a missed movie.

He thought about meals at sea in rough weather on the surface. Whatever possessed the Navy to buy round bottom metal pitchers for ships? He'd always thought he'd like to meet that idiot some day. Now he didn't care. It was just a memory.

He heard noises in the Control Room and glanced at his watch. His hour of yesterdays was gone. It was time to leave the boat and return another day for the rest. Too many memories for one trip. He looked forward to returning soon. But for now, it was time to return home and comfort his wife. Humor would not relieve her tension like it had for him and his shipmates in yesterdays.

The drive home took an eternity. Too much time available for emotions to return. He knew exactly how his wife felt. He too felt the fear but he would refuse to show it. He had to.

One thought kept coming back - The Boats will never leave you and the memories of adventures will always live.

The old man was never much for praying - he'd never felt the need. What more could he possibly want but the love of the woman he had married and the son he'd watch grow, much too quickly, into manhood? Yes, he was blessed. Yet silently he muttered these words. Lord, I have but one request: "May my son live to have such memories as have I - Amen."

**Another smokeboater snipe shares thoughts from his SIRAGO days. Welcome Joe Roche, who is a 'little' diesel boat-qualified engineman with a 'big' heart, who joins the reprobates here in the After Battery!**

## **God is an Engineman** by Joe Roche

I'll never forget the first time God spoke to me. It was a Friday afternoon, and I had the duty. I don't remember how long I was aboard at the time but I was standing topside by myself, port side of the sail when God walked up to me and said, "RoSHAY..."

Now let me explain something. That is not how my name is pronounced. God is omnipotent, omniscient and all those other big 'O' words, but he couldn't pronounce my last name. It's Roche, plain and simple. God asked me what was I striking for. I said I didn't know what was available to me. Since I was only a seaman, with no 'A' school behind me, how would I go about getting a trade? He asked me, "Would you like to work in the enginerooms?"

I immediately jumped at the chance and said, "Yeh, but I'm a seaman not a fireman." He said, "Do you know where the forward engineroom is?" I replied, right aft of the after battery head. He replied, "You're a fireman now and I want to see red stripes on your uniform Monday morning." He smiled that little smile he had, the kind of smile that you realized only he got the joke. That's how I became an engineman.

God was a quiet unassuming individual. He was rarely loud, quietly profane when needed and spoke very softly. Soft enough, where I had to lean in towards him to hear. However, he had a soft semi-drawl that was hard to pinpoint exactly where he was from. He never spoke of his past, or his family, including his sub service during WW II. One of his major assets in dealing with the wardroom whenever he was asked a question, was he would quietly mumble a response to the gentleman from the forward battery. His mumble was unintelligible to everyone in earshot. Said officer would gravely nod his head in agreement and walk away, wondering what in the hell did God say. Needless to say, no officer ever got in between him and his beloved enginerooms and his men.



As far as I know, in the 2 1/2 years I served with him he was fair to everyone, even sonarmen and quartermasters. But if he got pissed at you, you paid the price. He caught one ET taking a shower at sea and running the water as he whistled a merry tune. His tune changed when God told him he was standing the first still watch. He counseled lowlife firemen like myself and the other occupants of the goat locker, but only when asked. He never offered his opinion first. During full dress inspections with medals, he wore what had to be the minimum, but what stood out was his War Patrol pin.

During one of our ORI trips to Gitmo, we had been at the war game stuff for about 6-8 days, seemed like 8 months. You remember them... 24 hours on, nothing off. Summertime, water injection temps in the 80's, Hot as hell in every compartment. Submerged for about 20 hours. The last two of which, we rigged for silent running. No AC, no refrigeration, no lights except emergency lighting. I was sitting in the mess hall on some damage control party waiting to spring into action. There I was, bitching loud enough for everyone to hear. About the smelly, rotten conditions we lived in. Sweat all over the place, even in the sonarshack. The fetid air, what there was of it was too thin to light a cigarette. The icebox was melting and the water was sloshing around the after battery. Miserable conditions. God was also in the the mess hall and he said loud enough for everyone to hear, ."RoSHAY, stop your gahdam bitching... You're acting like you're the only one going through this."

He was right of course. When I made the round of the brigs, he would welcome me back with that little smile of his and ask me if I was gonna stick around for a while this time. The worse thing he ever said to me after one of my many fuckups, was, "I'm disappointed in you Roshay."

That hurt and I always vowed to try to get back in his good graces. Which I think I did. He wasn't the type that would hold a grudge. I don't think he was on board when I made EN3. But I know he would have smiled that little smile and say, " I knew you could do it, RoShay."

God left *SIRAGO* quietly one day without ever saying goodbye. He was going on to civilian life. God used to love to drink scotch and milk. Rumor had it, he had a bad stomach... whatever that meant. He moved to one of the Carolinas', stayed in touch with our COB, who passed on to me (much later) that God was very sick and not doing to well. No one knows when Pappy Settle died, or what he died of. All I know is that Pappy was a God and a Chief Engineman. He made it feel great to be an Engineman too. That's how I remember him.

## **My Very First Time** by Joe Roche

That's not what I meant, you bunch of reprobates. I remember when I got rated. Here I was, an FN(SS) one day, oiling in the engine rooms and all of a sudden I'm a throttleman. I don't know how soon after I made rate that I throttled my first watch,

but it was a watch I'll never forget. I was a boot throttleman with a boot oiler. But what the hell, that's what being a sub sailor is all about. You accept the responsibilities you're given. Just like the game hide and seek we played as kids...."Ready or not, here I come."

I was standing watch in the fwd. engine room, which was the designated running room at the time. Now all that means is, when the word is passed to "Prepare to surface one/two main engines," the designated running room lites off their engines.

Well, here we are, submerged and making fresh water. Simple, quiet and hot. No problem! My slave is sitting in front of the Badgers, while I sit in the fairly cool hatch leading into the aft engine room hatch conversing with the other two fellow snipes when word is passed, "Prepare to snorkle." As we jump into action I'm thinking ahead about how snorkling wrecks havoc with the stills, and how I'm gonna have to keep an eye on them.

Anyway, we lite off #1&2, get them on line and the water is still good. At one point Control calls back to commence an aircharge. We lite off the Hardy Tynes & before I know, we are one very busy engine room. At this point I ain't sitting in my 'It's good to be King' chair. I'm thinking how big a difference it is when you throttle your very first time, compared to oiling... You look at things a little bit different. Things are progressing smoothly when all of a sudden the head valve slams shut, 1-2 inches of vacuum pulled... No biggy, but the manometers on the stills jump around a bit but we settle them down.

Next thing I know the head valve recycles 3-4 times. The stills go ape shit, the manometers are at the top of the sight glasses. At this point we're just passing salt water into the tank. The head valve shuts again for good, pulls the requisite 8" and shuts down the engines... We shut all valves, kill the air charge, the oiler is trying to save the barrel of water we're trying to make and I'm on the phone to control screaming about the assholes on the planes who just destroyed a perfectly good batch of water, but how I'm gonna blow it to the fresh water tanks anyway and the cooks ain't gonna need to add salt to whatever it is they're cooking. I hang up and begin venting the HPAC stages when I look in the lower flats and what to my surprise do I see, not eight tiny reindeer, but fucking water rising over the deck plates... Slowly creeping up to the HPAC motors. All of a sudden I remember a drain valve I forgot to shut. (Now this is akin to a quartermaster realizing his plot was 12 degrees off, a sonarman mistaking another submerged sub for a whale. Or a torpedoman realizing what just left #1 tube was only a water slug, not a torpedo). I believe it was Baker valve drain. Not sure, mind is blank now as it was then. After I shut the valve and scrambling around, I get the drain pump on the forward bilge and after a few tense minutes the water began to recede.

Well I aged about 15 years after that incident, dirtied my skivvies and firmly believe, that incident was the genesis of my hair falling out. But on the bright side, I never, ever, forgot to shut that valve again.

## **Being King** by Joe Roche

What I liked about being an engineman aboard the USS Sirago SS-485, the best gahdam boat in SubRon 6 in the early '60s' was that nobody fucked with you in the enginerooms. They may tweak your nose in the control room, ragging you about your filthy, oily, smelly clothes, breaking your balls in after battery crews mess, but in the engineroom you were the king.

It's great being king. As a throttleman, you had your own slave that had to perform the most menial, foul, filthy and demeaning tasks. Just like I did when I was a slave. As a slave in the enginerooms, the bilges were your realm. The fuel oil purifier was your steed, and the CFO tank was your windmill. It was to stay full at all times, and don't forget to pump the bilges, take the readings, start the Hardy Twins... We're gonna make some air. The cooks need water, lite off the Badgers. Gahdammit keep that float in the middle of the glass, or you'll be making battery water, and everyone will be shitting non-stop for a week, and the Doc will be pissed off at you. While you're at it, go make a coffee run for both rooms.

While I was a slave I always dreamed of becoming King, because I wouldn't break my slaves balls like my king is breaking mine! When I became a throttleman, I change my mind real quick. Had to give my slave something to look forward to didn't I?

Dinks coming in for a signature? Shit, he became slave #2. Especially if one came in while we were rigging for deep submergence. Give him the main saltwater intake valve to shut in the lower flats... Don't remember how many turns it took to shut that sucker, but they were real hard turns and I'm certain a dink would count at least 342 turns by time he came topside all sweaty, oily and begging to be released... But slave #1 wanted to keep him around for a while. Being the gracious king that I was, I always let him keep his dink slave for a while.

As the throttleman, you got to sit in the most comfortable chair. Answer the phone and spin your finger in the air and point at what you wanted your slave to lite off. Of course, you had to drink coffee. Your ears were always alert for any sound however slight, any noise that might indicate a potential problem, which could mean pulling a liner or some other equally horrible thing. Your ears became your eyes in most cases.

When the rest of the crew had to pass through your kingdom, they always had to pay a toll of some sort. The most perverted of course were the best tolls to collect. Since they broke your chops when an engineman walked forward, it became your turn in the engineroom. Especially thrilling was when the cook's slave... Young and probably a dink himself, Mr. messcrank came into my kingdom and wanted my slave to go outboard one of the engines and fetch him a tin of coffee or sugar. We graciously agreed to hold his filthy white apron while he crawled outboard and got

his own can of whatever, running back to the cook , sobbing about how those scuzzy fucking enginememen made him crawl outboard an engine while it was running... All the while begging the cook to let him spit in the chow, just in case one of us would eat it. Yeah, it was great being King!

## **As The Old Man Turned** by Joe Roche

The old man said, “Stop the car, I’ll walk the rest of the way.” The younger man silently obeyed.

The old man got out of the car, leaning heavily on his cane, began the long walk down the deserted pier. Halfway down the pier he stopped. The younger man watched as the older man seemed to straighten up and uncurl his body that had been racked the last few years with rheumatism. The younger man got out of the car and slowly walked down the pier, until he stood about ten feet behind and to the side of the old man. He was worried about him. The old man hadn’t been the same since his wife of fifty-six years died two years ago. He thought his request to visit this place was strange, but he took him here anyway, without question. He loved the old man and would certainly do anything he asked. He looked out to sea, wondering what the old man was looking for.

The years dropped from the older mans eyes as he watched the tall, strong young boy walking down the pier, in his summer whites, with his sea bag jauntily thrown over his left shoulder with an arrogance that only is afforded the young. The young sailor was looking for his boat. When he found it, he crossed the brow, saluted the ensign and the topside watch and reported aboard his very first duty station. It was 1944.

The young man was told to go below and ask for the COB, who would assign him his bunk. After the COB introduced himself, he pointed to a bunk and told him, “That would be his world for the next patrol.” He then introduced him to his new boss, who threw a white apron at him and told him change out of his whites, since he wouldn’t be going anywhere for the next few weeks.

The next few weeks turned into two months of mess cooking, trying to qualify and his first war patrol. During which, his duty station was to sit in the mess hall and use a stopwatch. If they were attacked by the Japs, he was to time and count the depth charges.

One patrol led to another and then another and by the end of the third patrol he finally received his coveted Dolphins. It was about three weeks after his fourth patrol that he woke up one morning with terrible pains in his abdomen. He could barely get around. He took some good-natured kidding about trying to get out of work, but by nightfall it was clear something was very wrong and he was rushed

over to sick bay. After a preliminary examination it was determined that he had acute appendicitis and would have to be operated on.

It was while he recuperated that his boat went back to sea. He was angry that she went to sea without him and he missed being with his friends and crewmates, but he understood. After all, there was a war going on.

After his recuperation was over, he was given a new set of orders to another boat and immediately went to sea. It was while he was at sea, he found out his first boat was long overdue and was assumed lost.

The old man's eyes clouded up and his memories of so long ago faded once more to a place that he hadn't visited in such a long time.

As the old man turned, the younger man saw a single tear run down his cheek and was overwhelmed with sadness for his grandfather. He wanted to do something to make it all right for him, but in his heart, he knew he couldn't. That whatever the old man was going through, he and only he, would have to deal with whatever was bothering him.

On the long trip home, the younger man said, "Poppa, what was it that made you so sad back there on the pier?"

The old man never spoke to anyone, including his wife, about what had happened during the war. But he told his grandson. He told him because he finally realized that his story needs to be remembered by people, so these things wouldn't repeat themselves. He told his story. His grandson listened without interruption. He thought of his Poppa, a kid going away to war.

"Hell, at that age, I was getting ready for four years of fun at college," thought the younger man. Two days after they returned home, the old man died peacefully in his sleep. At the funeral, a card with the following poem was left in the old man's coffin. It read;

*There is a port of no return, where ships  
May ride at anchor for a little space.  
And then, some starless night, the cable slips,  
Leaving an eddy at the mooring place . . .  
Gulls, veer no longer. Sailor, rest your oar.  
No tangled wreckage will be washed ashore*

## **As They Roar to Life** by Joe Roche

You could almost feel the electricity in the air. What little air was left. We had been submerged for almost 16 hours, and the air was foul from cigarette smoke, body odors that emanated from men that hadn't seen a shower in almost a month, diesel fuel and the galley cooking fumes that dumped into the forward engine room where I was struggling to stay awake, along with my oiler. The atmosphere on board had taken a change for the better. Guys were not scowling at each other as much. Were not as quick to jump on anything that was said that wasn't to the liking of another shipmate. We were on the back end of a very long and difficult patrol and the crew were more than ready to head for the barn.

The forward engine room was blistering hot, not only from the injection temperature of the sea, but we had recently finished making fresh water. The question hung in the air like the torpid heat of the engine room. Why did we have to make water at the end of this patrol? Does the wardroom know something that hasn't been announced yet? Are we going home or are we going somewhere else? Was the water for the brown bagger's showers? This was on everyone's mind. If our orders were changed at this stage of the patrol, there was gonna be a very unhappy crew.

As the hours dragged by, word came back to us that we were going home and had in fact not received a change of orders that the crew was expecting. A rumor. A lousy rotten rumor, started by some lousy rotten sailor who had nothing to do but get everyone crazy. It worked! It drove us all crazy.

It was close to the end of my watch, when the order came over the 1MC, "Prepare to surface, four engines." This was it we're going home. The order had been anticipated for some time. Long after the fresh milk ran out. Long after the fresh vegetables ran out. Long after what passed as food changed into another life form. Our mid-rats famous cold cuts, turned a slimy looking green, you couldn't tell the bologna from the salami, the mayo had a brown crust an inch thick and no one would venture a guess as to what the yellow stuff was in the bowl.

Both engine room crews had the Fairbanks lined up and ready to go in record time. Then the order, "Surface, surface, surface!" You can hear 600 pound air rushing into the ballast tanks, pushing out the water that kept us down and safe from prying eyes. Positive buoyancy took over like magic. As we broached the surface and heard the main induction bang open, we received a start light on our engine order panel, the oiler opened the engine air induction valve and the throttlemen in both rooms began cranking over the Fairbanks. The oilers split a gut spinning open the inboard exhaust valves. As the throttlemen kicked in the fuel racks the engine roared to life, a pressure was built up and then the outboard exhaust valve was opened. Then the process was repeated until both engines in both engine rooms were running.

**"Lets go! Maneuvering, get them on line... Put some 'going home turns' on em!!"**

**The brown baggers slowly make their way to the after torpedo room where Schmidy is cutting hair for four-bits a head. You add your name to his list and wait your turn. An unwritten law on Sirago, was the brown baggers got to take the first showers. Most of the guys living in J 50 could wait till then. Didn't want the married guys scaring hell out of their babies, did we.**

**There is something about lighting off the Fairbanks that remains deeply imbedded in my psyche. As they roar to life, the power, the noise, the smell of diesel exhaust, the burning eyes. A tactile feeling, that can only be experienced by being there, in the engineroom. The crushing roar as the engines seem to get into a harmonic sync and then seem to quiet into a throb. Everyone on the boat hears them. The lookouts see the overboard discharge water. Everyone remembers what the roar of the engines meant for them. What comes to your mind when you remember that long-ago sound? I know what comes to my mind. I bet it's the same as you.**

**Just one more time. Please God, just one more time...**

## **Sir! I Have Two Contacts Bearing...by Joe Roche**

**It was a typical fall day. Windy, chilly and overcast. I had just returned to Orion after a weekend in New York City, visiting my wife and new baby boy. I had been TAD to Orion for a week while Sirago was at sea. She pulled into Pier 22 sometime over the weekend, loaded stores and fuel and was prepared to go to sea again at about 0900 that Monday morning. I had just enough time to pickup my orders from the squadron office, grab my seabag and make my way over Sirago's brow. The sea and anchor detail had been set. I made my way to the after torpedo room hatch, dropped my seabag down and was going to change from dress blues to dungarees, but was told I didn't have enough time, just lay topside to handle lines. I was indoctrinated early on to 'dirty' in my submarine career, when I was told to crawl into a line locker and tie up the line I had just coiled up. So much for clean Blues! Little did I know that in the days and years to come, 'clean anything' was a relative term.**

**After we backed out into the channel, I had my first chance to go below to change my clothes, meet our COB and get assigned a bunk in the after torpedo room. I was told I had the first watch after we secured from the sea and anchor detail. I noticed the boat starting to bob, weave and stumble like a punch-drunk fighter after being hit in the head too many times. We were heading into a storm.**

**By time the first call to chow came, the boat was pitching violently from port to starboard. Myself and only a few others sat down to lunch. After lunch, I was handed an oversized, smelly, filthy parka, an inflatable life vest and stood my first watch on the helm. The lookouts were going to be rotated, one at a time, due to the weather. And because of the weather, I had a hell of a time maintaining my course.**

That gyro card was spinning like a top. I'd add too much rudder one way then the other, trying to keep it on course. I got a few 'mind your helms' from the OOD on the bridge. Who, by the way I could barely hear due to the howling wind.

My turn arrived to relieve the lookout. The quartermaster who had been holding on to his radar gear, every so often would give the course and speed of the two destroyers off our port side to the OOD, so I knew what to look for when it became my turn topside. Which I was looking forward to, in spite of the weather. Hell, I wasn't seasick. How bad could it be? The quartermaster's name was Maurice Laubach and I never will forget when he told me to get my gear on. After I donned the smelly parka and life vest, he gave me this five or six-inch wide belt that had a huge 'D' ring attached to it. Attached to the 'D' ring was a heavy line about three feet long with a pelican hook back-spliced to the line. His instructions were as follows:

“Buckle this belt tight around your waist and as soon as you get topside, clip the hook into the TBT handle, RIGHT AWAY.” I stupidly asked why. “So you don't get washed overboard! We'll never find you and the parka your wearing will drag you down under the water even if you can inflate the life jacket.”

Now, I never saw a deer jacked in car headlights in my life... But I knew I must have looked like one at that very moment. His last instructions to me were, “When I pop the hatch, get the hell out of the conn.”

I did as I was told and proceeded to enter into a world of noise, wind, unmitigated power. Nature in all her primordial splendor and malevolence.

Before I go on, I have to say that I came to Sirago from the fleet and had been in hurricanes before. But nothing could be compared to being, at times, three to four feet from the ocean one minute on a roll to port, then thinking the boat is going to roll over on its back the next minute as it heels over to starboard.

The lookout I relieved gave me the binoculars and said “Good luck,” waved in some vague direction of the two destroyers and in between waves jumped into the conning tower. I then introduced myself to Ltjg. Mike Leeds, who asked me to give him a bearing of the ships on our port side. I stuck my head out from behind the bubble and thought the first layer of skin was being ripped off my face. I gave him my best guesstimate as to the relative positions of these poor devils. The destroyers were being tossed from wave to wave like rubber balls. Made me glad I wasn't on one of those things... Barely! I couldn't believe I had volunteered for this duty. It must have been a case of temporary insanity.

The water was the color of bright green bile, the sky was in turn, black then gray. The boat plunged *under* waves, not over them. As each wave passed over the bullnosed bow, I watched wide-eyed as green water rose up through the superstructure to our knees. Then rose up to our waists. Then rose up to our necks. At some point I remembered one of my mother's favorite sayings. She used to say,



“You made your bed, now you have to sleep in it”. It became perfectly clear to me, exactly at that moment, what that meant.

I don't remember much of the rest of that first day. I remember the cold, the wet, the sound of the wind. I remember heading for my bunk and passing through the engine rooms thinking how nice and warm they were. I must have been in a state of semi-shock for the rest of the two-week trip. I remember a few people. The COB Chief Patterson, Mike Leeds, the old cook who wondered out loud what idiots were eating chow in this weather, Laubach and the lookout I relieved that day.

That's all I remember about it. Just a few hours of my first day on Sirago. Then nothing. Two weeks erased from my memory.

## **The End of a Proud Lady** by Joe Roche

The other day, I came upon a photo on Sirago's web site that stopped me short. It was Sirago tied up at some unrecognizable pier in Norfolk. The caption underneath stated, *“Sirago in Norfolk just prior to being decommissioned.”*

She was tied up by herself. No other squadron boats near her. She looked so forlorn as if she knew what was coming and bereft of any hope of being saved from the cutting torch. How could that be? How could a cold, black steel cylinder surmise her ending? But she does. If you look real hard at that photo, you can tell.

She put in twenty-seven years of duty. Twenty-seven years' worth of thousands of young men who served her. Their hopes, their fears, their dreams. The thoughts of families and sweethearts ashore. Of children, going to school for the first time. A birthday missed. A wedding anniversary uncelebrated. Holidays missed. The death of a loved one, who died while we were submerged off the coast of some country whose name is long forgotten, but the pain of that death and the loved one, is still etched forever in the mind. Tell me *she* didn't absorb the energy of those memories, somehow, into the steel of her hull.

Twenty-seven years and thousands of 'Clear the bridge', 'Rig for deep submergence', 'Prepare to snorkel two main engines' and 'Lookouts to the bridge'. How about the excitement generated by making turns for home, after spending four or five weeks at sea. The thoughts of a hot shower and a cold beer at Bells. Setting the maneuvering watch. Damn, we're almost home! Sirago makes a hard left turn into Pier 22 and glides smoothly (sometimes) towards her slot. A line handler hurls a monkey fist to the inboard boat or pier line handler. Stop bells ring on the engines. Quiet now, except for the inboard induction valves being spun shut. The heat from the just shutdown engines, radiating though out the engine rooms. Lockers, opening and slamming shut! Dress uniforms being hastily donned. White hats jammed down low over the eyes. Gangway! Make way for liberty call. Gonna see

mamma and the kids. The J-50 sailors giving way to the 'Brown Baggers', so they can go home to their wife and kids.

Are you going to tell me *she* doesn't have that energy stored somewhere in her black hull?

That energy, that helped drive her on, while her young men worked tirelessly to keep her in service. Begging, borrowing, or more likely, stealing parts to hold her together.

There was no money forthcoming from anywhere or from anyone that gave a damn about diesel boats. Their time was over. A new era was upon us and Rickover had a blank check for his nukes and made sure nothing trickled down to us. Someone even stole one of my engines out of the forward engine room, for a damn machine that could blow bubbles. I guess that was someone's idea of a joke.

In human years, twenty-seven years is very young. I guess submarine years are like dog years and that made her very, very old.

There isn't a degaussing range anywhere in the world that can excise that magnetic field! With one exception... A welders cutting torch.

There she sits. Still forlorn. Knowing the end is near, without hope for a reprieve. Sitting there, with all that energy from all those years of memories, stored in some existential battery, hidden somewhere in her. No crew member ever saw that battery. But it was there, somewhere. That somewhere, is in the memories of every man who served on board Sirago. The energy that made Sirago who she was and who we are, will remain in the universe as long as one of us is alive. Because we are the ones who perpetuate her memory, by sharing those memories.

## **It Wasn't The Hilton** by Joe Roche

Serving on a WW II vintage submarine in the early 1960s' was a wonderful example and testament of being able to 'get along' with others. The confines of these 311 foot sardine tubes did not allow for the same isolation or privacy that a Buddhist sitting meditation on some hilltop or in a forest may require. Onboard Sirago if you wanted privacy, you went to the head. That was it!

So it is with a sense of belonging that allowed young men to 'get along' with his shipmates. Sociologists should have studied the submarine force to see why these men were able to get along with each other with a tolerance that would have stunned them into unbelievability. Same for the psychologists. They just would not have understood, period!

They would have thought the grab assing, the hassling of some dink NQP, or the blatant sexual references to just about everything under the sun, would be the most outrageous form of anti-social behavior ever witnessed on one of the governments Ships of the Line and would have recommended immediate Section Eight discharges for almost every man on board.

What possibly could have been the reason that seventy people chose to live in a submerged pipe. Where the most elemental forms of hygiene were disregarded or not allowed. Where changing the "linen" meant turning your fart sack and pillow case inside out so often that Doc would point out to you that this is not a pig sty you're living in. To which most of us replied, "Really?" Where fresh water was as valuable a commodity as the fuel oil was to the running of the engines, but much more scarce. Where you're able to get two weeks at sea on one pair of dungarees, two pair of socks and four pair of skivvies. For us enginemen, a bucket of hot water in the lower flats was as close to a shower as you got. It's amazing how your perception is formed by the environment you live in. During our '63 Med cruise, (I think) Bob Carey arranged a swap with another MM3 from a tin can we were operating with. When he came back to the boat all he talked about was taking a shower every night. Talk about luxury.

No one seemed to mind though. For all intents and purposes, we all were in the same boat, (pun intended.) Someone may have had a choice bunk in some out of the way location in the after battery. But Hogan's Alley remained a veritable pig sty. Dirty clothes piled in corners or hanging from bunk bags, paperback novels that were in worse shape than the Dead Sea Scrolls, still making the rounds, with certain very descriptive pages torn from them, sticking out from under pillows, awaiting the next reader. Who as he arrives at the place where the pages are torn out, will scream out a curse about "Getting to the best part of the book and some SOB tore them out." It wasn't until Doc Lay had 'titivate' ship day and the white lights went on, only then could the devastation of the compartment be seen.

The chow was the best - and the worst. We had mid-rats, as in midnight rations. But, ahh, mid-rats! A more appropriate name could not be found. Unless the cook made some fresh bread or sticky buns, mid-rats consisted of 'stuff' that defied description. Bologna had an aura about it. A greenish hue, that changed colors as you turned it in the light... First green, then yellowish, then - well you get the picture. The butter was covered with a scabrous inch-thick layer of brownish looking vulcanized... butter? Same situation with the mayo. But guys ate this stuff up as if it were their last meal.

For me, all the above adds up to one thing. I was where I asked to be. I spent some time on a bird farm. Now that was hell! Showers every night, uniform of the day after 1600, Masters at Arms running all over that ship looking for anything to write you up about, 25 minutes on the chow line, every meal every day. Insignificant cogs in a very large machine.

So we volunteered for submarine service. We lived crowded together in a steel tube. With no showers, some of us no beds, we hot bunked. We ate some of the finest chow the Navy ever provided and also ate the worst. We had no ship laundry, so we wore our dungarees until they could stand by themselves. We breathed some of the foulest air imaginable and some of the sweetest. Our eardrums were stretched beyond human endurance when we pulled a vacuum. We worked around the clock many times to keep Sirago on station. We didn't get paid overtime nor get an extra day off. We just got the feeling that maybe; just maybe you were playing an important part in something a lot bigger than yourself. But we were young and nothing was bigger than you when you were twenty years old.

So, to the sociologists and shrinks I can only say, we were young, dumb and carefree and wanted to serve in and be with the very best the Navy had to offer. We did that of our own free will. Forty years ago, this past February, I left Sirago and the Navy, but the memories remain.

**Ron 'WARSHOT' Smith, a World War II sub vet and author of his great book, *TORPEDOMAN*, joins the fray and shares some reflections on submarine life during the war. I'm sure you'll agree that his 'story-telling' abilities rival the best of us!**

## **Midway R&R 1943** by Ron 'Warshot' Smith

I guess everyone has heard about Midway, about halfway between North America and Asia. But do you know it intimately? No? Okay, let me tell you the real 'skinny' on this 'Worst place on Earth' to pull a Liberty, let alone an R&R.

Midway is actually two islands, Eastern Island and Sand Island. It's the furthest west of the Hawaiian chain.

Each of these islands are about one mile across. One had the airfield, the other had the main Marine garrison. The area between Sand and Eastern Island makes a large beautiful lagoon, closed in on the third side by a huge coral reef, making it a natural harbor.

Normally, the only inhabitants are birds... Millions of birds. But unique among all these birds is the Gooney Bird. Actually, a Gooney Bird is a baby Albatross and Midway is the home to all the Albatross in the world.

The topography is simple, SAND, nothing but SAND, with a few scraggly trees and palms.

Midway first became important to man as the halfway point for the first airline service across the Pacific Ocean. The China Clippers of Pan American Airways had

to make a stop at Midway to refuel and rest. They built a hotel for the passengers to sleep overnight and appropriately named it the Pan Am Hotel.

This was the R&R accommodations for submarine crews between war patrols. It was closer to the 'front' than Pearl Harbor, hence saving both time and fuel.

After 60 plus days at sea, getting bombed and depth charged, it was a welcome relief for a short spell but the occasional Jap air raids from Wake Island kept life thrilling.

No woman had set foot on this God-forsaken place since the last civilian plane left in 1941, so sex was not a viable option. All that was left was beer drinking and **GAMBLING**.

The Gooney Bird Hotel, that's what we renamed it, was a V-shaped building with a fairly large entry or lobby area. In World War II, it was the 'Las Vegas of the Pacific'. Green felt-covered tables for Craps, Poker, and Roulette were placed around this lobby. Gambling went on 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It was not unusual for pots to get as large as \$3,000.00. No small thing since the average player made less than 100 bucks per month. As usual, the Navy displayed its normal duplicity. They allowed the gambling, but you could only buy one \$50.00 money order to send home. Usually, the heavy winners would trust their poke to a buddy that was going back to the States, as he was supposed to then send it to the winners family. What do you think the odds of that happening are???

As I was saying, we were ensconced (you like that one?) at said Gooney Bird Hotel. O's on one side, nere-do-wells on the other. We got all our pay in cash as usual and one case of beer, that's 24 bottles, per week, per man. Some shit called *Green River*, made in California. Now any dumbass knows them prune-pickers can't make real beer, but we drank it. There wasn't any coolers or ice, so we parked our cases of beer UNDER the stern planes to cool it off a little. It helped.

The powers that be wouldn't allow any 'girlie' pics on the place, not even *Esquire*. There were several thousand Marines guarding the place and they had been there sooo long they were 'rock happy', that's what we called half-crazy. Every night, you could walk by the big building housing the main head and hear the meat slapping as hundreds of guys jacked-off. They had knocked out all the lights in the place so everyone had anonymity. It was tempting.

Also there were the daily attempts by sailors and marines to build makeshift rafts to desert and get back to the States. Anything to get off Midway. Most of their rafts were made of scraps of wood, empty milk cartons, anything that would float. It was said that a lot of guys drowned trying to get off that hell hole.

The beaches were beautiful, white sand and clear blue water. You could see a hundred feet or more down in the water, it was that clear. These same beaches were

covered with MILLIONS of 'Cat's-Eyes'. They looked just like an eyeball, colored center with a white outside, but rounded on the front and flat on the back. They came in a multitude of colors and sizes, from less than 1/4 inch to as big as 2 inches. When we weren't gambling or getting drunk on the shitty California beer, we tried to find pairs of matching 'Cat's-Eyes'. Some guys found some really neat matches.

The fuckin' Japs wouldn't let us rest, kept sending planes over to 'stir the shit'. One-night Ted Sharp, one of our GMs and I were guzzling down our beer when the air raid sirens went off. First thing they did when this occurred was to shut off every fuckin' light on the islands. Great, you couldn't see shit. Ted and I went running down this dirt road (they were ALL dirt roads) looking for an air raid shelter we had seen. These 'air raid shelters' were just holes dug in the sand, covered with some wood and more sand piled on top. We were each sucking on one bottle and carrying another under our arms. We must have run for an hour, stopping every now and then to swig some more beer. The anti-aircraft guns were blasting away and every once in a while a bomb would explode. Finally, we were exhausted and said, "Fuck It." and sat down on a sand pile to watch the show. Things finally settled down. We finished our beer and fell asleep on the sand pile. When we woke up the next morning, we discovered that we had been sleeping on top of a damn air raid shelter. Such is life.

The most fun and excitement of the whole two weeks was a baseball game between us, from SEAL, and the crew of RUNNER. Eveybody got all beered up and the game ended in a free-for-all between the two crews. Just a few knots on the head and bloody lips until someone from RUNNER pulled out his deck knife, we all carried them, 8" blade in a leather sheaf on your belt. This guy stuck his deck knife through the foot of one of our torpedoman. That ended the game.

After two glorious weeks on this tropical paradise we managed to get out with our lives, a full crew, fuel in the tanks, and some of our money.

We headed out on our seventh war patrol; an Empire run. (note: RUNNER didn't come back from her next patrol.)

**Bruce Miller, LCDR USN (ret), now brings us a tale from the 'forward battery' boys!**

## **The Flying Desk Caper** by R. Bruce Miller, LCDR, USN (ret)

Once upon a time there were four fun-loving, happy-go-lucky Naval Officers. They thoroughly enjoyed each others company and had been known to alternately go out for some fun together and play harmless practical jokes on each other. Three of these gentlemen were submariners (Steely Eyed Killers of the Deep) and the fourth was a Limited Duty Officer (Surface Warfare) Lieutenant. These four compatriots

had the good fortune to be stationed together at the Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion and Repair, Newport News, during a time when the construction of 688 Class submarines was at its peak. Because of the heavy load of construction in the submarine arena, even the SWO-LDO was pressed into service to manage one of the submarine constructions projects.

Being the only 'Skimmer' in the group and an LDO besides, the Lieutenant decided that he needed to take it upon himself to show these upstart 'Bubbleheads' the appropriate way to have fun, work, deal with the shipyard, build submarines, live, eat, breathe, etc. He basically enjoyed being a 'Sea Daddy' to this poor misguided group of submariners and tried to teach the others in this happy little band how to do everything. As a result, the group was sometimes regaled with innumerable parables (read: Sea Stories) concerning every possible topic under the sun. These training sessions could and would cover everything from determining the speed of a surface ship from the height of its bow wave in relation to its hull number, to the appropriate home rules for raising a teenage daughter. Although these lessons were quite informative, it soon became evident, even to these poor, unlearned, naive submariners, that some of his tales might be a tad overblown and maybe even somewhat inflated or even, (dare I say it), exaggerated. However; due to the dignified and mature nature of the gentleman in question, these stories could NEVER be called lies.

Once this realization set in, the three, young (by comparison), polite submariners would listen quietly, nod in approval of the moral to the story being espoused by their learned colleague but do their best to NOT encourage additional discourse. Any comment uttered by one of the three dolphin wearers in response to any given point was considered an open invitation for the SWO-sage to expound on any tangent that may be related in some way to the topic at hand. Any comment made by one of the three was frowned upon by the other two. Unfortunately, this form of finesse was somewhat lost on our LDO hero, and the stories would continue unabated in even greater style, flair, and dramatization. At one point, our intrepid set of three had become so exhausted by the flow, that they made a small mistake. The LDO was detailing his Herculean exploits on the waterfront of the shipyard and the deck plates of the boat itself. He was describing how he never had time at his desk in the project office because of these efforts and that it wouldn't matter if he had a desk on the waterfront because he would be onboard and not able to get to it. He swore that even through all of these travails he would still accomplish his given task. The fateful words uttered were something to the effect,

"I don't care if my desk is in the overhead, I'll still get it all done!"

It was at this point that our submariners made their error. They sighed, rolled their eyes, and then gave each other a sly, knowing sneer. The LDO, being wise in the ways of his compatriots, saw this and then proceeded to commit an even larger, more grievous error. He indicated that the three friends did not possess enough of

those qualities, attributes or physical characteristics necessary to be called 'real' men or to accomplish that which he thought they were considering.

**Next Scene:** The next morning, in the office of the four friends. The LDO enters to hear his phone ringing. He looks for his desk and locates it twelve feet in the air with all of its associated equipment (files, computer, phone, light, calendar, desk pad, etc.) all intact. His shoulders sag, he slowly shakes his head, turns and walks out. His weekly time sheet entry for the day indicates 'Sick Leave'.

**New Scene:** Our three 'Steely Eyed Killers of the Deep' are at attention, on the carpet in the Deputy Supervisor's Office being read the riot act. Apparently, a grievance had been filed for an act which had the possibility of introducing potentially harmful industrial dust into the work area (when the ceiling tiles were removed to hoist the desk). The Deputy has to speak in a 'louder than normal' voice in order to be heard over the Supervisor's boisterous laughter in the office next door as he sees the photos of the incident. Our heroes were released on their own recognizance. (Note: No LDO or other form of wildlife was harmed in the commission of this prank.)

**A smokeboat engineman, Ronald Mitchell, has a few recollections from his Entemedor (SS-340) days.**

## **Two Minute and 47 Second Club** by Ronald Mitchell

When on the 340 boat, we were prepping for a 'deployment' (read northern run). Skipper was new. Went out in Long Island Sound to go through our paces to see if we were up to snuff. We dove the boat and all that good stuff. So far, so good. Apparently, he was happy with most of that.

Then it was "Prepare to snorkel, one (or whatever) main engine(s)." About 20 minutes later, maneuvering reported "Snorkeling on (whatever we had been ordered) main engines." Skipper came on the 1MC and informed the crew in no uncertain terms that our effort wasn't good enough, not even *nearly* good enough. He promised that we were going to stay out there until we got it right.

Many, many attempts were performed, and none suited him so we did it again and again. One of the main problems was the FER. Most times we got the start bell and early on in this fiasco, the throttleman was all alone, since the oiler was on the trim manifold. Some waited for him to get relieved and come aft. I found that it required 3 arms/hands and one foot to light off snorkeling. And since I am not equipped that way, we had problems. Even after the compartment was rigged and the inboard opened, we still had to wait for the 3rd arm/hand to open the snorkel exhaust valve. AER could have helped but I guess they were waiting for a start bell back there.

One evening, I was on 16-20 and was shown that the return to center switch used to bypass the high back pressure on the exhaust line had a malfunctioning spring so



that if one put it into the bypass position, it stayed there. Wasn't that convenient? Freed up the left hand to open the snorkel exhaust valve!. Absolutely amazing. The next start was done in 2 minutes and 47 seconds from time of "Prepare to snorkel, 1 main engine" to "Snorkeling 1 main engine". Rig for snorkel bill and inboard exhaust valve opening was done before oiler even made it to the FER. The skipper then came on the 1MC and congratulated everyone and said something to the effect that would be satisfactory and to knock off the drills "before we break something" I converted a steaming shirt to a great looking shirt with snorkel head valve complete with closing electrodes, waves and all that stuff and announcing that I was part of the "Two Minute and 47 Second Club". That AWOL spring returned to its home and that was the end of the snorkel drills.

## **58 Feet Smartly** by Ronald Mitchell

During an operation, the skipper about wore everyone out with his order to periscope depth for a quick look around and then commence snorkeling to clean up the air and throw a little charge on the battery or just move somewhere a bit quicker.

Steaming along then the word came "58 feet smartly, set condition Baker, prepare to snorkel, one main engine." I learned real quick that if you planned to get the watertight door on the latch, you'd better get your butt up to the forward end of the compartment damn fast, otherwise you were going to be lifting a damn heavy door. At that time, the door outweighed me by a bunch since I wore size 28 patch-pocket dungarees and weighed about 145 pounds.

I wore moccasins in the FER and soon they were soaked with our various oils and fuels so they became really slick. When I got the order above, I just hauled it to the forward end, got the bulkhead flappers shut and the watertight door on the latch. Then, since we had a helluva up angle, I just grabbed hold of stuff and slid down the deck, rigging the compartment for snorkeling on the way down. Only thing left was to secure from condition Baker and then fire off the engine.

## **The Great Hydraulic Mystery** by Ronald Mitchell

My Maneuvering Watch station was on #4 line though I was an EN2(SS). The lead first class had the FER, my normal watch station for Maneuvering Watch and all of us grunts were distributed throughout the ship. Stations were manned and we were getting ready to shove off from the subbase in New London.

First clue that something was up was when somebody (maybe the Engineering Officer) told me, "Get a truck and get twenty cans of hydraulic oil". I grabbed a 1150 chit book, got a sig from somebody and headed out with a striker. Checked the vehicles at the head of the pier until I found one with keys and helped myself. Whizzed over to supply and loaded up the hydraulic oil. Got back to the pier and the

lines were already singled up. People appeared and the hydraulic oil went aboard as I returned the truck. As soon as I got my carcass aboard, the brow came right behind me.

Got underway pretty normally and settled into the regular underway watch. No big deals going on but did get a hint that there seemed to be a hydraulic leak somewhere and our oil was disappearing. There were many searches done in the superstructure and compartments. The oil that we had brought aboard was all sent to the FTR where a hose was rigged up into the escape trunk and some poor slob had to pour the oil into the funnel attached to the hose which went into the fill connection to the hydraulic storage tanks. There, for the benefit of those who might not know, the oil was pumped with a hand pump to the FER to the hydraulic supply tank. We were a Guppy IIA so the hydraulic system took up residence in the FER.

All was going fairly well with a trim dive and instruction over the squawk box to look for hydraulic leaks throughout the boat. We checked the lower flats in the FER over and over and found nothing. Apparently the skipper was determined to carry out whatever we were supposed to be doing, so we did it. Symptoms of the problem was really aggravated when a scope was lowered. Leak searches continued.

We were short of hydraulic oil again so began manufacturing it from our engine oil, 9250D, 2 parts, and diesel fuel, 1 part. This was mixed in the FER and carried through the boat all the way to the escape trunk in the FTR and poured in the funnel/hose rig to the storage tank and then pumped to the hydraulic supply tank which was about 2 feet from where we were making the stuff. Nobody figured out that we should find a way to get it in the tank directly.

We were steaming along at periscope depth and all of a sudden, one of the MBT vents opened magically all by itself!!! Apparently, a scope had been raised and lowered and while it was going down, the vent opened itself. A bit more concern was raised about the hydraulic problem. The XO got the Engineer and was doing a compartment by compartment search. They got as far as the FER and just a freak chance of the boat rolling enough while someone was looking spotted the leak. Someone doing maintenance on the return line filters had left the vent open. The vent was piped up to the lowest part of the bilge so as it drained our hydraulic system, the oil just mixed with the other oil in the bilge and since the end of the vent line was below the surface, it couldn't be seen. That fixed the problem of losing the oil but the system was still messed up. Finally, someone found the main hydraulic return stop valve shut, also left over from the filter job. The valve was opened and the problem solved, except for an apparent thought in someone's mind that sabotage was afoot.

The XO was interviewing the people who stood watch in the FER. He sent for me and when I got to the compartment, he asked me if I knew where the valve was located. I told him, "Sure, right over there," and pointed in the direction of the valve. He started jumping up and down and saying, "He knows, he knows". I told him, "I'm

qualified and I'm supposed to know." That seemed to cool him a bit. I can't believe that I was the only watch stander in the FER that knew where that valve was located. I was allowed to return to my rack and continue my beauty rest. Never heard any more about the incident. The Engineer might have had notes made in his file or the A gang leader might have caught some well-deserved static.

This ends the saga of the hydraulic system screw ups except for the nagging 'what if'. What if we had been on the surface with the lookouts up and hatch open and the vent opened? One flooded ballast tank wouldn't have taken her down but it sure would have puckered some folks.

**Entries from Chris Herst, a 'Sonar Girl' from the DARTER !**

## **Arrival (What did I get Myself Into?)** by Chris Herst

There is a point in every young sailor's career when they arrive at their first ship. As the old saying goes: "First impressions are the most important". That being said, I have heard literally thousands of people looking at a submarine pier side and say things like "Wow, it looks like a shark" or "That is pure stealth". This was NOT the impression I was granted when arriving at the USS Darter (SS-576).

First let me explain that I was granted orders to this vessel out of Sonar 'C' school. The instructors (all hardcore lifers) told me what a great gift I had been given by the great Submarine God. I left Colorado Springs on December 31st 1981 for the trip to my boat. Doing as I was directed from some higher authority I never met, I was in dress blues, the appropriate and recognized travel attire for a young petty officer. I was headed for Subic Bay, Philippines. Oh how I wish the Internet was available then! After a gruesome 19-hour flight on a 747 from Oakland International Airport with my running mate Shawn Rowe (another story there), we arrived at Clark Air force Base in the Philippines.

We went into the terminal, collected our fully loaded sea-bags and mustered in line to be checked by customs (2 air force personnel who seemed totally put upon having to do customs). After several military people had passed up the line, one of the air man announces that active duty military needed to form to the left. We shifted over and waited some more. As we finally arrived at the desk, the tired looking sergeant, says "orders" I handed him my packet, he eyeballs them, gives me a nasty look and stamps my orders for port arrival. "Next!". OK, now what? So I asked "Now what do I do?" he gestured off to his right and said, "There's a bus down to Subic."

Being the good sailor that I was, I moved to the left and waited for Shawn. We spent about twenty minutes wandering around trying to locate the bus. Finally, we approached a counter with another Sergeant and asked the question "Where do we catch the bus to Subic?" He pointed us in the direction we needed to go and

grunted something unintelligible. We picked up our sea bags and headed for the door indicated. There was no bus. So we continued in the direction indicated and eventually ended up at the main gate.

Please remember, at this point that we are both in dress blues, the temperature is just shy of melting pure titanium and the humidity level is that of a swimming pool. We asked the gate guard for directions to the bus. He gave us directions that continued out into town. When we finally arrived at the bus station, we were 30 pounds lighter each and exhausted. We had walked about 3 miles fully loaded. We changed some 'Cano' (American Green Backs) money to pesos and purchased our bus tickets to Subic and waited patiently while consuming no less than 4 sodas each in less than 2 minutes.

The bus finally arrived, and the terminal guy tells us in that funny little accent that this is our bus. Much trepidation was bestowed upon me. This bus was from around 1940, bright red with dents and scrapes down the sides, all the tires were bald and the majority of the riders were chickens. Wholly, only 3 out of 25 or 30 windows actually operated and Shawn and I were introduced to the term "Rabbit Bus Line". If you are ever given the opportunity to ride one of these, cut your hand off in trade and walk to your destination. After a grueling sweat soaked chicken feathered ride of about 3 hours we arrived in Subic. We grabbed our gear and asked how to get to the base. We were directed to a bright yellow contraption with a myriad of horses on the hood, dingle balls around the entire inside, Christmas lights strategically strewn over the beast and called a "Jeep Knee". Cool! NEAT! Ah Crap

We paid our 60 centavos (had the driver pick it out, I didn't know what a centavo was), picked my seat on the bench and away we went for a fifteen-minute ride to the front of the gate. Finally! Americans! We grabbed our gear and rushed to the gate at which point we were met by one of the largest men I had ever laid eyes on. He was one of the Marines on duty. He asked for our orders, checked them over and told us to wait inside. We entered the building and discovered the greatest thing ever created by man....Air Conditioning!!!!. I had not realized that my body temperature had risen just under that of the exhaust of an F-14 with it's after burner cooking. After about twenty minutes our escort arrived.

Let it be said that my impressions of the Navy up to this point had involved boot camp and schools. The standard issue 4.0 sailor, clean neat uniform, well groomed Crackerjack material. There stood before us a real life dwarf. Not a midget. I am talking about a no sh\*t, straight from a fantasy novel, dwarf. He was clad in a pair of the dirtiest dungarees I had ever seen. He had a full beard, a white hat (more yellow than anything) cocked to one side, a ring of keys hanging off his belt loop and a cigarette hanging out the right side of his mouth. All he needed was the horn hat and a large hammer.

"You the two nubs for the Darter?" Nub? Nub? He must have meant sub. "Yes we are. Are we glad to see you." He rolled his eyes, looked us up and down, rolled his eyes again and waved us to follow him.

"Looks like two nerds that couldn't tell their ass from a hole. Why weren't you on the bus?"

Shawn and I stopped in our tracks. "We were on the bus," I protested.

"Look, first, my name is Mike Pennel. I'm one of the Sonarman on duty today. I was here when the bus arrived and you two weren't on it. You f\*\*cking Nubs are in deep already."

Shawn explained that we were in fact on the bus. This is the point where Mike busted loose with a huge laugh. "You rode a Rabbit?!! Oh my Gawd! Why didn't you take the Air Force bus right in front of the terminal?"

A sick feeling fell over me. A real bus? No it couldn't be. "Wait 'til the guys on the boat hear this. You two jackasses will never live this down. You two are a couple of real Nubs." Okay. We probably deserved that.

"Hey Mike, what in hell is a Nub? You keep calling us that."

At this point we were introduced to what a fleet, diesel boat sailor perceived...and my future: Part I (Parts II and on...well that's a whole different story).

"Non Useful Body. Get used to it. You are just like me. A non-qual dink puke lower than whale sh\*t, air-breathin' food-eatin' rack-stealin' sanitary-fillin' completely useless body (please note that all of that is said in one breath with no punctuation). Come on, get in the van."

We followed in shocked silence. Mike began a description of the boat and crew, none of it very pleasant, as we drove down to the boat. He was actually a pretty neat guy. He let us know the boat was in overhaul, gave us quick brief on how quals would work (another story), and let us know the crew was comprised of all hardcore boat sailors, most of which had not seen the U.S. in several years.

Now the impression. We arrived outside the gate to the piers, unloaded our bags and followed Mike through the gate. "She don't look like much right now, lot of stuff ripped out," He informed us.

As we rounded the corner of the last building and headed towards the dry-dock pier, I noticed a huge winged thing with a black tube in it. Mike pointed and said, "There she is."

Again I stopped with my chin on my chest. No shark look. No stealthy hunter. What I was looking at was best described as a person hit by a train that was undergoing a major operation with every manner of life support attached. "THAT is our boat?!!" "Yep. Come on, I'll help you get checked in."

We followed, feet dragging staring in disbelief at this monster under extreme surgery. From bow to stern, the pressure hull was stripped. There were no less than three holes cut into the boat that a Mac truck would have no problem driving into. Hoses ran across from the dry-dock at approximately 3-foot intervals down the entire length of the boat, ranging from very small to very large. There were what appeared to be sheds in three different places. There were pieces of metal everywhere inside the dry-dock basin. Very much like a giant sea monster had beached itself and swallowed a giant Alka seltzer. It's innards had exploded into the dry-dock.

This was almost exactly like Star Wars when Princess Leia saw the Millenium Falcon. Remember the question she asked Han Solo? "*You came in that? You are braver than I thought.*" My very first thought was: "There is no way on God's Green Earth that this could possibly be MY boat. This was an erector set gone horribly bad."

By the time we got to the barge I was sick to my stomach. How could my instructors have done this to me? I was a good student. I even bought them beer! We partied together. They told me things about how to get along as a non-qual. 'Boat secrets'. This was just not right. First, an absolutely horrible bus ride on a condemned rattrap in searing heat, and now this.

**NOT FAIR!!!! WHY ME GOD?!!**

First impressions go a very long way. In this case, it lasted long enough to meet the finest group of men I have ever worked with. These were the men who took this contraption to sea. They loved her and respected her. Took life on the edge. That was when I realized that a 'boat' is a piece of metal with a bunch of equipment inside. Yes, they tend to have a personality, but the crew, the men who drive her, fight her, help her when she needs it, love her and most of all respect her, that is what gives her life. The name she earns is through the men and their accomplishments. I realized then and there that I had in fact joined the "Elite of the Fleet". At nineteen, broke as hell and at loose ends, that was just about as good as it got.

## **Pirate Captain A Tribute to a Boat Captain** by Chris Herst

I arrived on board the USS Oklahoma City (SSN-723) after a quick trip to Kings Bay Georgia for Sonar Suite upgrade school. I had the pleasure of knowing one of the finest submarine captains to ever put a boat to sea. In this modern day of rocket

science and hi-tech gadgets, here was a man, that if you knew him, you walk through the fires of Hell to be in his presence.

The man knew how to drive a boat. Mr. Snead was a 'Good ol' boy' from Tennessee. He had a unique sounding voice and NEVER had a problem saying what was on his mind. My first underway with this 'terror of the high seas' is a very vivid memory. I say this because the man had a stylish way of letting the crew know what was up. If we did not conduct a fire drill correctly...he let us know in a 'gentlemanly' way.

Over the 1MC, "Gentlemen, that was F\*\*\*\*d up!. We need to fix this! Carry on!"  
Classic Snead.

I call him a pirate because of the way he carried himself. He would have fit perfectly on one of those old pirate ships. ARRRRGH! Getting to know this man was very easy. He was amiable. He wanted to be with the crew, get e feel for how they felt. He really made a difference. He smoked OP cigarettes. He would come down to the smoke pit in the machinery room,

"Someone give me a F\*\*\*ing smoke." (five or six packs would appear). "How's it goin' guys? Everyone all right? I can't wait to get back home. Thanks for the smoke, see ya later". That was Snead.

However, his 'pirate side' would come out whenever it was time fight the ship. He would get this look in his eyes and everyone knew... Don't be the one to screw up.

We were on our merry way to the Florida area to conduct TRE. The Commodore of Squadron Eight was riding for a pre-eval and we went to fire control tracking party on an unsuspecting floating target. As transiting merchant ships have no idea we are even in the area, is very easy to use them as 'targets of opportunity'. Squadron is sitting in the corner, aft of fire control on the starboard side, watching intently and scribbling in his note pad. Sonar is manned to sardine capacity... Fire control is jammed with JO's... Here comes the man... It went like this...

"This is the Captain, I have the Deck, the Engineer retains the Con. Let me have the attention of the Fire Control Party... Here's what we are gonna do. We are gonna go to PD, scope this guy and then shoot this f\*\*\*er! Any questions?"

Nobody had a question. I looked into the control room from sonar right at the Commodore... His chin was on his chest and his eyes were as big as plates. He even dropped his pen. I will never forget that. The main part of this has to do with a real life situation that turned funny. Just wanted to let you know what kind of 'funny' this is.

We were on station... Somewhere 'out there'. There were two boats with the same characteristics (equipment) in a certain area. We were the primary shooter for Tomahawk missiles and they were secondary. When the flag dropped, we were

keyed up and ready to go. Observations... Downloads... Preps... Checks... Nerves frayed. It was very exciting.

When it came time to launch the bird, the fire control system had a dumb blonde in a conversation syndrome... FULL.

No more data in... No more info to the bird... Nothing. Needless to say, the Captain was not a happy camper. Our moment of glory... And nothing! The Fire Controlmen commenced troubleshooting, praying to God and Davy Jones and all things nautical that it was just a glitch. Nothing doing. With our 'tail between our legs', we pulled out and opened datum. Sent the embarrassing message off and the other guy moved into position to give it a go.

Snead made it abundantly clear that he was ready to FIRE the Fire Controlmen. Not one, but the entire Division! Then we got word the other guy had the exact same problem. It was a 'glitch' within the system. That led to a small boat transfer of some equipment in the open ocean. I was on the small boat handling team and got to witness this first-hand. So what you are about to read is true. It went down this way.

The captain is still VERY irate about this situation. We surface, the small boat handling team musters topside, we wait. Snead is pacing up and down the side of the boat like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. The six of us on the team are gathered together around the forward escape trunk (goes into the mess decks on a 688).

Someone asked the COB for permission to smoke; the COB asked the Captain who mumbled an obscene yes. We all lit up. Then it happened. Snead approached the group cussing a blue streak that went something to this effect:

"I can't believe this. I just can't f\*\*\*ing believe this. I got a BILLION dollar submarine with millions of dollars' worth of equipment and weapons and I can't even throw a goddamned rock at the f\*\*\*ing enemy! Someone give me a f\*\*\*ing smoke!"

He chose from the arrayed packs... Lit up... And proceeded to the back of the sail. All of us in the handling party were doing everything we could not to bust up when the COB noticed where the captain had gone. His eyes got big and he pointed. I looked and realized the captain was smoking right underneath the hydrogen discharge. Guess what we were doing? That's right campers... Discharging hydrogen overboard.

We all started calling the captain who finally asked what we wanted. The COB informed him that we were discharging and Snead moved rapidly away with a final tirade, "Great... Just f\*\*\*ing great! I can see the headline now! CO Blows Self Up!!"

That did it. We all lost it and for the first time in three days, The Captain smiled. The pressure was off. We did what we had to do, finished a great deployment and



laughed all the way home about the Captain blowing himself up. He is a great man and still the only CO I would EVER want to go to war with. I respect him, and almost wish that I had never served under another CO. it was never a dull moment when Snead was around.

Pirate Captain? Dammed right. Good thing we never mutinied... The world would never have been the same!

## **Nicknames A Rite of Passage** by Chris Herst

One of the first things I learned upon reporting to my first submarine, is that everyone seemed to have a nickname. Of course being a non-qual, I had not yet earned that special right. There are two times in a submariner's life that fall under VERY special. The obvious first is when those 'silver tuna fighting over a shit-can' are pinned on, and that special moment when you know you are part of the crew by the blessing of a nickname.

There are rules to obtaining a nickname. For example, you cannot pick your own nickname such as 'Spike', 'Killer' etc. There is normally one designated name giver. When he decides what your 'new' name will be, you will be duly informed.

You cannot purchase a nickname either. This would be unethical. Nicknames, afterall, are EARNED or BESTOWED. You cannot bribe one, either (I tried...cookies, candy, cigarettes).

On the Darter, nicknames tended to run towards the lower region of manhood. There was 'Blue Steely', 'Pee-ater', 'Mule'. But then there were some seemingly normal ones as well; 'Charlie Brown' (also known as 'Him' when intoxicated), 'Hammer', 'Clog', etc. I was deep into being a nonqualdinkpukelowerthanwhaledungairbreathin rackstealinworthlesspeiceofcrap when I got my new name.

I was 'crankin' at the time. We have all had our go at that, although it seems the 'New Navy' does not sanction the use of highly-trained nuclear personnel. I cannot confirm nor deny that I actually saw this.

On a diesel boat, EVERYONE gets a turn. The other 'New Navy' issue is that the individuals that are awarded this specialized duty are no longer called 'cranks', the new politically correct name is 'Food Service Attendant' (FSA for short).

As smoke boat sailors know, the normal operation when on station is to run under during daylight hours and surface and charge the batteries at night. While on the surface housekeeping evolutions take place. Sanitaries are blown, trash is taken to the bridge to be given a proper burial at sea, etc. It was during this evolution that created the scenario for my new name.

The evening meal was complete. The mess decks were clean and the qualified minions of the boat were preparing for the 2000 movie. The movie projector operator had set up the screen. Popcorn was being popped and bug juice was flowing freely. My compatriot and I were preparing the trash for disposal. As was protocol, we went to the control room and asked the control room supervisor permission to move trash to the bridge. That permission was obtained, and Andy and I began the process of moving properly bagged and weighted trash bags to the bridge access area.

As most submariners know, plastic trash bags are surrounded by a mesh bag and properly weighted with at least three TDU/GDU weights, then stabbed a multitude of times to release any trapped air. Seven and a half pound discs of steel in the bottom of the GDU bags are used to properly send a bag of trash to the ocean depths. Once the trash was moved to the control room, permission was granted to move trash to the bridge to be thrown over the side. The control room was rigged for black. Andy moved up the ladder to the Nav level of the bridge with a bag in tow. Once there, he passed the bag to the lookout who then disposed of it over the side. I grabbed a bag and moved up the control room ladder, passed it to Andy...etc.

On about the fifth bag, I had just touched the grate in the control room when I heard Andy say "Shit!", followed by a blinding white light and much confusion on my part. The next thing I knew, I was sitting on the edge of the Con and the several people yelling, "We got a man down!" "We got a man hit!" I was trying to figure out who it was.

I had a massive headache and the room was kind of spinning. Then I was floating! And a deep voice kept calling me by name and reassuring me everything was going to be okay. I was going to a light....turned out to be the mess decks. John V. AKA 'Mule' was carrying me. The one A-ganger on the boat every non-qual feared.

"Keep looking at me Chris. You're going to be alright buddy."

Mule said to me. I was placed on one of the benches at a table. Movie interrupted. Four or five doctors were on board for some inspection. They all had a way to determine if I was alright. "Follow my finger..." "How many fingers am I holding up?" "Don't close your eyes."

I had no idea what had happened. I was sweating...I wiped it away...RED! OMIGOD! I'm bleeding! "You have a concussion."

I was hit by a TDU weight, that fell about 10 feet, right in the grape. Once they determined I wasn't going to die, a QM1 by the name of Dan made a statement. His wife was into arcane arts. He said that if his wife had seen that, she would have said that I had a head like a dragon. There it was my new name was born. 'Dragon'.

It could be used several ways; he's built like a dragon, he's draggin' his ass. The important point here was the realization that I was officially part of the crew. Mule was not the evil guy everybody thought. And they cared. I was a shipmate. Still a nonqualdinkpukelowerethanwhaledungairbreathinrackstealinpieceocrap...but I was a shipmate. As I lay down on my forward torpedo room rack with the most massive headache I ever had...I smiled. I was a shipmate.

**Larry Dunn has crafted a wonderful poem that speaks volumes about our old diesel boat days. This is one that's dedicated to every sailor that now wears, or once wore, that coveted insignia.**

## **Brother of the 'Phin** by Larry Dunn July 2003

I chanced upon a sailor once with an emblem on his chest.  
It appeared to be two angry sharks on a trash can for a rest.

His white hat was wrinkled and dirty, his neckerchief tied too tight  
and he had only one eye open as he staggered through the night.

He was young and scrawny and wiry; with knuckles cracked and oozing.  
I could tell from the way he looked and smelled he'd spent the night  
whorin' and boozin'.

But as he pulled abreast, he squared his hat and said "Sir, do you have a  
light?  
I'm due back aboard by quarter to four Or the COB will be settin' me right."

As I fumbled around for my lighter he pulled some smokes from his sock  
"and I'll be damned lucky to make it," he muttered 'Cause I'm steamin'  
against the clock."

Through the flame of my well-worn Zippo I could see a smile on his face.  
"But, you know -- it was damn well worth it. That 'Bell's' is a helluva  
place."

He sucked the smoke deep down in his lungs and blew smoke rings up  
towards the moon  
Then he rolled up his cuffs, pushed his hat to the back and said "Maybe  
there'll be a cab soon."

In spite of the time he was losing He was wanting to shoot the breeze  
So we sat on the curb, like two birds on a perch as he talked of his life on  
the seas.

**I asked about the thing on his chest and he looked at me with a grin.  
Then he squared his hat, snubbed out his smoke and said "I'm a Brother  
of the 'Phin."**

**"I'm one of the boys who go under the sea where the lights from above  
don't shine;  
Where mermaids play and Neptune is king and life and death intertwine."**

**"Life on a boat goes deep in your blood and nothing on earth can compare  
to the feeling inside as she commences a dive going deep on a hope and a  
prayer."**

**"I've sailed some fearsome waters down below the raging main  
and I've heard that old boat creak and groan like the wheels of a railroad  
train."**

**"It's the one place on earth where there ain't no slack where you don't  
have more than you need;  
where each man is prince of his own little space and each lives by the  
submarine creed."**

**"There ain't much I've done in this fickle life that would cause other men to  
take note,  
But I've walked in the steps of some mighty fine men who helped keep this  
country afloat."**

**"They slipped silently through the layers down below that raging main  
while up above enemy men-o'-war laid claim to the same domain."**

**"Brave sailors were they in their sleek boats of steel  
silently stalking their prey and closing in for the kill."**

**"They died as they lived unafraid, proud and free  
Putting all on the line to secure liberty."**

**"Their bones now rest in glory down in Neptune's hallowed ground  
But their souls stand tall at the right hand of God Awaiting the klaxon's  
next sound."**

**"So, it's more than a 'thing' that I wear on my chest It's a badge of the  
brave, proud and true.  
It's a tribute to those who have gone here before riding boats that are still  
overdue"**

"It's the "Dolphins" of a submariner worn proudly by the few who've qualified at every watch and touched every bolt and screw."

"They know the boat on which they sail like they know their very soul and through the fires of hell or the pearly gates they're ready for each patrol."

"But when in port they take great sport standing out from all the rest. For deep inside they burn with pride for the dolphins on their chest."

Then he stood erect, squared his hat and pulled his neckerchief down to the 'V'  
He rolled down his cuffs, put his smokes in his sock and squinted back towards the sea.

"I can hear them diesels calling So I'd best be on my way.  
We'll be punchin' holes in the ocean when the sun peeks over the bay."

As I watched him turn and walk away I felt honored to know such men. for they bring life to Duty, Honor, Country these "Brothers of the 'Phin."

**Finally, to put everything here in the proper perspective, John 'TwoScoops' Eckard has penned a marvelous piece that, in spite of the 'jabs, barbs & harpoons' that boat sailors like to sling at each other, his poem pretty much says it all. Thanks John.**

## **THE FURY OF THE SUN** by John Eckard

They say we have it easy, and maybe they are right.  
We've never felt a depth charge, we've never seen a fight.  
We don't stink of diesel, we wash our clothes each week.  
The nukes will make us tons of water, our hull it doesn't leak.

The smokeboat sailors have their fun, they say no boomer's cool,  
"Hey squid can I come on your boat and swim around your pool?"  
They say we're soft, we'll never know, just what their boats went through  
to end a war they didn't start and wish they never knew.

Yes it's true, our fish stay dry, none pass the outer doors.  
But wasn't that the final goal of The War to End All Wars?  
So listen now, and listen well, we stand our watches well  
and if the time should ever come, we too, will face our hell.

**You did your job, you've earned our thanks, and the lessons that you taught  
are passed to each and every nub that thinks that he's so hot.  
His quals will be as tough as when you first filled out your card.  
No sleazy sigs will sully what was meant to be damned hard.  
For when those dolphins are tacked on, you know he'll beam with pride.  
And pass on those traditions of the men who fought and died.  
We share the tales we've heard from you, sometimes we change the names.  
But don't you ever start to think, we're out here playing games.**

**We might not have to close and shoot, a ship that's in our scope.  
Our mission differs from what you had, and so, you'd better hope,  
that in our life, your children's too, in fact, for long past that,  
that we will never get flash traffic with a message that  
cause birds, not fish, to swim away and bring their judgment down  
on an enemy that we've not seen, nor pinged with sonar sound.**

**For if we ever fire those shots and bring the fury of the sun  
to those who threaten you and yours, then our hell has just begun.  
You came back heroes to your homes, maybe greeted with a band.  
But we'll come back to nothing, no homes, no kids, no land.  
For our war will be the one that really is the end.  
It started with the fires of hell that we were told to send.**

**So go ahead and have your fun, we'll take on your best shot,  
but then go home, and go to sleep, our job is finished not.  
We'll just go on making more patrols, not much to do out here.  
Four knots to nowhere, punching holes in an ocean, without fear.**