



# Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

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

We still give a hoot!

March 2010 Issue



## Shipmates & 1<sup>st</sup> Mates:

Our Groton Picnic, June 11th, 12th & 13th is coming up fast....there is information and a registration form on our web page. This year will be the first time that we will have the picnic catered by a local barbecue restaurant. Ed has assured me that it will be as good as always. I hope that everyone that can, attends the picnic....it's always a great time! If you can't make it, you can still buy raffle tickets that help support the Association.

I am in the process of reducing the number of rooms that I have set aside for our Galveston Reunion. It will still be held during November 8th thru the 13th; the only change will be in the number of reserved rooms and our hospitality room. Since the number of shipmates that responded positively for attending was less than 15 shipmates, I will more than likely have the hospitality room in my suite. This worked out pretty well in San Diego; I don't see why it won't work in Galveston. Our reunions are always a good time to meet shipmates that you have not seen in years. I hope that everyone that can make it...makes it this year.

As I close, I would like to thank Ed Welch for running our Groton Picnic and Ken Johnson for putting together and mailing out your Sea Owl Hooter HiLites. I feel that our Hooter Hilites is the best boat reunion association newsletter in the fleet. Ken does a great job with it. My thanks to both Ed and Ken for all they do for us.

Roy & Carol Purtell

## From the Editor

By Ken Johnson

There is something about this issue (and the two previous ones) that you may not know. It applies, of course, only to the printed version and not the PDF version. Since the September 2009 issue I have printed it on an Epson Workforce printer which uses Epson DURABrite inks. In addition to being a faster printer the Epson inks are waterproof and will not smear if you get the newsletter wet.

While I try to avoid writing about controversial subjects in this newsletter, Bob D'Amico suggested the topic of women on submarines for his contribution. As he mentions in his discussion on the topic, I suggested that he watch "Operation Petticoat" for inspiration. There is a particular line from this movie where the Army Major is hanging up the womens' underwear in the engine room to dry. She gets into an argument with the Chief Machinist Mate in charge and finally responds, "you're talking to an officer"! He replies, "Congress made you an officer, but God made you a woman and a woman shouldn't mess around with a man's machinery". While I may not agree with the Chief, not something I would recommend for ANY officer regardless of rank, I guess I would just say to those making the decision, "The Submarine Force ain't broke! Don't fix it!"

I want to thank all of you who sent in your dues payments since the last issue! I do not enjoy dropping shipmates off the mailing list

because they are over a year behind in their dues! Let me remind all of you who are not Life Members that the dues for Life Membership are only \$35 if you are age 75 or older and \$75 if you are under 75. Do the math and see what works for you. Check the upper right hand corner of the address label on the envelope to see what your current dues status is. If it says LM, then you are already a Life Member. If it says 09, you are paid through 2009 and will not drop off the mailing list until after the December 2010 issue.

## Groton Picnic

You will find included with this issue a registration form for the Groton picnic in June. This year the raffle prize will be a Hewlett Packard notebook PC. You do not need to attend the picnic to win so even if you are not planning to go, buy a few chances anyway!

## HP Mini 210-1080NR 10.1-Inch Blue Netbook - 9.75 Hours of Battery Life

### Product Features

- Intel Atom Processor N450 (1.66 GHz, 512 KB L2 Cache)
- 1GB DDR2 System Memory (1 DIMM)
- 250GB (7200RPM) Hard Drive (SATA)
- Genuine Windows 7 Starter, \* Up to 9.75 Hours of Battery Life
- 10.1" Diagonal WSVGA LED Anti-glare Widescreen Display (1024 x 600)
- Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 3150 (shared) with up to 256MB Total Available Graphics Memory



# Giving the idea of women on submarines 'the float test'.

by Bob D'Amico

I'm going to assume that ALL the other generations of my shipmates who also had the privilege of serving on board the USS Sea Owl, also used that phrase... 'the float test!' For those who haven't, giving something 'the float test' simply means throwing it over the side... if it floats... it passes. If it sinks, it doesn't.

I wouldn't be putting this piece together had I not actually lived aboard a submarine during part of my navy years. From the 'outside' of this debate... or if you prefer... skimming along the surface of it... I would probably think: 'Yeah... OK... let's be fair and totally equal across the board. It works fine on OTHER ships... why not a submarine?'

My bunk aboard the Sea Owl was top

most, forward most... on the starboard side of the forward torpedo room. Fourteen guys – if you count 'the bridal suite', and a bunch of torpedos shared that 'bedroom' with me. One sink-ful of water a day when we were underway, and a submarine shower was a daily armpit squirt from a can of Right Guard. (more than one squirt a day and you'd need a paint scraper on your armpits). When we finally headed for port and could each take a sub shower... wet once... lather... rinse once. I'm sure the women would just love living in those conditions. In my humble opinion, I'd say go right ahead... other ill-advised things have also been given the float test... bloop...bloop... bloop... bubbles disappear... item sinks... it's been 'deep sixed.'

But that was an old diesel sub we were on. I'm just a fossil. I'm told that this really IS a new sub navy. I know that these newer subs have a bit more room than we had on the Sea Owl. Shower every day for all hands, and many other bennies. Fact still is... it's not a big surface ship... it's still a long metallic tube with one main street– from the aft to the forward torpedo rooms

and back. – when you're having your daily jog (yeah, right!) Watch out for those hatches.... and oh... don't invade any of the areas designated for the women to be private in. Huh? Whut? Where?

I put this out there a couple of weeks ago to a few mates. Ken Johnson told me that his favorite movie was *Operation Petticoat*... one which I've seen decades ago. I gave it another chance thanks to Netflix, and actually loved it. (the boat it was shot on had an interior identical to the Sea Owl!) Even though it was quite entertaining, it was still Hollywood at work!

Regarding women on subs... Roy Purtell said: "It's a bad idea.....those pencil pushers don't know it.... Bill Clinton could not keep his hands off of his intern.....inside the large

Whitehouse.....Senators are always messing around with female interns.....as are others... CEO's you name it....it happens. Now they want to put both sexes together inside a submarine... do they expect nothing to happen?... only a fool would think this way.

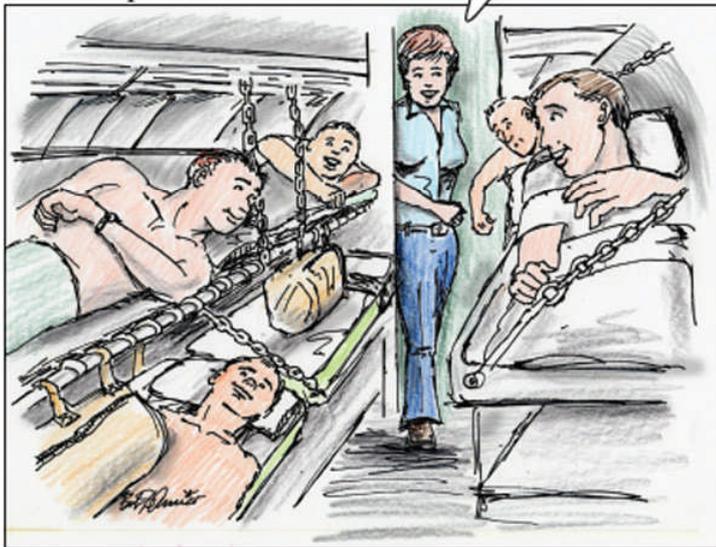
Ed Welch has the best plan that I (Roy) have heard.....put 3 females on the boat... all officers. This way they have their

own state room in the officers quarters. They would have to get through sub school..pass all the physical requirement..the psych test...same as their male counterparts.

It's going to happen..but it's a bad move. Imagine a female sleeping– she's in PJ's– no bra on– they should not have to sleep with their cloths on. An alarm goes off– all hands turn to. No time to get dressed. Just throw a shirt on or just run in a T-shirt– run to your emergency station. When the emergency has passed–does everyone check out the female officer with no bra on ????? Sure they do. !!!"

I asked a female cousin, Dawn DeGrauw, who spent

SORRY, GUYS... I JUST NEED TO PASS THROUGH THIS COMPARTMENT TO GET TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.



a total of 5 years in the Navy, leaving as an air traffic controller 2nd class (E-5). (Notice I'm giving the last word to the woman!) In an email back to me she said:

*I agree that women should be allowed to serve on subs. Women have only been allowed to serve on ships since 1993, so I feel they should begin allowing women "to man" subs as well. Having been stationed on an aircraft carrier for 15 months, the USS Harry S. Truman CVN-75, even this monstrous vessel has very tight spaces, where, guess what - men AND women both serve on! So what's the difference? One vessel is below the water's surface, one is on the water's surface. Not a good enough reason to not allow women on board. Like I said, both types of ships (actually ALL ships) have very tight spaces! As a woman, I never felt threatened or uncomfortable by the males in my division, or anywhere on the ship. I refused (and still refuse) to put myself in that position. The guys I worked with were like my brothers. It's a mindset that I feel is crucial to women who are among men onboard ships, or anywhere for that matter. I treat everyone the same, and expect the same in return.*

*I forgot the man's name, but he said something along the lines of "the best and brightest should be allowed to serve on any Navy vessel." Well, there you go. I couldn't have put it better myself.*

**My sincere thanks to my cousin Dawn for both her service, and her opinion... which I respect, but don't agree with. Even in this modern navy, and even though it was 40 years ago and a diesel 'pig boat' that I served on, I still maintain that there is quite a major lifestyle and space difference between an aircraft carrier or even smaller skimmer ships... and a sub!**

#### **Galveston Reunion**

By Ken Johnson



During our last reunion at San Diego in September 2009 we voted to hold our next reunion at a city which has a memorial diesel submarine boat. Specifically we chose Galveston, Texas which is the home of the USS Cavalla (SS 244). The site is known as the American Undersea Warfare Center and Cavalla shares it with the USS Stewart (DE 238). Web site is: <http://www.cavalla244.org>.

On the morning of September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck the upper Texas coast and caused significant damage in the Galveston area. If you explore the above site, you can see many photographs of the damage done by this storm. If you are on Facebook, visit the CAVALLA HISTORICAL FOUNDATION fan page and see what they are doing to restore and maintain this boat.

Better yet, attend this reunion and show that you support the crew of Cavalla and the work that they do. Pack some work clothes and join them, if you are so inclined. They are planning one of their work weekends in November while we will be there. If nothing else it will be a chance to meet other submariners and volunteers who do get involved. Having done three Torsk work weekends in Baltimore myself, I can tell you that it is a good time.



One of the saddest parts of doing the newsletter is the listing of those shipmates who have departed on "eternal patrol" since the last issue. We have learned since the last newsletter of the passing of these shipmates:

David Wessinger, CO – 58-60 – February 17
Hubert Walls, GM – 44 – Date unknown
Samuel J. Robinson Jr., LT – 49-51 – November 28, 2009

We extend our deepest sympathy to family 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.*

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

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# The 40's

December 2009 Issue



## The Pacific

By Ken Johnson

This is one of those times when I wish I had HBO! I hope that those of you who do have been watching the new HBO mini-series, "The Pacific". This is a 10-part miniseries produced by Tom Hanks, Stephen Spielberg and Gary Goetzman which tracks the real life stories of three U.S. Marines, Robert Leckie, John Basilone and Eugene Sledge on Guadalcanal, Pelilu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa during World War II. Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone received the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Battle of Guadalcanal. He was killed in action on the first day of the Battle of Iwo Jima, after which he was posthumously honored with the Navy Cross. He was the only enlisted Marine in World War II to receive the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross. He has received many honors including being the namesake for streets, military locations and a United States Navy destroyer.

## Dive: A Submariner's Story

By Ken Johnson

The following is from the web site (<http://www.divethemovie.com>) for this movie which is scheduled to be released some time in 2010:

"Dive: A Submariners Story" is a documentary about the brave young men who manned these deadly underwater boats, defending a country they loved. The film is a fascinating collection of stories told from many different perspectives that paint a humbling image of the war in the Pacific. Spanning the length of the boat, torpedo men, radio operators, electricians, cooks and many more all take part in illustrating this heroic tale. Each share their experiences and give first hand accounts of the dangerous life they volunteered to live - what they felt as they climbed onboard for the first time, the camaraderie between members of the crew and the terrifying emotions that gripped them as depth charges jolted their vessel.

More than 100 World War II submarine Veterans were interviewed for the film, and many hours of footage were shot to capture them describing the war as seen through their eyes. In their own words they describe their experiences and provide in vivid detail their life while living, working and serving onboard. The film captures the essence of an actual World War II patrol, placing you inside the conning tower as the captain prepares for an attack, listening as torpedo men load the tubes and wait to fire a spread or hanging out in the crews mess for a heated game of cards. Men who were there relive many accounts of some of the most exciting patrols during the war, the men that experienced it, lived it and loved it.

*About the Filmmaker, Bret Miller:*

If someone had told me during high school or college that someday I would be making a film about World War II submarines, I would have thought they were crazy. I may be going out on a limb, but I'll bet I wasn't the only person that ever dreaded history class. But

we get older, wiser, and interests begin to transform and become a little more colorful.

I was always fascinated with how movies were put together to create a story. As a result of my intrigue, my mother gave me video camera as a high school graduation present. I had a lot of fun with that camera - made short films with friends, documented my last day in high school, shot many weddings and of course filmed many pranks on unsuspecting people with my buddies. How I wish I could find those tapes. That little camera fired up a desire to be a filmmaker and led me to the University of North Texas where I earned a degree in Radio, Television and Film. Now what do I do?

I started my career just out of college by working in the advertising department of a small company in Dallas. There I produced television commercials, radio spots, many company training videos and was introduced to the world of website development. Although this was not exactly my dream job, it was an interesting one that was full of many challenges and was a huge learning experience. The website training paid off and took me to the next chapter of my life, working for a small internet startup company. Several years of my life were spent there designing and programming websites until I was laid off, released or how I like to look at it - set free. I've learned that it doesn't matter how bad things may seem, because there's always an upside. When life gives you lemons, you make a movie. That's what I did.

In 2001, while traveling across Oklahoma, I ran into, of all things, a World War II submarine. Now parked in a field at a museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma is the USS Batfish - quite a remarkable boat during the war. During her seven war patrols she sank a total of 14 ships and damaged 2 others. History was made during her 6th war patrol when she sank 3 Japanese subs in 72 hours and was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. I had no idea that discovering this submarine would have such a huge impact on my life.

The crew of the USS Batfish meets every year in Muskogee, and I've attended every year since 2004. This is what eventually sparked the idea for "DIVE". Over the years, I had been attending their reunions and listening to their amazing stories which inspired me to make the film. I can't say I've been making documentary films for years and don't have a case full of accolades to prove my worth as a filmmaker. This is my first film, but you have to start somewhere. This amazing adventure has taken me to many new places and introduced me to some very interesting people. This project has really been the most challenging and fulfilling thing I've ever done.

I'm very proud of this film. Being one of the guys who has actually documented the lives of these American heroes is a pretty cool feeling. I don't feel that I chose this project, rather it chose me. For some reason I just happened to be driving down a road and ran into a submarine that has completely changed my life. I hope everyone will discover their submarine.



# The 50's

March 2010 Issue



## Captain David Wessinger

By Ken Johnson

Following the notification of Capt Wessinger's passing on February 17<sup>th</sup>, I received the following copy of an email from Bill Houley who had served in Capt Wessinger's wardroom. This email was addressed to Capt Wessinger's son, David, Jr.

SEA OWL was my first submarine following a brief stint in destroyers. I reported as an Ensign, and in those days Ensigns in submarines were a rarity, not that welcome as we brought enthusiasm but little else. I knew everything most ensigns know: nothing at all, so I had a rough row to hoe for the first months. Your dad was a tough task master but ran a fine ship in an even-handed way that ensured I received a good start to my submarine career. Of course I was very young in those days and had no way to appreciate how valuable sea experience in a venerable WWII diesel boat would be to a child destined to spend many years in the Navy (37). I also lived through the transition to nuclear power, a transition with which many diesel submariners were uncomfortable. At least I knew where they were coming from. Your dad, like his contemporaries, led a demanding ship late in its life and woefully lacking in what we today consider the basic amenities. Camaraderie was the basic ingredient that made long weeks at sea possible, even if a staple of our conversations was "Woe is we." Of course, like most young men, I did not appreciate how much I had learned until I left, 2 commanding officers later, and I now appreciate that much of the foundation for my subsequent career had been put in place by a fine officer named Dave Wessinger. So let me join others who benefited from your dad's contributions to our nation in saluting him and those family and friends who mourn his loss.

William Houley  
Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.)

## Famous Sailors Stamps

By Ken Johnson

The United States Postal Service recently honored four heroes of U.S. Navy history by issuing a set of commemorative postage stamps, the Distinguished Sailors series. It is this series of stamps which I have chosen to mail this newsletter. Here is a brief description of those Distinguished Sailors chosen.

**Admiral William S. Sims** commanded two battleships, *Minnesota* (1909–11) and *Nevada* (1915–16), but his most important command was the Atlantic Torpedo Flotilla (1913–15). He was president of the Naval War College when in March 1917 he was sent to London to coordinate the navy's role in World War

I. He later became commander in chief of U.S. naval forces in European waters. In 1920, he published *The Victory at Sea*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. Sims was an outspoken reformer and innovator who helped shape the Navy into a modern fighting force. The Navy has named three destroyers after Sims. The most recent, *USS W.S. Sims* (DE-1059), was commissioned in 1970.

**Admiral Arleigh A. Burke** successively commanded Destroyer Division 43, Destroyer Division 44, Destroyer Squadron 12, and Destroyer Squadron 23 during World War II. This latter squadron, known as the "Little Beavers," covered the initial landings in Bougainville in November 1943, and fought in 22 separate engagements during the next four months. During this period, the "Little Beavers," were credited with destroying one Japanese cruiser, nine destroyers, one submarine, several smaller ships, and approximately 30 aircraft. In August 1955 he became CNO. Burke served an unprecedented three terms as CNO duty before being transferred to the Retired List on 1 August 1961. The Navy honored him by naming a new class of guided missile destroyers after him. On July 4, 1991 the first of these, the *USS Arleigh Burke* (DDG-51), was commissioned.

**LCDR John McCloy** served in the United States Navy for 30 years, retiring from active duty in 1928. John McCloy has the distinction of being awarded the Medal of Honor on two separate occasions. McCloy's first Medal of Honor was earned during the China Relief Expedition of 1900, where he was attempting to rescue persons under siege at 11 ministries in Peking, China. McCloy earned his second Medal of Honor for his heroism in 1914 when American forces landed at Veracruz, Mexico. In 1919, now a lieutenant, he was awarded the Navy Cross for "distinguished service" as commander of *USS Curlew*, which engaged in the "difficult and hazardous duty" of sweeping mines in the North Sea in the aftermath of World War I. In 1963, the Navy commissioned a destroyer escort named in his honor, the *USS McCloy* (DE-1038).

**Doris Miller** was the first black American hero of World War II. Miller was awarded the Navy Cross "for distinguished devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor." Miller was serving aboard the battleship *West Virginia*. When damage to the ship prevented him from reaching his regular battle station, Miller helped with efforts to rescue his shipmates, scores of whom were wounded or trapped in wreckage. After assisting the captain on the bridge, who had been mortally wounded, Miller took over an unattended 50-caliber machine gun nearby. He maintained fire on Japanese aircraft until ordered to abandon the bridge as fires raged out of control. In June 1943 he was assigned to the new escort aircraft carrier *Liscome Bay*. On Nov. 24, 1943, he was killed in action along with more than 600 shipmates when a Japanese submarine torpedoed and sank *Liscome Bay* during the invasion of the Gilbert Islands. A destroyer escort, *USS Miller* (DE-1091), commissioned in 1973, was named for him.





# The 60's

March 2010 Issue



## The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race & Its Dangerous Legacy by David Hoffman

By Ken Johnson

I recently listened to the audio version of this book. I had heard the author interviewed on the radio and decided to order the audio version of the book from audible.com. Subsequently I also ordered the printed version as well.



In the last issue I wrote about a Cold War weapon that might have been. This book discusses a number of Cold War weapons that actually were produced (and may still be around in some form). The title refers to a so-called "doomsday system" known as "Perimeter" which was designed to launch nuclear missiles semi-automatically in the event that top Soviet leaders had been killed or disabled in a nuclear attack upon the Soviet Union. Deep underground in a series of hardened bunkers designed to

withstand nuclear attack, a group of duty officers monitored information with a checklist of three conditions. Condition 1: Verify the "Perimeter" system was activated. (This activation meant that the military commanders or the Kremlin had given advance permission for the system to fire.) Condition 2: Check whether contact had been lost with the military and political leaders. (If the lines went out, if the hand was dead, this meant leadership decapitation.) Condition 3: Determine whether nuclear detonations were being felt by a network of special sensors that measured light, radioactivity, seismic shocks and atmospheric overpressure. If all three conditions were met, the officers were supposed to issue a command to launch the "Perimeter" command rockets, which would order all remaining nuclear armed missiles of the Soviet Union to launch, aimed at the United States. This system was tested in November 1994. The deterrent value of this system is questioned since its very existence was highly classified and it may not have even been known about by the US President or senior military staff!

The book also describes the Soviet biological warfare programs which are truly scary. President Nixon announced in 1979 that the US would unilaterally stop all offensive biological weapons research and destroy the stocks, while maintaining a program of defensive research. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, continued to develop a program of offensive and defensive biological weapons and it was not known until the end of the Cold War how truly extensive their programs were. (Further information can be found on line by doing a Google search on "Biopreperat" which was the name of this program which operated from the 1970s through the 1990s.)

Also, after the former Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the status of nuclear material, particularly in former Soviet republics was uncertain. As an example, the book describes discovery of a supply of 90% enriched uranium in a warehouse in Kazakhstan. This turned into an operation which became known as "Project Sapphire". Apparently this material had been just left behind by the Russians, and there was some evidence that Iran was interested in obtaining it. The submarine connection here is that this stockpile of fuel was intended for use in Russian Project 705 (NATO Alfa class) submarines. The power plant for the boat was a lead-bismuth cooled fast reactor. Operation of such a plant presented some serious difficulties. The issue is that the lead/bismuth eutectic solution solidifies at 125 °C (257 °F). If ever hardened, it would be impossible to restart the reactor, since the fuel assemblies would be frozen in the solidified coolant. Thus, whenever the reactor is shut down, the liquid coolant must be heated externally with superheated steam. Near the piers where the submarines were moored, a special facility was constructed to deliver superheated steam to the vessels' reactors when the reactors were shut down.

At any rate, "Project Sapphire" involved a special US "tiger team" that went in, inventoried the fuel material, repackaged it and flew it out of Kazakhstan directly to the USA on C-5 transport planes. (You can find information on line about this by just doing a Google search on "Project Sapphire".)

## Congratulations Jerry Leppart

By Ken Johnson



At a recent joint meeting South East District 1 District Commander Dick Kanning presented his annual SED 1 awards. Shipmate Jerry Leppart, FN 62-64, received this year's individual for his tireless effort to convince North Carolina to offer a special vehicle registration plate for submarine veterans.