



UNITED STATES SUBMARINE VETERANS INC. SEAWOLF BASE

Panama City, Fl

January
2023

"UP BUBBLE"

United States Submarine Veterans Creed

"To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of their duties while serving their country. That their dedication, deeds and supreme sacrifice be a constant source of motivation toward greater accomplishments. Pledge loyalty and patriotism to the United States of America and its Constitution."

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Lost Boat USS Scorpion SS278

Displacement 1475 tons (surf.), 2370 tons (subm.); length 307'; beam. 27'; speed 20k (surf.), 8.75k (subm.); test depth 300'; armament 1-3"/50 Cal. Deck gun, 6-21" torpedo tubes fwd., 4-21" torpedo tubes aft; complement 6 officers - 54 enlisted men; class "GATO"

Keel laid down by Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Kittery, ME, 20MAR42; Launched: 20JUL42; Sponsored by Miss Elizabeth T. Monagle; Commissioned: 1OCT42 with LCdr William N. Wylie in command.

Following further yard work and fitting out, USS SCORPION (SS-278) conducted shakedown operations off the southern New England coast during January 1943 and sailed for Panama in late February. In mid-March, she transited the canal, and, on the 24th, she arrived at Pearl Harbor. There, she underwent modifications which included the installation of a bathythermograph, a then new oceanographic instrument to enable her to locate and hide in thermal layers that minimized the effectiveness of SONAR equipment.

On 5 April, SCORPION departed Pearl Harbor for her first war patrol, a hunting and mining mission off the east coast of Honshu. On the 19th, she reached the mining area near Nakaminato. During the afternoon, she reconnoitered the coast; and, in the evening, she planted her mines; then retired to deep water. On the 20th, she sank her first enemy ship, a 1,934-ton converted gunboat. On the 21st, prior to 0100, she fired on and destroyed her first sampan in surface action, then moved up the coast to observe the fishing grounds, shipping lanes, and coastline of the Shioya Saki area. On the night of the 22nd, she destroyed three more sampans with

Lost Boats for the Month

January

USS Scorpion SS278	6 Jan. '44
USS Argonaut SS166	10 Jan. '43
USS Swordfish SS193	12 Jan. '45
USS S-36 SS141	20 Jan. '42
USS S-26 SS131	24 Jan. '42



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Coming Events

21 Jan. 2023 - 1400
Business Meeting
American Legion Post #392
535 Oak St.
Panama City

18 Feb. 2023 - 1300
Luncheon
Location
T B D



Lost Boat USS Scorpion SS278

gunfire and continued north, toward Kinkasan To.

With the absence of shipping along the coastal lanes, she moved seaward and, on the 27th, sighted a convoy of four freighters escorted by a destroyer. At 0459, she fired four torpedoes at the first and largest merchantman; two at the second; then dived and rigged for depth charging. At 0505, the destroyer dropped her first depth charges. A half-hour later, the Japanese warship broke off her search for SCORPION to aid the stricken passenger-cargo ship. While SCORPION escaped with slight damage, the 6,380-ton merchant vessel sank.

On the 28th, SCORPION received orders home. En route on the 29th, she sighted and engaged a 100-ton patrol vessel, which she left burning to the waterline. On the morning of the 30th, she stalked, fired on, and finally torpedoed and sank a 600-ton patrol ship. During the hour and three-quarters fight, however, SCORPION received her first casualty. LCdr R. M. Raymond, on board as prospective commanding officer, was hit and killed by gunfire.

Soon after the patrol vessel went down, an enemy plane appeared. SCORPION submerged; survived the plane's depth charges and continued toward Midway and Pearl Harbor, arriving on 8 May.

With a 4" gun in place of her 3" gun, SCORPION set out on her second war patrol on 29 May. On 2 June, she refueled at Midway and, on the 21st, she arrived off Takara Jima in the Tokara Gunto. For the next week, she searched for targets in that archipelago in an effort to disrupt shipping on the Formosa-Nagasaki routes. On the 28th, she shifted her hunt to the Yellow Sea and, by the 30th, was off the Shantung Peninsula. On 3 July, she sighted a five-freighter convoy with one escort making its way through the eastern waters of that sea. By 0955, she had sent torpedoes toward the convoy and dived. As the depth charging began, she struck bottom at 25 fathoms. Two charges exploded close by. Between 1002 and 1006, five more shook her hull. Fearing that she was stirring up a mud trail, her screws were stopped and she settled on the bottom at 29 fathoms. At 1008, a chain or cable was dragged over her hull. Four minutes later, her hull was scraped a second time. Immediately underway again, she began evasive course changes and escaped further exploding charges. The hunt continued for over an hour; and, at 1149,



All indications point to the loss of the USS Scorpion SS278 was due to hitting a mine.

SCORPION came to periscope depth; spied the destroyer 7,000 yards off; and cleared the area. Postwar examination of Japanese records show that SCORPION scored five hits and sank a 3,890-ton freighter, and a 6,112-ton passenger-cargo ship.

Because of damage received during the depth charging, SCORPION retraced her route through Tokara Gunto; underwent a bomber attack east of Akuseki Jima; and continued on to Midway. On 26 July, she arrived back at Pearl Harbor; underwent repairs conducted training exercises, and, on 13 October, departed Pearl Harbor for her third war patrol.

After touching at Midway on 17 October, she headed for the Marianas, where she reconnoitered Pagan and Agrihan Islands on the 25th and 26th, and Farallon de Pajaros on the 1st and 2nd of November. On the last date, she struck an uncharted pinnacle; but suffering no apparent damage, continued her patrol. On 3 November, she was off Maug; and, two days later, she sighted her first target, a Mogami-class cruiser. Squalls interfered, however, and she abandoned the target after a four-hour chase. On the 7th, she was back off Agrihan; and, on the 8th, she closed a freighter, which turned and gave chase. The freighter was a "Q" ship, a warship disguised as a merchantman. Unable to regain the advantage, SCORPION retired.

Poor weather continued to plague the submarine's hunting until, on the 13th, she sighted a freighter and a tanker escorted by three warships. Firing her torpedoes, she scored on the oiler, which went dead in the water. One of the escorts dropped depth

charges, then rejoined the formation.

On the 14th, SCORPION patrolled near Rota; and, on the 15th, she watched for targets off Saipan. For the next week, the submarine continued to work the shipping lanes of the Marianas without success. Heavy seas and squalls continued to shelter enemy traffic.

On the 22nd, she sighted a transport accompanied by two destroyers and a corvette. She stalked the formation for 16 hours but was unable to fire. A few hours later, low on fuel, she headed home.

Departing Pearl Harbor on 29 December 1943, USS SCORPION (SS-278) stopped at Midway to top off with fuel, and left that place on 3 January 1944 to conduct her fourth war patrol during WWII. Her assigned area was in the northern East China and Yellow Seas.

On the morning of 5 January, SCORPION reported that one of her crew had sustained a fracture of the upper arm and requested a rendezvous with USS HERRING (SS-233) which was returning from patrol and was near her. The rendezvous was accomplished on the afternoon of 5 January but heavy seas prevented the transfer. HERRING reported this fact on 6 January, and stated "SCORPION reports case under control." SCORPION was never seen or heard from again after her departure from that rendezvous. On 16 February 1944, USS STEELHEAD (SS-280) and SCORPION were warned that they were close together, and that an enemy submarine was in the vicinity.

No information has been received from

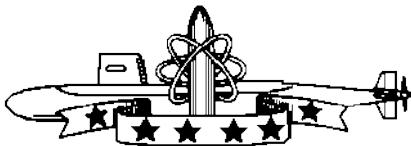
Lost Boat USS Scorpion SS278

the Japanese which would indicate that SCORPION's loss was the result of enemy anti-submarine tactics. There were, however, several mine lines across the entrance to the Yellow Sea. The presence of these mine lines and the "restricted area" bounding them was discovered from captured Japanese Notices to Mariners at a much later date. In the meantime several submarines had made patrols in this area, crossing and recrossing the mine lines without incident, and coming safely home. It is probable that these mine lines were very thin, offering only about a 10 percent threat to submarines at maximum, and steadily decreasing in effectiveness with the passage of time. SCORPION was lost soon after these mines were laid, or at a time when they presumably offered the greatest threat.

She could have been an operational casualty, but her area consists of water shallow enough so that it might be expected that some men would have survived. Since we know of no survivors, the most reasonable assumption is that she hit a mine.

SCORPION earned three battle stars for her World War II service.

*Compiled from
"Dictionary of American
Naval Fighting Ships,"
- Navy Department;
and
"UNITED STATES NAVAL
SUBMARINE FORCE INFORMATION
BOOK"
-- J. Christley*



Commander's Corner

A new year is here. As a USSVI Base I guess we held on in 2022. I think one of the biggest things that bothered me about 2022 was losing several members to Eternal Patrol and, in each case, we only knew of their passing a year or two after the fact. This is not right.

For those that have volunteered to participate in the Base's Call Program you must pursue your assigned Call List duties with much more added emphasis. So, when contacting your folks don't settle for giving the "well I called and didn't get an answer" or "the phone number was

disconnected" explanations. The Call program is not to simply call members that live close. It's not to just notify members of coming events. It is to develop a meaningful relationship.

Your calls should be, of course to remind them of upcoming events, but also to find out how they are doing. How their family is doing. To see if they need any help. And of course, to share a sea story or two. Basically, our Call Program is designed to get that member to feel a part of this unique organization. Remember, we are all not those spry, energetic dynamos we use to be. We must better manage and utilize our Call Program in 2023 to result in having a better turn out at functions, to not be shocked or embarrassed to find a member had died one or two years before we actually knew and to more importantly develop closer friendships.

As for our membership ranks, our numbers have dwindled a bit. As mentioned, we've lost ones that departed on Eternal Patrol. Some have gone due to relocation, one because it seemed as if we didn't do anything, or some had quit just because they didn't want to participate.

There are USSVI programs that exist for its bases to mingle in the local community. Should it be the *Kaps for Kids* or the *Eagle Scout* programs, another USSVI program or a project we may come up with locally, we need to engage and make it work.

During the coming months, I, with the help of our Board of Directors, will be introducing such ideas. But it will take this crew to make it happen. Everyone, including myself, uses the excuse "we're getting old" as an explanation for not being active. But no matter what the excuse the real reason we haven't been engaging is because we've been uninspired, lazy, or just didn't give a shit. I know no one walked around their boat uninspired. If you did there would have been some crusty old chief offering to put his boot up yourr ass. We didn't sit around the boat showing signs of laziness – again you would meet some positive leadership head on. And - look out if you were labeled as lazy – you would more likely be shown the door. Well, of course we all are those crusty old chiefs now. So, the drive and desire for whatever we tackle is still in us – we just need to get it off the shelf.

Another topic that has bothered me is how we conduct ourselves as individuals at times. It's not possible to think a group of such "seasoned" veterans are without their own ideas about anything and everything. What we must do is not voice our thoughts about politics or religion. Period! Doing so could lead to disagreements that may not be easily brushed

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off. Strict adherence to staying totally away from off the cuff comments in regard to politics or religion must be insisted on at Seawolf Base functions. So please consider your shipmate during the upcoming year. They may not agree with your ideas. Keep those unwanted thoughts to yourself.

I am positive 2023 will be a great year. What I would most like from each of you is your participation. Please join our functions. Please express your ideas. Please contribute to whatever we involve ourselves in. And do your part in attracting new membership. Wear your dolphins. Carry the Pamphlets that Dan O'Dwyer has kindly developed. We'll have a stash of them soon so when we get them put some in your car, have them ready and give them out as you find new members. Remember membership is not limited to only Submariners. We can sign up those that have or do support our submarine world.

January 21 is our next regularly scheduled membership meeting. See you there.

George Hackett - Base Commander

**Happy Birthday
January**

**Jennifer Bannister - 11th
"Dutch" Prager - 14th**

**Looking for a new Lada, or why
a US submarine hunter might be
flying over the Baltic Sea**

Flight radar websites show that a U.S. Navy submarine-hunting aircraft flew from either the U.S. or Scotland to the Baltic Sea on Tuesday. As of Tuesday afternoon eastern time, the P-8 Poseidon is flying circuits over the Baltic Sea.

It's possible that the maritime surveillance aircraft is simply training or gathering intelligence on surface vessels of Russia's Baltic Fleet. But it may be monitoring a Russian submarine that has been conducting trials in the Baltic Sea. The Kronshtadt is the first of a new version of Russia's Lada-class diesel-electric attack submarine. Extremely quiet, Kronshtadt will operate under command of Russia's Northern Fleet. That will likely see Kronshtadt act as a screening unit to defend Russian ballistic missile submarines in the Arctic and Barents seas from US and British attack submarines attempting

cont'd on page 6

Silently. Quickly. By Sea, in Darkness.

How U.S. Submarines Helped Special Troops Destroy Enemy Supply Lines in the Korean War

Part Two

USS Juneau Performs Raid Close to the Target Area

The solution to the problem of accurately and efficiently attacking North Korean railways nestled in the coastline mountains came from the executive officer of the USS Juneau (CL 119), Commander W. B. Porter. On the night of July 11, 1950, Porter, a demolition expert, and eight other crewmen attacked the east coast rail lines in the area of Rashin.

Porter and his men transferred to the USS Mansfield (DD 728), which took them within two miles of the coast of the target area. Using a whaleboat, the 10 men, armed with charges, detonators, carbines, maps, compasses, and walkie-talkie radios, paddled ashore. The group placed the demolition charges in a train tunnel, which blew up a train after the party departed.

The success of this raid gave genesis to the Special Operations Group (SOG) on August 6, 1950, which was tasked with the mission to continue such demolition raids against North Korean rail lines. The SOG used the First Marine Reconnaissance Company and Underwater Demolition Team One from surface vessels called fast-transports (APDs) to conduct similar missions. On August 8, 1950, the USS Perch arrived in Yokosuka, Japan, to participate in these special demolition operations. Upon arrival, the crew of the Perch learned that their detachment of Marines was being reassigned to their regiment at the Pusan Perimeter. This left a transport submarine without anyone to transport.

The Navy attempted to find a suitable replacement for the Marines who had trained on the Perch. First, they assigned a detachment from UDT 1. After a short training period, the two groups synched and were ready for their first mission against the North Koreans. But UDT 1 was assigned to another mission and flown to Korea. The next two candidates were two Army special activities companies. Lt. Comdr. Robert Quinn, the commander of the Perch, had a lukewarm opinion of them: "They came to us recommended as real 'hot shots'. They were not as inspired or as well trained as the UDT's or U.S. Marines but by the end of the week they were fairly proficient in debarking from Perch."

But as with UDT 1, the two Army units were reassigned to other missions. At the end of August, 17 British volunteer raiders were invited aboard for a one-day demonstration. They conducted a few disembarking drills and were shown the submarine and outboard boats. On September 18, the 67-man unit of the 41st Independent Royal Marine Commandos reported aboard at Camp McGill, Japan.

British Commandos Learn American Ways

The 41st Independent Royal Marine Commandos, a 300-man British brigade size unit, was an unusual group, and the use of "Independent" in the name denotes the haste in which the unit was formed. The new unit of Royal Marines was composed of three groups: volunteers and reservists in the United Kingdom, volunteers from the sailors and Marines from the British Pacific fleet, and reinforcements bound for Malaysia to combat the communist insurgency in the Malayan Emergency. The first group that was organized in England was flown to Japan dressed in civilian clothes to disguise their true purpose.

The Marine commandos were placed under the operational control of the U.S. Navy and were assigned to report to Camp McGill, Japan, for training with the Perch. The commander of the new commando unit was Lt. Col. Douglas B. Drysdale, a seasoned officer in the Royal Marines and a veteran of World War II, having served as a commando in the Far East.

In addition to training on how to embark and disembark from the Perch, the Marine commandos had to become familiar with American small arms and equipment. It was agreed between the British and the Americans that the commandos should use the same weapons being used by the U.S. Marines and U.S. Army. The commandos also learned to use the standard American issue SCR 536 short-range radio (an oversized handset with a pull-out antenna) and the SCR 300 net set radio. Lt. Commander Quinn was impressed with the commandos' "can do" attitude and their quick adaptation to American equipment and to life aboard a submarine.

The 41st Commandos and the Perch went on several amphibious landing exercises during the one-week training period, which included a full-scale simulated demolition raid.

The Royal Marines and the crew of the Perch appeared to get along. The commandos remarked on the quality of submarine food, stating that "one of the steaks is a week's meat ration in England." Typically the commandos averaged about six eggs for breakfast.

While ashore on liberty after the full-scale exercise, the crew of the Perch were made honorary members of the Chowder, Marching, Singing and Shakespeare Society, celebrating through the streets around Camp McGill until 1:30 a.m., which inspired a few "conversations" at the officers club.

Before the training got under way and even before the Royal Marines arrived, the particulars of the mission for the undersea raiding force had to be determined. In July 1950, top commanders established several joint target zones along the east coast of North Korea where there were vulnerable railroad lines that were a direct conduit from the Soviet Union to North Korea. To plan out the raids, Far East Command sent the USS Pickerel (SS 524) to photograph prospective sites in August. From that photoreconnaissance mission, four target sites were prioritized in the Perch's operational plan.

Perch, British Commandos Scrub a First Attempt

The mission parameters listed four targets that the undersea raiders were to attack during their patrol. The Perch was to first conduct a reconnaissance of the target areas and, working with Drysdale, determine the best means to deploy the commandos against the desired objectives.

On September 25, the Perch and her undersea raiding force set sail toward her patrol area. On the night of September 30, the Perch arrived at the first target area, and the commandos prepared to make their first demolition raid.

The previous day, Quinn had received a dispatch warning that there could be mines and not to go beyond the 50-fathom curve. That meant the submarine had to stay offshore about four miles, or where the depth was about 50 fathoms or deeper, where there was less likelihood of sea mines. In the morning they inspected their target area, a railroad bridge. The smoke of a passing train was seen as a good sign.

The Perch stationed herself more than four and a half miles off the shore, and just before seven in the evening, the submarine surfaced and the crew began to prepare for that night's raid. The crew inflated the seven rubber boats, and at 7:30 the Perch lowered her aft end to launch the skimmer from the hangar section.

This was where the problems began.

The skimmer's outboard motor would not start. The engine apparently got flooded and failed to turn over.

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While the maintenance crew worked on the skimmer, the officers on the bridge observed the landing area. First, an enemy patrol boat transited the landing area. Then lights appeared at either end of the bridge, and then suddenly they went out. Two trucks appeared on the beach of the landing area. Soon after the lights of the trucks went out, a myriad of smaller lights went out across the beach all at the same time. Quinn determined that the North Koreans had picked them up on radar after surfacing and set up a trap.

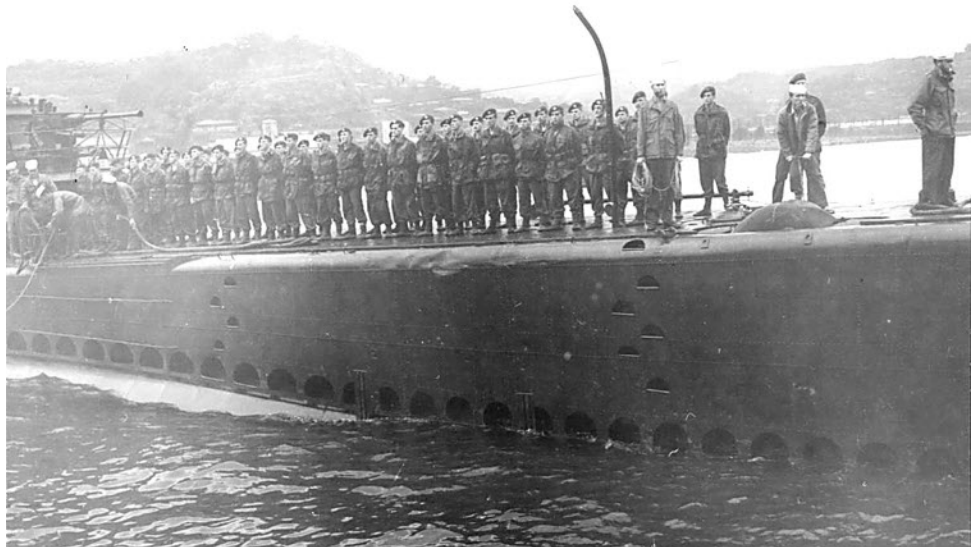
He called off the raid, and crew and commandos packed everything back up. It was fortuitous that the skimmer's engine failed that night because the commandos would have landed right in the middle of a well-laid ambush.

After getting the equipment stowed away, Quinn, Drysdale, and their officers began to consider their options for the next target the following night. The new plan included two destroyers, with one going south to create a diversion while the other stayed with the Perch to provide cover fire for the landing force if needed.

On the night of October 1, the Perch chose a second target, a few miles north and east of the previous night's landing area. At 7:30 p.m., the USS Herbert J. Thomas began a diversionary mission and was ready to attack any patrol craft coming out of Shoko-Do. The Perch and the USS Maddox proceeded to their position off of the landing area. The Maddox, which was 4,000 yards to the west of the Perch, was to fire only if the landing got into trouble.

At 7:45 p.m., before surfacing, the Perch spotted a patrol boat through the periscope responding to the diversion created by the Herbert J. Thomas. The diversion appeared to be successful, and the new landing area was clear. The submarine surfaced and got the undersea raiding force off to their one and only demolition raid from the Perch. As the commandos set about their work on shore, Quinn and the crew of the Perch, listening to activity ashore over the radio, felt the tension rise, and those on the bridge of the submarine could see sporadic gun flashes and roving lights. In his description in the patrol report, Quinn remarked on his sense of powerlessness while gaining ever more respect for the Royal Marines.

When the commandos were retrieved at 2:39 a.m. on October 2, the raiders reported that the North Koreans were building pill-



The commandos remarked on the quality of submarine food, stating that "one of the steaks is a week's meat ration in England."

boxes along the coast in this sector. The raids had had their effect, causing the North Koreans to divert men and material from the front to address the clandestine attacks from the sea. The Maddox reported hearing an additional explosion after the raiding force left the beach, and it was thought that one of the mines left in the tunnels had gone off.

USS Perch and the Commandos Return for New Assignments

With the cancellation of the attacks on the remaining targets, the destroyers sailed off to complete their sweeping patrol, and the Perch with her Royal Marines returned to Japan for new assignments. The British commandos continued to conduct raids until November 1950, when the weather turned too cold to conduct such raids, and United Nations Forces were pushing the North Koreans up toward the Yalu River. The Commandos then played an important role in the tactical retreat at Chosin Reservoir and the evacuation at Hungnam when the Chinese joined the fray in force in December 1950.

Lt. Colonel Drysdale and the others of the 41st Independent Royal Marine Commandos who served on the USS Perch were surprised that they had been so quickly recommended for awards. Quinn recommended several of the Royal Marines for medals and letters of commendation. Cyrus Cole, commander of Submarine Division 31, put forth a formal letter requesting that Drysdale and Marine Peter Jones be awarded the Silver Star. Several others received the Bronze Star with Combat "V," and several more received letters of commendation. The Silver Star, along

The Silver Star, along with the White Ensign that had covered his body, was presented to Marine Peter Jones's mother.

The Perch, now without a mission, was recalled to Yokosuka, Japan, where the 41st Commandos and the Perch parted company. She would not be used again in this capacity during wartime until the Vietnam War in 1965. Commander Cole remarked in his endorsement of the Perch's patrol report that the transport submarine was the "beginning of a new phase in submarine warfare . . . in which a submarine designed for a special purpose other than attack by torpedoes has been put to offensive use."

Following the demolition raid by undersea raiders from the USS Perch, the Navy had to reevaluate the transport submarine concept and address the problems that occurred during the mission in Korea. The hazards of not having a mine detector on a transport submarine was identified in 1948 as a problem that jeopardized beach reconnaissance missions and clandestine raids. Two years later, the problem had still not been fixed. The experience of the Perch and the undersea raiders in Korea had shown how far out at sea a transport submarine had to go to achieve her mission and to avoid sea mines.

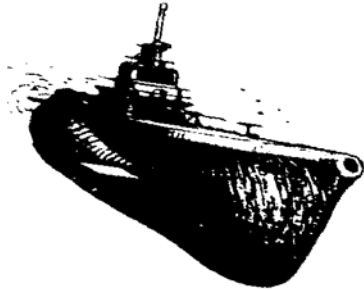
Another issue was enemy radar. On the night of September 30, the Perch had been discovered even though she was four miles out, and the North Koreans were able to quickly lay a trap for the raiders. The proliferation of radar technology since World War II was beginning to undermine the

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stealth of submarines and hamper surface-launched raiders. Finally, the "Undersea Raiding Force" itself was an issue. Since World War II and again in the Korean War, Adm. A. W. Radford, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, believed that the raiding force of a transport submarine should be part of the submarine crew. This innovation has never really taken hold, although today there are special units of U.S. Navy SEALs that specialize in submarine operations.

For their effort and being the first submarine to launch an attack against the enemy since World War II, the USS Perch and her crew were awarded the Submarine Combat Insignia. It award was one of only two such awards issued during the Korean War.

-- National Archives - Prologue Magazine



Looking for a new Lada, or why a US submarine hunter might be flying over the Baltic Sea

to track them. This cat-and-mouse game is the centerpiece of NATO's nuclear deterrent strategy. It is thus a critical U.S. military priority that its forces can identify, track and, if necessary, destroy these Russian forces.

That brings us back to the P-8 Poseidon.

While excellent at tracking surface vessels, the P-8 is the world leader in tracking underwater contacts. Dropping sonobuoys that listen for a submarine's movement and other emanations, the P-8 is also equipped with an array of other sensors including advanced radar and infrared systems. These allow it to detect unusual fluctuations on the water's surface, submarine periscopes, and submarine power emissions. That makes the P-8 particularly useful for tracking very quiet submarines like the Kronshtadt. And with the Kronshtadt engaged in sea trials to test out various elements of its systems, it presents a priceless intelligence-gathering target. The Kronshtadt includes highly classified Russian naval developments, so if the U.S. can gain insight into how these

systems work, NATO can better plan to deal with the Lada class in the future.

Such preparation is sensible. While Russian ground and air forces are performing disastrously in Ukraine (with worse yet to come), Russian submarine forces have made major advances in recent years. These forces are now operating further away from Russian waters and sometimes in a very bold manner. While the U.S. currently retains the edge in undersea military operations, operating against the most capable Russian submarines affords valuable high-challenge/stress training for P-8 crews in anticipation of an increasingly likely conflict with China. The People's Liberation Army-Navy is investing heavily in its own undersea forces, after all.

But whatever the P-8 is doing over the Baltic Sea, there's one final point to note. Namely, the question as to why, yet again, is it the U.S. that must provide these military capabilities and not European powers? It's a familiar question with an unfortunate answer.

-- Washington Examiner

Submariner Humor

Submarine Superman

So... what is it, exactly, that makes a veteran - a submarine veteran in particular - different? Well, gather round, lads and lasses, and I'll share you a tale...

Dateline: 1987-ish

Location: undisclosed submerged area of operations, North Atlantic. ...ish

You can mess with a lot of things in a submariner's life, and he will simply gripe about it and move along. Extend a run by two weeks. We already expected it. Commence field day? Already have a cleaning spot picked out, a plan for a nap. Want to send me up topside in a blizzard? Set fire to the galley? Fry electronics by taking a wave over the sail on the surface? Clog the sanitary systems? Poison the air requiring all hands use emergency air breathing masks plugged into a plumbed network of air lines? That's what they pay us for. Bring it on.

But there's some things they don't pay enough for. High up on that list is bad or no movies.

This is how the rules read: If you don't have a genuine emergency, mission, or better idea (read: liberty port) don't mess with movie night. Do not break the machine. Do not break the film (or tape). Do not turn the mess decks lights on in the middle of the movie.

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And above all, do not mess with the movie storage locker or contents. There'd better be a full loadout, functionally watchable, and preferably entertaining.

Now of course, there is a wicked little paradox here: the only thing worse you can do to a submariner than mess with movie night is to make the rule that you can't mess with movie night.

See, here's the thing: behind the swagger, lack of decorum, and general sacrilege that oozes from each submariner, and freely flows when there's a crew of them, their general disregard and heathenish ways only seem faithless to others. The submariner's creed, "we are the crew, we are the ship" completely excludes reverence for the silly decorum of others. That irreverence isn't a byproduct. It is a critically functional facet of a mindset formed in an environment unimaginable to most people. "Nothing is sacred" is a sacred codex.

And so the deadly game of survival underwater inevitably requires shenanigans, just to get the irreverence flowing and all warmed up...

The run to our undisclosed location was slow. The operation was mind-numbingly boring to 90% of the crew. And so, the movies began once shakedown, drills, field day, and all the stuff we do getting settled into a deployment is under control.

I remember the exact moment this transition took place. I was basking in the downtime of taking my turn as aux operator in Sonar. We rotated in on the main sonar stack (listening post) periodically, then out to take a little while to rest the eyes and ears. The aux operator was the spare man, the guy free to move about the cabin. The one guy available to fetch coffee while he's out of the shack. And in this capacity, I had just exited the shack headed toward the ladder down toward the mess decks. The predictable but loud thrum of the inside of the submarine was suddenly punctuated by a peculiarly angry voice.

"The Care Bears Movie?!"

Now at this point I want to acknowledge and guide the two types of people still reading this far: the first type will assume I have reported what was actually said, and that was that.

Why, bless your little ol' hearts.

The second group will understand, to varying degrees based on experience, that more was said, that it was vulgar, and therefore either needlessly confusing to the uninitiated or fully implied and understood

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Submariner Humor

to those who are wise in the ways of sailors.

I'm not saying the feelings being emoted were unholy. I'm just saying I suspect the ensuing Cosmic Blush caused the 400-cycle bus to dip a few hertz in shame, heaving an acoustically-detectable electronic sigh into the Deep.

See, before every deployment, some young buck gets awarded the privilege of anonymously accompanying the Supply Officer to Squadron, where he could help choose the movies we'd take to sea. What was chosen was chosen, there was no arguing the titles once the hatch closed and we submerged into the Darkness of the Big Bathtub. By some sort of cosmic law probably related to penance for our vocabulary, it was understood to be also forbidden to just "not watch" a movie taken onboard for deployment. If one movie were to get watched, they all had to get watched (you see how that "one crew - one screw theme keeps coming back?).

The outcry I heard was not one of disgust from a qualified Submariner, but one of qualified horror.

Sure enough, our mystery sailor had put the Care Bear Movie into the box with the others. Now, please don't try to wrap your head around why Squadron had stocked Care Bears in their library. I'm 35 years deep into this bizarre case, and still got nuthin'. It was just there, alright?

And of course, that meant it HAD to be watched.

This couldn't have happened even two years previous. Up till then, we used the old 16mm film projectors. In the Eighties, this meant a harsh demarcation of available movie titles. On film, we got older movies, lots of B-grade material. On the new VHS Format, suddenly Care Bears was possible.

And now, by virtue of its malevolent presence, required.

Dear friend, we had a term for something tested to extremes, that came from the mechanical type rates. We would say we "Hydro'd" a thing to indicate it had endured extreme testing conditions. In the spirit of what can only be described as rhapsodic resignation, we embraced this Care Bears. It was screened at least twice a day for two weeks.

In recounting this tale, it is at this moment that I suddenly hesitate to bring you, dear reader, further into the ebullient cesspool of Submarine humour. But I can't leave you hanging either, now can I. I'm just saying Let it now be known that you have been warned.

Our uniform at sea is referred to as a "poopy-suit." A one-piece easy-in, easy-out garment with a single zipper from neck to the netherworld built especially to enable a sailor to quickly go from sleeping to fighting for survival, unhampered by the one thing he never had to begin with, modesty issues. It is equally conducive to the semi-conscious divestiture by an exhausted sailor who has spent the last 3 days in arduous testing, or nail-biting suspense. The last thing a bone-weary sailor needs is complicated clothing.

By the Official Manual of Uniform Regulations, beneath the poopy suit was to be worn a white t-shirt and underwear. By the Eighties, the t-shirt was often a printed shirt, a personal and as vulgar a message as the times allowed. Of course, no one knew whether you had a plain white t-shirt or not unless you zipped down the poopy suit a bit.

As the hydro-testing of the Care Bears exuberantly continued, there came a point when things suddenly went from darkly hilarious to diabolically collaborative. And it all started with Pink Floyd.

As many qualified, off-duty submariners as could were lounging Conspiratorially on the mess decks for screening #45 of "A Care Bear Movie", when someone up front suddenly had an epiphany. As behind him Care bears were glowing a rainbow beam at some evil-doer meany-doo-doo-head, he seductively unzipped his poopy suit in front of us down to his navel. He stretched it aside to reveal his Pink Floyd "Dark Side of the Moon" prism t-shirt. It was perfect. How perfect? Well I'll tell you. In two watches, a matter of 12 hours, we went from a boat-full of submariners obsessed with Care Bears to actually believing we WERE Care Bears.

We all had different names and powers though. In addition to "dark side of the moon" beam, there was AC/DC's "Highway to Hell", Rolling Stone's giant Tongue, Cuervo Gold, Jack Daniels, Triumph motorcycle on a highway... you get the idea. Things with a hint of being worthy of becoming a "Stare" came out from the woodwork. These became our mythical superpowers. We would unzip and expose our tummies at hilariously awkward conversational moments. Passing each other in the passageways, which required the two parties turn sideways and slide past, became fodder for coy, often lewd

insinuations based on our particular hidden "Stare". It evolved into a friendly challenge - woe be to you if you were caught in a challenge with a plain white t-shirt. Well, until one guy turned it into "Blinded by the Light".

That was a stroke of genius right there. But as childishly silly as most of it was, there were other moments. One torpedo man had a flag shirt - just a simple one mind you, nothing garish. We would kazoo-choir our way through a shortened rendition of the star-spangled banner, suddenly a little awkward and maybe a little moved at the displayed patriotism. An ET had a print of John Holland, an iconic image of the inventor and founder of modern submarines. His "stare" was generally met with a respectful grunt of acknowledgment, as if his opponent was grudgingly acknowledging having been trumped.

Mine, or at least my favorite of what I had available that run, was a "Keep on Truckin'" shirt. Whenever space allowed, I'd always strike the pose, ya' know, one foot impossibly extended forward creating the illusion of a giant step being taken. That was my Stare, and it was used to convey reaching a little further than you thought you could. I didn't mean it to be entirely serious, but the element of genuine encouragement stood fast. By the time we stationed the inbound maneuvering watch, I had it perfected.

And so it came to be on a cool September morning as we were bumped and nudged and coddled up towards the pier by the tug, all the aft line-handlers, yours truly included, greeted and encouraged our pier-side counterparts with our new communication skills, successively beaming them our particular "Stare". I even struck my most dramatic "Keep on Truckin'" pose yet, what with not being inside the boat and all, but ya' know, they just weren't pickin' up what we were layin' down.

We finally gave up, to attend to that which stood between us and getting off the boat and off to our families or, well, wherever the boat wasn't. We reminded ourselves a little, but not terribly too late, that when in the sunshine, we had to at least try to act like the other sun-walkers. We ahemed and coughed our way back in juvenile seriousness to a modicum of decorum just in time for the colors to shift from the bridge to the aft deck where we stood, as the final act of transitioning from

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underway to officially in-port.

As we all snapped to salute the colors, wouldn't you know it, there stood our torpedo man, giving his surreptitious stare with one hand exposing his Care-Bear Stare chest flag, eyes locked straight into the eyes of the Ship's stars and stripes. It was in that beautiful moment that I realized that the warped, defiant, oppositional and sometimes arrogant mind of a US Submariner is a National Treasure, capable of Care-Bear Staring down the Enemy and the Sea he tries to hide in, armed with nothing but a t-shirt and a poopy-suit to load it into for launching.

You cannot win against this.

--Author Unknown

*Happy New
Year!*

