

Whitey's Talk at 2009 San Diego USS Skipjack SSN-585 Reunion

It is summer of 1962 and I'm crossing America from Washington state to Connecticut on old US 30. This is with orders to USS Tullibee SSN-597 and after my second time through A1W reactor plant training in Idaho. Wyoming is wide with lots of sagebrush, Nebraska is wider and corn fields start in middle and end in Pennsylvania. Wound up in Portsmouth Naval Shipyard on Skipjack (Tullibee wouldn't keep me because I didn't go to S1C reactor and Thresher didn't need me). I walked past ballistic missile sub 617 being built, past 585 in drydock with gobs of hoses, cables and lines (pretty messy looking), but then I saw the living barge. It had a sign USS SKIPJACK-SSN 585 WORLD'S FASTEST SUBMARINE and I felt real proud then.

I'm honored and fortunate to be here and wish to thank the commissioning crew members for giving the next crew a darn good boat. The first crew always determines whether a boat will be "good or bad". They had to put up with lots of high ranking visitors so plenty of field day and cleanup. Anyone remember those?

How do you get to be a submariner: 1. Be Semi-intelligent 2. Volunteer 3. Get accepted (some surface YN or PN says Duh, guy must be nuts, whoomp goes rubber stamp/Approved! 4. Lots of training.

By fall 1962 we had made a Mediterranean run where I saw Pisa (climbed the tower) and Florence, lost Von Forrell in a La Spezia bar after too much rum and coke (first and last rum for me). The shore patrol captured me while looking for him. They brought me back before midnight. We had cinderella liberty of course. Shore patrol brought him back about 0200 and he wound up restricted. His story was he was looking for me. That episode caused him to change my nickname from Whitey to White Rat. Later it was just plain Rat and later still Chief Rat. But his restriction ended in Naples and we didn't go on liberty together. There I got to visit Pompeii ruins and see cart tracks worn into street stones. Our last port was Toulon, France where a certain EM1 tripped on curb, stumbled forward and slammed hand through plate glass window of a bar. He only had one witness that he actually tripped. Had to find doctor fast. Then we went to sea and cranked up to Flank speed after Gibraltar and made "Fastest Submerged Transit of Atlantic" a record that stood for over 20 years until broken by a 688 class boat. We were hustling to join the naval blockade of Cuba. Although we rapidly loaded out in New London and were ready, we didn't go.

My first CO was Les Kelly and I sat across the green table in wardroom 3 times in one week for Captain's Masts, 1st result Summary Court Martial. I whined to my Chief and Chief of Boat Pudgy Welsh. They got me another visit. This time no court Martial. 3rd time I got a suspended bust from ETR2(SS) to third class. All I had done was throw a trash can into street. Maybe some drinking had occurred, I was just transiting across Bank Street from Ernie's to Tiny's Heat Wave!

1st XO= LCDR Chewing-tall & steely eyed, "Run She May-Shine She Must. He talked to me in RC tunnel saying only two ways to go-up or down, better make up my mind fast. I did and matured somewhat. He retired as RADM.

1st Engineer LT Bernard M. "Bud" Kauderer-chain smoker, good engineer (retired as VADM), got us out

of Portsmouth in fall of 62 and well trained before next ENG. LT Alfred S. MacLaren-set a good example for personal physical fitness and was tough on "salt water verdigris". He qualified me as a Reactor Operator and may have been reluctant I let him down later on a Reactor Operator watch by causing an alarm when we increased speed. Jimmy Youngblood MMC(SS) (Plank Owner and only Enlisted EOOW) said "let go of the handle now". My first Incident Report.

Some other officers:

LT Ralph West-my 3rd Engineer-very organized, well liked & retired as RADM. I learned a great deal about proper paperwork from him. He took us through Refueling and SUBSAFE upgrade overhaul in Charleston. I won't talk about the spill or oil in an air system problems he has to endure there. Years later in late 80s, as a RADM, he had command of all San Diego submarine stuff in late 80 At that time I was Repair Production Manager on USS McKee AS-41 (which even though our newest tender, it's in mothballs now).

CAPT Paul Tomb-best Commanding Officer I ever served with in my 32 years. He also retired as a RADM. When I left Skipjack and the Navy in June 65 he said if I ever need help just call. I did later in Oct. because I had reenlisted in Portland, Or. and gotten orders to a "skimmer". He got them squashed and eventually I came back "home" to 585 in Chasn via 2 days on Shark in Norva. I arrived at morning quarters and was soundly jeered-dang, I felt welcome.

LT Ron Etchyson-11th Reactor Controls Division Officer for me. Good guy, but we had a long argument over one of the pressurizer panels, which he won because he was the O. He retired as a VADM and is in Zerk's home state of Tn.

We had some mighty good officers and chiefs and of course all First Class and below were EXCELLENT. My very best time was as a member of the "Goat Locker"-Chief's Quarters where Jim Bob Thomas improved my cribbage skill, Joe Lopez told me to quit all that running in place-he couldn't sleep and most of all Gary Brown explained how to make a One man sawmill. Took him several tries to get it through my head. He also taught me lots about repairing mechanical stuff (show and tell), as did so many others in M, E and A Divs.

Enlisted: Robert "Bobby" Dorman, Boonton NJ. We shared our personal troubles* and he helped me a lot and was another brain in RC Div besides Zerk. He got out and became a Geologist in Co. We figured out a whole resistor bank was open while running diesel on surface with no tea kettle. We were both still seconds and it was our first observation of a khaki "cluster". Joe Fennimore practiced his monkey skills doing troubleshooting and repairs.

Ralph "Beartracks" Brotherton- Electrician, Missourian, great cartoonist-some made the ship's newspaper, sure wish they were saved. My favorite was "chloride leeches" in Reserve Feed Tanks and a self portrait simply labeled "Tracks". Tracks was sitting against a tree on a creek bank with fishing pole in hand, straw hat on and grain stalk in his mouth.

Radioman Joe Heroux who slept behind the ELT shack door (3 bunks) with me and Pete Soccoco. They

rarely disturbed me and hopefully I was the same for them. The door was a slightly different story.

Will Parent-Electrician, liked Ramblers, we talked Studebakers and AMC cars at Reno in 2003. Now he's gone too soon.

Elmer "Prince Pure" Pringle, Engineman, won F word contest for most uses in one sentence. Terrible English but all of us understood him. Hard worker, gone now, but a Prince of a shipmate. Once in Bermuda NAS EM club he put hickies on ???s neck just before that person flew out to go home for "another baby girl being born". Had they been drinking ? Perhaps!

Bermuda is good place to get hull cleaned by little fish plus marine life to enter and foul sea water coolers. Some work required back in homeport, right M and A Divs?

Smiley Cochrane EM1(SS) plank owner and a genuine nice guy a couple axe handles wide. He whacked Prince Pure in head with hammer while coming up ladder from Lower Level Machinery Space. I slugged Smiley on shoulder and said "why did you do that"? Then realizing Smiley could crush me, I beat feet ashore in Ft. Lauderdale. He was in Duty Section so couldn't leave boat. Was my only time ashore there, just long enough for "Miles of Smiles" to cool. We RC Div. had "some" equipment problems which only Zerk could figure out were caused by one of those well thought out, pre tested Shipalts that we had installed before the trip.

Robert "Bob" Duschenau TM1(SS) helped me understand the torpedo room a lot better than on my 1st boat. He had a somewhat unusual nickname, and was pretty smart. He retired as an LDO Commander.

Russell Henkel-Wisc-came aboard as junior Sonarman and wound up retiring as a Master Chief. He probably has made more Northern runs than any other Sonarman in submarine force.

Donald Roy "Jake the Snake" Jacobsen-Pasco, Wa. EM1(SS) Snake? He was a bit thin. Now he's this sharp looking Master Chief running this Reunion for us. Along with Richard "Yogi Bear" Yoder-Ohio, I probably spent more time on watch with those two, both expert Throttlemen and Electric Plant Operators. Sometimes they were talkative and others not. I liked it both ways.

Fred "Foghorn" Ferguson MM1(SS) North Carolina, Somewhat enamored of himself. Some got even with him at poker where he usually donated. Foghorn was a good ELT making sure our reactor chemistry was "in spec."

"Joe" Funke, Torpedoman ,a very steady poker player (ask Foghorn) and you didn't want to mess with him on watch at Torpedo Room door when he was "carrying".

Peter Sococco SD1(SS), only man aboard with WWII submarine combat pin. A really nice Guamanian who took very good care of our officers. He demonstrated how to eat lobsters-head in left hand, tail in right, bend, snapping head off, suck open end in left hand. Green stuff is good. He holds the record for years on board.

ELT shack again-it doubled as Woody "Doc" Reed's office, medicine cabinet and sick call place. He took

very good care of us and made sure galley, scullery, cooks and mess cooks met cleanliness standards.

Tony Adams-he lived in there too, another good ELT, almost as gregarious as Foghorn. But he and Doc were always quiet behind the door.

Zerk-The one and only Robert "Bob" Mazurkiewicz, Reactor Operator, the second hardest man Whitey ever had to wake up, but probably smartest man on board. Refer back to Ft. Lauderdale trip. He even associated with Torpedomen. Wound up working for Atomic Energy Commission. Now back in Bristol, Tn.

Greg Sivik Meadville, Pa. Reactor operator and one of biggest guys aboard. He kept the Reactor Compartment air particle detector going for several years. He "owned" it, but you had to squeeze by to get from aft to forward or vice versa. Also drove a Corvair-hmm?

Ray Wilfong-Reactor Operator helped me learn more about Studebaker engines and stock car racing. Tony Adams has better stories on that. We got a new Copes-Vulcan SGWLC system and he and I trained on it then had to train others. He knew it so well he just took over. He wound up working for Mercury Marine in Wi. He drove an OHC Pontiac six with stock car flair.

Neal Schwantes, Fond du Lac Wi. and Gerald Goodoien, Apple Valley, Mn. They lived in the Lower Levels back aft and taught me about Feed and Condensate, Lube oil, Main Sea Water, Air Conditioning, Charging and Discharge Stations, etc.-enough so I qualified Machinery Watch Supervisor in late 64. Now it's called Engineering Watch Supervisor.

Frank Stroup, excellent Electronics tech who always has entertaining stories and we've kept in touch.

Gary Brown, McKenzie Falls Or. MMC(SS) Extremely talented machinist, welder, valve repairman. Once welded hole in main steam crossover valve at sea while it was blowing steam in overhead. Retired as a LT and once was on USS Gudgeon in Puget Shipyard same time as I was there as Nuclear Ship Supt. When visiting him, sure enough he's welding pipe hangers in Engineroom. He taught me valve lapping repairs such that in my whole career after 1970, nuclear valve repairs were main reason I advanced. He ran a one man fishing boat out of Brownsville, Wa into the wide Pacific the last time I saw him until this reunion.

OK, I'm leaving out lots of good sailors like "Sammy" Basilio, SD2 (SS), Gerald Johnston, Auxiliary man-he of the hydraulic dungarees and our good COB Pudgy-only he knows how much work it was to keep us out of trouble with the wardroom. Also a tip of the hat to all y'all Southerners on board like Bobby Gene "Dater" Dempsey and Don "Sidemeat" Yarbrough.

Some Questions:

What's an "ooley"? Where's the after battery well hatch located? Who was nicknamed "Fid" Do you remember nukes having to change ratings from Engineman to Machinist Mate and I.C. Electrician to Electronics Tech.? Did you sleep facing forward or aft in your bunk. Did you like big down angles?

Submarining is not for the weak of heart, but our officers and crew (you people) always brought us back

to the surface and home safely. Every one of you should be darn proud

Do you remember Quartermaster "Red" Callenberg-he who managed to fire off a .45 caliber round inside the sail and live to tell about it. He retired as a Master Chief. I'm sure none of us ever messed around with the pistol while on topside watch. Were you ever cold topside? How about inside the boat when seawater injection temperature was 28 degrees F. in Blue Nose waters?

I remember Red for something else. I brought this good looking lady named Marilyn from Camas, Wa. to a ship's dance in 64 wearing a green cocktail dress and that darn Red kept wanting to dance with her. I was getting upset. But fortunately I still have her right here.

Skipjack was good to me again in 1972 when I was Nuclear Repair Officer on sub tender USS L. Y. Spear. Had to repair valve XC-4 which involved installing a containment tent, setting up core removal cooling, partial drain of vessel, then repair valve with high Beta inside. Then restore everything to normal. Took me a month to write work procedure, gather and receipt inspect all materials and another month of 24 hr work supervision to do job. Some of you had to be involved. We saved gov't \$350 K and I made LTJG. That's enough bragging and BS, Thanks friends, it was an honor to serve with all y'all.