



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

Web Site: <http://www.usseaowl.com>

We still give a hoot!

March 2006 Issue



Shipmates & 1st mates

President's Message

2006 Reunion

Our next reunion will take place in Charleston, SC. Shipmates Walt Deal & Jerry Farr have taken the lead on this reunion, as they both live and work in the area. As with other reunions, I'm certain that this reunion will have much to see and do while visiting the area. We have set the date for this reunion as Oct 29 – Nov 2, 2006 at the Clarion Hotel Charleston International Airport. Their web site is <http://www.charlestonclarion.com/html/lobby.html>. Inform the desk clerk that you are with the USS Sea Owl Association. Room rates are \$74.00 per day, plus taxes. This room rate is available should shipmates want to arrive early or stay after reunion. Our hospitality room will be at the Clarion Hotel. We will have soda, beer & chips available

These dates coincide well with the SubVets of WWII memorial service held each year in St. Marys, GA, which is held during the first week of November. This would be to accommodate those shipmates that travel east from the west coast. Aside for a Dinner Banquet on Wednesday, November 2nd, scheduled events during this reunion are still in the planning stages. More information will be available in the June issue of Hooter Hilites issues as we near the reunion date.

The Balao class submarine USS Clamagore (SS 343) is one of the many Patriot's Point Naval and Maritime Museum attractions at Charleston. Arriving too late to serve in combat in World War II, Clamagore was modified in 1947 and again in 1962 into a FRAM II/GUPPY III submarine. The modifications to Clamagore included



a snorkel and a lengthened pressure hull to accommodate updated sonars and fire control systems. One of only nine boats converted to a Guppy III configuration, and the sole survivor of these vessels, Clamagore represents the continued adaptation and use of war-built diesel submarines by the Navy for the first two decades of the Cold War. The Guppy submarines, like Clamagore, comprised the bulk of the United States submarine force through the mid-1960s.

Clamagore is displayed along with the aircraft carrier Yorktown, the destroyer Laffey, and the Coast Guard Cutter Ingham. Recently added to the exhibits at Patriot's Point is the sail, fairwater planes

and top of the rudder of the USS Lewis and Clark (SSBN644) as a Cold War Submarine Memorial.

In addition, Charleston is now the home of the recovered Civil War Confederate submarine CSS Hunley. Limited tours are available on Saturdays and Sundays at this time, but tour schedules may well be expanded by the time of our reunion.

Charleston offers many other attractions of interest. Keep checking the Sea Owl web site for the latest information and updates on this reunion. If you have ideas or suggestions of tours or other events you would like to see scheduled, please let me know.

Groton Picnic:

This year's raffle item will be a Bose Wave Music radio, as pictured below. If you have never heard one of these radios, you are really missing something - they are superb quality radios.



Tickets are \$5.00 each or 5 for \$20.00; they can be purchased by sending a check payable to Ed Welch, 33 Waco Court, Groton, CT 06340-4719. Tickets will then have your name put on them and dropped into the box for drawing during our picnic in June of 2006. No tickets are returned to those buying tickets. This is open to shipmates, family members and friends. Pass the word around on this raffle - everyone will want a chance to win this great item. The dates for the 2006 Groton Picnic are June 11-13, 2006.

Since time is getting short before the picnic in June, you should buy your tickets soon. If sufficient tickets are not sold before the Groton picnic, the drawing will be done at the reunion in Charleston, SC in October.

2007 Reunion:

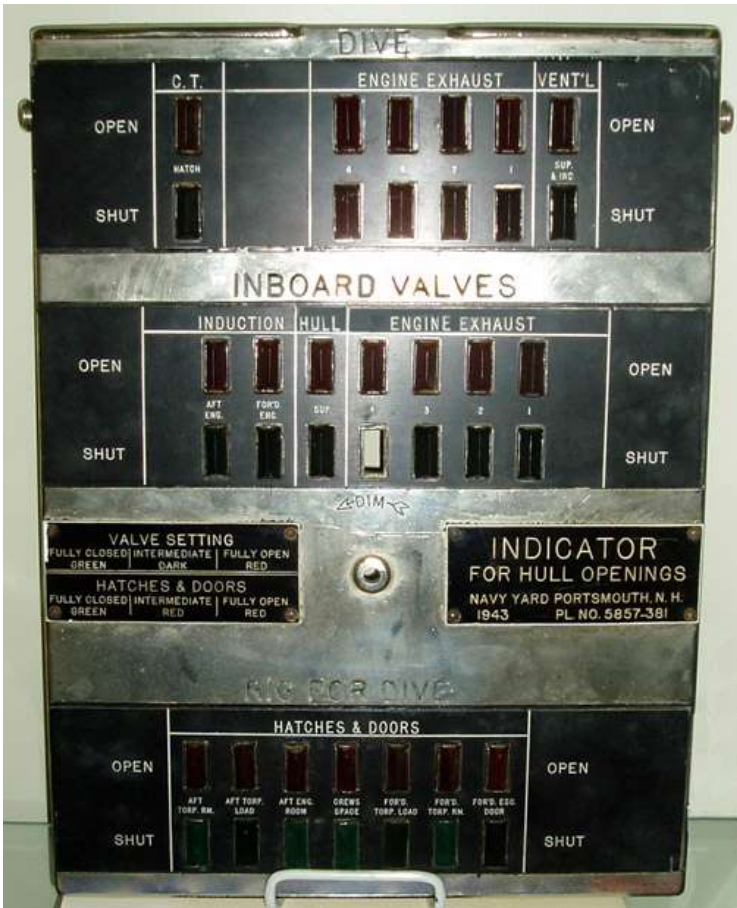
As of now, our 2007 reunion will be in St. Marys, GA, home of Kings Bay Submarine base. The reunion will take place during the 1st week of November, which is also the same time of the SubVets of WWII memorial service, held each year at this site. Shipmate Howie Stein IC 59-61 will be working on a 5-day cruise that departs from Jacksonville, FL, a short drive from St. Marys, GA. The response from those attending our Branson reunion was

overwhelming in favor of a cruise of this type, from Jacksonville that would take place after our St. Marys reunion. We had been in St. Marys for our 2002 reunion, and I have heard from many shipmates that they wanted to return to Kings Bay - now is your chance. As more information becomes available, I will get it out to everyone....watch for your 2007 reunion cruise information!!!

From the Editor

First my apologies for mailing the September 2005 issue out so late to you and for missing a December issue all together. Last fall was a VERY busy time for me and I was overtaken by projects I had taken on including part-time management responsibility for the Russian Sub Museum in Providence through the winter months. Ric Hedman who was hired as Site Manager last May returned home to Seattle on November 1st and left me with a sizeable “to do” list to work on through the winter months before his return in April. Recently I learned that he will not be returning at all so the next few months promise to be even busier for me as I will likely be spending much more time in Providence preparing it for the summer season.

As I did last year, I mailed out Christmas cards again this year, this time with the Sea Owl’s “Christmas tree” as it is on display at Albacore Park in Portsmouth, NH. If I missed any of you in mailing out this card, again my apologies. Here is the “Christmas tree” image again. Some of you may have gotten a Christmas card several years back after I first discovered the Sea Owl’s “Christmas tree” on display at Albacore Park. It had been removed and stored shortly after that and was only put on display again last year. After some negotiation and persuasion, I managed to get them to open the glass case so I could get a clear picture without the glare from the glass. For this year’s card, I did a little PhotoShop touch up to make it appear as a “green board”.



Some have requested copies of this year’s Christmas card and I would certainly be willing to supply them, if you would like at my cost. They were printed on blank greeting card stock that is readily available at Michael’s craft stores at a reasonable price or I can also supply them as a Winthrop-Atkins “Cape Cads” card in a variety of colors with a photographic print insert with matching envelopes for about \$1.00 each.

As I write this, I am busy making final arrangements for a trip in to Russia to attend the 43rd International Submariners Association Congress in May. The USS Sea Owl will be well represented at this event as Don Gregg (QM 63-68) and Doug Jensen (MM 63-66) will also be attending. The formal congress is scheduled to be held in Moscow from May 22 – 25 and a follow-on informal event will be held at St. Petersburg from May 26 – 28. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Russian submarine force which was founded by decree of Tsar Nicholas II on March 19, 1906. I am sure this will be a trip to remember for many years to come. I expect to have many pictures and other items from this event for a real “dog and pony show” at the Groton picnic.

As always a newsletter would not be complete if we were not to remind everyone to pay their dues. Adding the two digits or letters following your name on the mailing label to indicate your dues status according to our records proved to be a great success and resulted in many shipmates catching up on their dues. I will continue this. To review, if there is a “LM” on your mailing label, you are a Life Member and you never have to pay dues again. A “06” would mean you are paid up through October 2006, etc. If you are overdue or “dink”, but still within a year of being paid up, you will continue to get a note in your newsletter reminding you to pay your dues before October 31st or you will no longer receive the newsletter by mail.

Submarine Force Library and Museum Docent Program

by Ken Johnson

In December the USSVI Groton Base was approached by CAPT Mike Riegel, USN (Ret), Executive Director of the Submarine Force Library and Museum in Groton, with a proposal to set up a docent program at the site. Volunteers were solicited and the response has been very favorable and enthusiastic. After approval of a Docent Training Manual, training sessions were scheduled and began in February. Initially docent “watches” are being scheduled for only Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays with the intent to expand this to all days that the museum is open over the summer months. Each docent “watch” is four hours in length and two docents are scheduled for each “watch”. Their purpose is to greet the public and to be available to answer questions about the museum and the Submarine Force in general.

Seeing this as an opportunity to learn more about the resources of this library and museum, I decided to volunteer as a docent and stood my first “watch” on Friday, March 10th. I have one more of these scheduled for this month on Friday, March 24th and two more scheduled in April. After my morning watch on March 10th I spent the rest of the day in the library. The result of my “research” there is the article about “Operation Lockout” and the farewell letter from Captain Kolaras on the decommissioning of Sea owl that appear later in this newsletter.

After spending the past 3-1/2 years explaining Russian cruise missile submarines the opportunity to explain U. S. Navy submarines and to help visitors to have a positive and educational experience visiting our own excellent museum in Groton is a welcome change and is a very rewarding experience.

Book Review: "Shadow Divers" by Robert Kurson

Review by Ken Johnson

This book, a true life detective story, tells of the six year quest of two divers to identify a German submarine sunk during World War II just 60 miles off the New Jersey coast. Since the wreck lies in 230 feet of water, exploration of it is not for the recreational diver. Three men tragically lost their lives exploring it.

This book was selected as the 2006 reading selection by the Reading Across Rhode Island project which is run by the Providence Public Library. The two principal divers involved in the story are Richie Kohler and John Chatterton who host the History Channel program, "Deepsea Detectives". In fact the offer from the History Channel for them to host this series was a direct result of their efforts to identify this German submarine. The PBS series, NOVA, also did a special called "Hitler's Lost Sub" describing their exploration and quest to identify this submarine. They only succeeded in finally making the identification by stubbornly refusing to quit until they succeeded.

Even the German government's own records denied the real identity of this submarine until conclusive proof was found on board to prove its true identity. This submarine had initially been assigned a patrol area south of New York, but enroute its orders had been changed, but never acknowledged. Germany assumed it had been lost in its reassigned operating area of the coast of Africa.

On January 28th the Reading Across Rhode Island program held a kickoff conference at Rhode Island College. I attended this conference and manned a booth for the Russian Sub Museum there. We hope to attract libraries and book discussion groups to schedule their discussions on board our Russian submarine over the course of the year. Since diver, Richie Kohler, was the keynote speaker at this conference, I invited him to tour our submarine afterward and had the privilege of showing him and his wife, Carrie, also a diver, on a VIP tour of the sub.



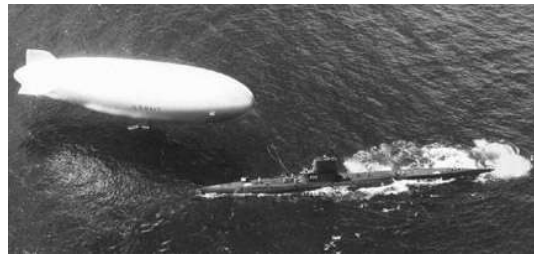
Submarine Rescues Blimp

By Ken Johnson

(The following story does not pertain to Sea Owl, but is an account of another submarine first, scored by the USS Sea Poacher in 1952. Since Sea Owl and Sea Poacher are SS 405 and SS 406 respectively, they share the same notebook at the Submarine Force Library and Museum. Besides, it's too good a story not to share.)

On July 10, 1952 while the USS Sea Poacher was operating with Navy blimp K-86 just 40 miles south of Key West, Florida the blimp's engines failed while it was making a low level search and a sudden downdraft caused to slam into the surface of the water, damaging its propellers and flooding the engines. Without engines to control it, the blimp essentially became a free floating balloon, rising to 3,000 feet before its pilot could bring it down again by releasing some helium.

Still experiencing problems controlling the blimp and faced with the prospect of having to abandon it, the blimp's Commander, LCDR William A. Baker, passed a line to the Sea Poacher to secure it while the crew offloaded equipment and part of the crew to a rubber raft



launched by Sea Poacher. A tow line was then secured to the submarine and Sea Poacher commenced towing the blimp back toward its

base at Boca Chica at an average speed of 15 knots.

For 3-1/2 hours the blimp was dragged along, fighting winds that once slammed it back into the water so hard that the three men who remained aboard were hip deep in water. Once outside the harbor the Sea Poacher transferred the tow line to an air sea rescue vessel that brought it in to about 300 feet off shore where a ground crew could "walk" it in to a hangar.

The main mission of blimps was to hunt down and kill submarines and they performed this mission quite effectively in the Atlantic during World War II since they could travel at slow speeds and remain on station for long periods of time. In this strange twist of fate, the hunted became the rescuer and by saving the blimp it saved taxpayers about \$600,000.

Sea Poacher was at the time commanded by CDR William Gibson and he and his crew certainly earned "bragging rights" for this feat.

Sailors Rest Your Oars

One of the saddest parts of doing the newsletter is always the listing of those shipmates who have departed on "eternal patrol" since the last issue. Since the last newsletter we have learned of the loss of the following shipmates:

Mike Eitelman, SM 44-45 – December 29, 2005

Harold Hill, TM – 44-45 – December 18, 2005

Stanley Greenwood, RMC – 61-63 – November 2, 2005

Peter Ford, EM – 54-57 – January 29, 2006

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of our departed shipmates.

*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.*

Hooter Hilites is a quarterly publication of the USS Sea Owl Association. Issues are published in March, June, September and December.

Sea Owl Association Officers are:

President – Roy Purtell, 4 Garden Court, Troy, NY 12180-1307, (518) 272-8614, e-mail roy@ussseawl.com

Vice-President/Historian - Tom Moniz, 8765 Carlisle Ave., Sacramento, CA 95828, (916) 682-9306, e-mail imoniz@frontiernet.net

Secretary/Treasurer – John Leers, 1453 Marty Drive, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-2425, (614) 866-3707, e-mail jleers1168@wowway.com

Storekeeper – Ed Welch, 33 Waco Court, Groton, CT 06340-4719, (860) 446-9104, e-mail erwelch@comcast.net

Newsletter Editor – Ken Johnson, P.O. Box 561, Oakham, MA 01068 (508) 882-3738, e-mail seaowl@charter.net or oakhamgraphics@charter.net



The 40's

March 2006 Issue



Veterans Oral Histories

By Ken Johnson

It is alarming to see the increase in the number of shipmates who are departing on "eternal patrol" and to realize that the opportunity to capture their experiences for future generations is rapidly being lost forever. I am now busy preparing the interviews that I did last fall for submission to the Library of Congress and hope to begin again soon doing more interviews. I had underestimated the work needed to document the material before submission and the extra duties I assumed last fall pertaining to the operation of the Russian Sub Museum in Providence began to consume much more time as well. My recent decision to volunteer as a docent at the Submarine Force Library and Museum in Groton will, I hope, present more opportunities to do more such interviews.

As I look at the exhibits at the Submarine Force Library and Museum, my thoughts are of how great a place it would be to do these interviews. I can imagine, for example, getting Carl Bryson there in front of the McCann/Momsen rescue bell to describe how it operates. As I complete the media for submission, I also plan to give copies to the library there at Groton for their files as well to add to their growing inventory.

Lamar Taylor Attends Pearl Harbor Memorial

By Ken Johnson

On December 8, 2005 this photograph of Lamar Taylor appeared in the Honolulu Advertiser along with this text in the accompanying article:

Lamar S. Taylor, 90, made the trip from Macon, Ga., for the commemoration and wore the uniform and rank of Navy commander, his retirement rank.

"This is brand new. About four years ago, my daughter bought it for me," he said of the uniform.

An ensign on the battleship California, Taylor, now confined to a wheelchair, tried to stand as much as he could during the program.

The California was hit forward and aft by two Japanese torpedoes in the early minutes of the Pearl Harbor raid. It was later hit by a bomb.

"We had a lot of crewmen below decks, and we saved them by cutting open the deck," Taylor said. "We had some good times before that, and we have a lot of things we'd like to forget."



Our congratulations to Lamar for making this trip. We hope he can make many more of them.

War Patrol Reports

By Ken Johnson

I have nearly completed the conversion of Sea Owl's three World War II war patrol reports to Adobe PDF format. With a few more sessions at the library in Groton, I should be able to fill in the remaining blanks in information. Then these will be available on CD for anyone who may want a copy.

I have also begun making copies of the USS Sea Poacher's war patrol reports as well. Sea Owl and Sea Poacher operated together during their first war patrols during WW II.

The Role of Blimps or Airships in World War II

By Ken Johnson

(Since I have included the article about Sea Poacher rescuing a Navy blimp in this newsletter, I thought this might be of interest.)

By June 1942, Congress had authorized the construction of 200 airships, and during the war Goodyear built a total of 168. At its production peak, the company was delivering 11 airships per month.

The K series airships had a capacity of 416,000 to 425,000 cubic feet of helium gas. They were 253 feet long, and 60 feet in diameter and were powered by two 425-horsepower engines that gave them a top speed of 50 miles per hour. They were not fast, but unlike an airplane that could remain airborne for only a few hours, a K-ship could stay aloft for 60 hours.

The United States was the only power to use airships during World War II, and the airships played a small but important role. They were used for minesweeping, search and rescue, photographic reconnaissance, scouting, escorting convoys, and antisubmarine patrols. Airships accompanied many oceangoing ships, both military and civilian. Of the 89,000 ships escorted by airships during the war, not one was lost to enemy action.

The Navy airships patrolled an area of over three million square miles over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the Mediterranean Sea during the war. They could look down on the ocean surface and spot a rising submarine and radio its position to the convoy's surface ships. The Navy's blimps initially operated from bases on the east and west coasts of the United States, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean, and as far south as Brazil. Later in the war, they also operated from bases at Cuers, France, and Pisa, Italy. In 1944, six K-ships flew across the Atlantic Ocean to Morocco, where they established a low-altitude antisubmarine barrier across the Strait of Gibraltar.

Only one airship was lost to enemy action. A surfaced German submarine shot down the airship K-74 during a battle, but the K-74 damaged the German U-boat so badly that it could not submerge and was sunk by British bombers in the North Sea while it was en route to Germany for repairs.



The 50's

March 2006 Issue



Operation Lockout

By Ken Johnson

(From the Sea Owl notebook at the Submarine Force Library and Museum in Groton.)

At 1015 on the morning of 6 February 1958, the USS Sea Owl, commanded by LCDR M. Hayes, USN commenced an exercise named by the crew as "Operation Lockout" that will take its place as one of the firsts in the annals of submarine history. Submerged at the entrance to Lindberg Bay in the St. Thomas area of the Virgin Islands, the crew of the Sea Owl started making submarine escapes out of the Forward Torpedo Room escape trunk using the Buoyant Ascent method to get to the surface. The evolution was completed approximately three and a half hours later. This was the first time in the Atlantic Fleet that "Buoyant Ascents" have been made from a submarine at sea to requalify the crew in submarine escape procedures.

As with all evolutions as dramatic and as important to the submarine force, this exercise was the culmination of good training and careful planning. Realizing the distinct advantage of "Buoyant Ascent" for submarine individual escape over its predecessors, the Chief of Naval Operations approved the "Buoyant Ascent" method as the primary means of submarine escape in 1956. Since that time more than 7,000 men had been given their initial training in this escape procedure at the Submarine Escape Training Tank, U. S. Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut.

Although "Buoyant Ascent" reduces the dangers of escapes such as bends, carbon dioxide poisoning and nitrogen narcosis by permitting the men to leave the escape compartment faster, it is not devoid of all danger. Its most serious hazard is air embolism which can be prevented by exhaling completely before ascent is started and continuous exhalation throughout the rise to the surface. "Buoyant Ascent" is similar to free ascent except that the submariner is made extremely buoyant by an inflated "Mae West" life jacket. This jacket is inflated prior to his leaving the trunk so that all the sailor has to do is step out of the escape trunk, blow out continuously the air in his lungs and continue exhaling forcibly while the jacket takes him to the surface at a rate of about 375 feet per minute. During his rise to the surface, the air in his lungs is constantly expanding, alleviating the desire to inhale.

The crew of the Sea Owl had been trained initially at the Submarine Escape Training Tank. The Commanding Officer of the Sea Owl had chosen this particular area, Lindberg Bay, as the place for the ascents because it afforded conditions that complied with the latest Submarine Force, Atlantic Fleet directive, and was readily accessible with few navigational hazards. He had the USS Kittiwake (ASR 13) commanded by LCDR W. H. Hibbs, USN, standing by with recompression chambers ready and a Submarine and Diving Medical Officer in a small boat on the surface above the submarine. The Commanding Officer had as advisors LCDR William D. Buckbee, USN, Director Escape and Rescue Dept., at the U. S. Naval Submarine School and OINC of the Escape

Training Tank, and Dave Jones, ENC(SS) one of the tank's leading instructors.

When word of the operation was first received there were mixed feelings concerning it among the crew. Some viewed the exercises with considerable enthusiasm as evidenced by such comments as "a new way to hold swim call" or "wear your whites, liberty commences on the surface". Others, perhaps the majority, were skeptical. As in any new venture there were questions such as; "What do we do when we reach the surface?" or "Is it any different than using the training tank?" There was a review in the operation of escape apparatus. As the day of the exercise arrived, the boat was ready. It had been inspected by a salvage party from the USS Kittiwake, CAPT W. Welham (MC) USN, Submarine Force Atlantic Medical Officer and LCDR Buckbee inspected both the physical condition of the escapees and proper operation of escape equipment. Only those who had qualified previously in "Buoyant Ascent" would be allowed to make the ascent.

At 9:04 AM, Sea Owl bottomed in the warm Caribbean in 35 feet of water which placed the escape trunk door about 15 feet below the surface. Under the careful supervision of the Chief of the Boat, J. G. Grenenberger, ENC(SS) the Forward Torpedo Room was made ready for escape.

The first to "lockout" were to be CAPT Welham and LCDR Buckbee with LT R. A. Hyde of the Sea Owl as trunk operator. It was the mission of this group to ensure proper functioning of all equipment before the crew began their ascents. At 0930 CAPT Welham escaped successfully followed by LCDR Buckbee. Mr. Buckbee then returned to the trunk and reentry was made into the submarine. At 1015 LT Hyde, W. F. Chitwood, HMC and C. O. Devine, TM2(SS) commenced the first ascents by members of the ship's company. All reached the surface without incident. They were followed by the remaining officers and men who very confidently climbed into the escape trunk, flooded down, equalized the pressure and opened the door to the sea. With calm dispatch they inflated their jackets, climbed through the door to the sea, exhaled completely, turned loose from the submarine and continually exhaling forcibly away they went to the surface.

In the last group LCDR Hayes and LT W. D. Wood, Executive Officer, made the ascent and then returned to the Sea Owl. The exercise was completed at 1305 after 2-1/2 hours, during which 30 men successfully made the ascent. The average time for the ascent and draining the trunk after each ascent was 15 minutes. It is believed that under actual escape conditions only 10 minutes per group would be necessary

After each group surfaced, they were received aboard Kittiwake for the noon meal while the Sea Owl surfaced.

All who made the ascent were convinced that the method used is rapid, efficient and safe. Most were ready to repeat the operation in deeper water. No skeptics remained among the crew.

It was expected that following this all submarine crews would make their requalifying ascents from their own boats in accordance with Submarine Force Atlantic Fleet policy.



The 60's

March 2006 Issue



A Fond Farewell

(The following is the text of a letter dated 15 November 1969 that I found in the Sea Owl notebook at the Submarine Force Library and Museum in Groton while doing research there recently.)

15 November 1969

Dear SEA OWL Friend,

We thought that you would be interested in the final days of SEA OWL as a fighting unit of our Navy after following her through our Mediterranean deployment. So we take this opportunity to tell you what has happened since our last newsletter.

As you know we arrived in New London on the 18th of September after a remarkably smooth Atlantic crossing from Rota, Spain. Except for one rough day which tossed us about a little, we managed to keep up a steady clip of better than 14 knots all the way across! Even on her final legs, she churned and burned! But then it's always that way when a sailor is homeward bound. No one complains when the ship pounds or lurches or pitches and groans. It's getting home that counts,

The cooks concocted a fabulous last supper on board on the night before our arrival. The menu was unbelievably delectable and the buffet with candlelight in the After Battery a spectacular work of art. We all partook of it with great relish and will recall with fond memories our last evening on board at sea as a crew.

No doubt, all of us felt grand when we saw all the "Welcome Home" signs and the band but most of all the pretty smiling faces on the pier. Chief Bonner and Torpedoman Tingley managed to make our singular distinctive cannon announce our arrival by loading it with black powder and lighting it off as we turned into the pier. It was a startling "Boom" that ensued and henceforth the perpetrators will be called Gunner Bonner and Gunner Tingley.

As is always the case, it was again very misty eyed on the pier that day just as it was on an early July morning when SEA OWL started the journey. Home was the sailor from the sea. . . .

Events since then have transpired quite rapidly. We started transferring some of our crew right away and off-loading fuel, torpedoes and spare parts.

During our last muster at quarters, the Captain had the most gratifying task of awarding the coveted silver dolphins to TM2 Dugger, STS3 Kenyon, IC3 Souza, RM3 Price and STS3 Blackwelder. Letters of Commendation were also presented to LT Strohmman, RMC(SS) Bouchard, CSC(SS) Dickerson and SM2(SS) Andersen for exceptional performance of duty during the Mediterranean deployment, STS3 Larose, ETR3 Flynn, YN3 Means, SK3 Inglis and ETN3 Hayes were also silver dolphin recipients during one of the later musters.

After undergoing a material inspection by the Board of Inspection and Survey we heard the ship's fate sealed when it was recommended that SEA OWL be stricken from the register of Naval ships. The hand writing was really on the wall all along. She's an old ship with not much modern equipment. To make her useful in this day and age, she had to be modernized. This would

have cost a prohibitive amount of money. As you all know, the President had already directed that the military do their share of saving money. SEA OWL was, therefore chosen as one of the ships to be inactivated and disposed of.

After reducing the crew to eighteen enlisted people, we started dismantling equipment and distributing it to other ships that had a need for it. Slowly we watched the ship become a hulk losing it's personality and the lifelike throb that distinguishes a man-of-war manned by an eager crew. To one who has never been to sea and lived on a ship, it is difficult to describe the gnawing, grievous sense of loss. SEA OWL slowly lost her identity and on this day, 15 November 1969, after a brief decommissioning ceremony, her colors were lowered for the last time to mark the end of a remarkable 25 year career.

We thought that you might like to keep the enclosed decommissioning program to remind you of a grand old ship that served our country and passed away gracefully. The crew has been scattered to other ships and stations and it is appropriate to list everyone's name and his new duty station for those who want to continue associations that started on SEA OWL.

(Editor's note: I did not make a copy of the decommissioning program during this visit, but will during a future visit. Also, I did not include the listing of all crew members and their next duty stations that was a part of this letter. This probably would have taken up the entire newsletter. If any shipmate would like a copy of the letter with the listing of crew and their next duty station, please let me know and I will get one to you.)

As the last Commanding Officer of SEA OWL, I wish to praise my shipmates for the tender loving care they bestowed upon their snip. Their constant efforts and spirit, undoubtedly, kept SEA OWL running until the bitter end. The fond friendships, memories and liberties will be remembered with a sense of pride and joy. I wish all of them God speed. To the mothers, fathers, wives and families of each SEA OWL crew member, I would like to express gratitude for that indispensable moral support that sustains men of the sea away from home. Your concern for our ship and our crew was inspiring to all of us. I wish you all success and happiness.

In closing, let me assure you that in spite of the passing of SEA OWL and other ships like her, our Navy will continue strong, proud and effective as long as the men that sail under our flag are reared with the convictions conceived, throughout the lands of our forefathers and nourished in the freedom of our country.

Sincerely,

Demosthenes N. KOLARAS
Commander, U. S. Navy
Commanding Officer