



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

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

We still give a hoot!

March 2011 Issue



President's Message

Shipmates & 1st Mates:

Hello Everyone: I trust that everyone is ready for Spring; I know that everyone living in the Northeast is! This has been quite the winter; the last that I heard it is the 15th snowiest winter on record for the last 150 years. Enough is enough already! Please Mother Nature give us Spring & Summer - we have earned it!

As we approach Spring, we hope we do anyway, let's plan on attending our Groton picnic. This year's picnic will not have the Friday night dinner. We are only going to have the Saturday, June 11th, picnic. For those that want to do a dinner Friday night, we can still get together at the Groton Motor Inn for dinner - just let Ed Welch know. This will be a pay-your-own meal, not part of the picnic registration, as it has been in the past. **Those going to the picnic should get your checks and information to Ed Welch by May 25th**, so that he can plan his food requirements. As we all know, things in life change. There is a good chance that this could be our last Groton picnic, as we know it. Ed & Paulette are considering moving back to New Hampshire, since Ed is fully retired now. If you have been putting off attending the Groton picnic. . .this should be the year that you make the extra effort to attend.

One item that has always been a nice fundraiser for the Association is the picnic raffle. Ed & I tried not to disappoint anyone this year. This year's item is an LCD 40" TV (see the raffle ad elsewhere in the newsletter). Buy your tickets now! Get your family members to buy tickets - the raffle is open to everyone. Send your check to Ed Welch, 33 Waco Court, Groton, CT 06340.

Roy

2011 Groton Picnic June 11th, 2011

We are not having the dinner on Friday before the picnic. Those shipmates that live in the Groton area or those that will be in town for the picnic that want to get together for dinner, let Ed know.

We can still have dinner together. Picnic Price: \$15.00 per person. Lobster is available by special request, for an additional \$12.00 each

Price includes Soda, Beer and lots of sea stories and good food! For Shipmates that want to meet for breakfast Sunday morning, details will be provided at the picnic.

2011 Sea Owl Reunion

September 28th thru October 2nd, 2011 Virginia Beach, Virginia, at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel Conference Center (see their website <http://www.virginiabeachresort.com/> for specifics on the hotel).

Make your own reservations by calling (800) 468-2722. Mention that you are a part of the USS Sea Owl Reunion for the rate of \$89.00 per night. This rate is good for 3 days before and after the Reunion dates.

As I get more information, I will post it on our website and also have a registration form posted there. I will also have registration forms available at the Groton picnic.

From the Editor

Bruce Blessington returns with the final part of a three-part series on his Southwest Asian odyssey. Bob D'Amico gives us another look at one of the legendary creatures that once inhabited our boat. I will have more to say about another legendary Sea Owl creature which I am saving for the next issue.

I welcome any and all contributions from Sea Owl shipmates.

A Southwest Asian Odyssey- Part 3

By: Bruce Blessington

Imagine the blast of heat you feel when opening the door of an industrial autoclave. A suffocating, scorching, steaming assault on your skin and respiratory system that produces instant sweat and forces you to recoil from its dragon breath. It's 1937 local, the temperature is 131° F and we've just popped open the aircraft door. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Doha, Qatar.



Feel the heat!

13 July 1304 Local, 1104Z Leg 8 1056 miles

We departed Amman enroute Doha about 45 minutes ago and are now in Saudi Arabian airspace. Captain Ed is asleep, Jesse is relaxing and I'm flying. Brown haze stretches from horizon to horizon from the ground up to 15,000. Below this beige blanket is the empty, baked desert of northern Saudi Arabia. Jeddah Center is responsible in this sector and we have the privilege of listening to a highly excited, over caffeinated air controller whose English is barely intelligible. Not to worry. When his instructions are not understood he helps us better comprehend by screaming into his mike and speaking faster. We listen with some amusement as a

British Airways jumbo headed for Europe 11,000 feet above us at flight level 360 exercises the controller. "I say old chap; could you have a go at that waypoint again?" "Proceed direct to point Queen, point Queen," screams the controller. "Right-o, copy Point Keen." "Neegaateevve! Point Queeeeee!" "Right, could we trouble you to give us that phonetically?" "Quebec, uniform, echo, echo, November," shrieks the controller, on the verge now of a hemorrhagic stroke. "Oh right, much obliged cheery-o," soothes BA as he shifts frequency to Jordanian ATC and heads direct to Queen on a route that he's doubtless flown dozens of times before.

Once again, we are having pressurization problems at 25,000 feet requiring an intermittent use of supplemental oxygen. Ed goes on a search for the leak but doesn't come up with anything conclusive. We request 21,000 from Ishkabibble the Screamer and after nearly twenty minutes of trying, we get clearance to descend. Finally after 3+ hours we leave Jeddah control and contact Doha approach who responds in a wonderfully comprehensible, clipped British accent. We are approaching Doha from the west and have to sort out which of two giant airfields is the civilian one and which is the military. They are almost in line which makes the determination even more challenging. Finally, we all agree that the field to the east is in fact our destination and begin our approach to land. As we descend below 10,000 ft., Ed notices a sudden non-linear change in cabin altitude. He concludes that the leak has in fact compromised our ability to maintain pressurization even at lower altitudes. Not good news. Wheels on the ground at 1637Z, 1937 local. The taxi in seems almost as long as the flight. We dutifully roll along behind the "Follow Me" who is guiding us to some god-forsaken corner of the airport. We are feeling a bit out of place in our twin turbo King Air, surrounded on all sides by the towering jumbo jets of major international carriers. We park, place the chocks and the tail support. The slightest exertion bathes us in sweat. After a twenty minute wait, the crew bus finally shows up and takes us to the terminal for clearing in and transfer to the hotel. The driver, flashing a full suite of gold teeth, informs us that it is so hot that the Qatari government has banned all outside construction work from 1000 to 1800 daily. Marriott's air conditioning and showers never felt so good.

Dinner conversation centers on what to do about the pressurization problem. We are going to be in mountains soon and will need to be above 16,000 feet. The supplemental oxygen system on the plane is not designed for continuous use. The only reasonable solution is to secure bottled oxygen in sufficient volume to sustain all of us for an extended period and to get the now, nearly depleted supplemental system recharged. Easy to say.

The next day was a series of frustrations and aggravations from the start. We were absolutely unable to get an aviation service provider to charge our oxygen system. Not that they couldn't, they wouldn't. We were just too small and our trifling need was only an irritation. Creative business inducements produced no better result. We were nobodies. The efforts to locate bottled oxygen produced marginally better results. Aviation grade oxygen was not to be had anywhere. Medical grade however was available. The difference is moisture content. Not significant in this situation in a heated cabin. I made a new friend in Dr. Alaa, a pharmacist in Doha. He was a man of his word. He promised to provide us with 3 10 liter cylinders of O2, three masks and three regulators. I picked them up; all new; all in order and priced exactly as quoted. A standup guy! Next, we needed to get back out to the plane to get it fueled. We are informed that the only way to accomplish this is to file for a work permit that

would allow us, if approved after a 3 day wait, access to the ramp. The only other way was to leave the country through immigrations and reenter later. And so, goodbye Qatar! We boarded the crew bus for the long ride out to our ramp where the King Air was parked all by its lonesome. We radioed for fuel and settled in for the inevitable delay. The plane and its occupants baked in the sun whilst waiting for the fuel jockeys. Cabin temperature 135°, outside temperature 129°. We quickly ran out of cool water and were forced to drink from our on-board stash of bottled water, refreshingly hot, at about cabin temperature. Two hours later we're topped off with fuel and ready to go back through customs and immigration. Hello and welcome to Qatar. With the requisite flourish of stamps and slapping of passports on counters we arrived again ... without having really left.

The plane is ready and we're ready. The oxygen chase cost us a day so we enjoy Marriott's hospitality for one more night and plan an early start.

15 July 0613 Local, 0313Z Legs 9, 10, 11, 1698 miles

We're back in the air again and depart to the west over the city. I'm amazed at Doha's growth. I first visited during my Mideast travel days back in the late 70's right after the first oil shock. Then the Gulf hotel, the pyramid-like structure in the lower left of the photo, was then the only modern structure on the peninsula.



Downtown Doha

Given our concerns over pressurization, we've filed a flight plan for a lower altitude, 13,000ft. The cabin pressure seems to be holding but our fuel burn is now dramatically higher necessitating a stop in Muscat, Oman for more fuel before heading east towards our final destination. We flew at 19,000 and the cabin pressure held up just fine giving us some hope that as we flew higher to clear the mountains we would be ok. and in fact we were. (The unused bottled oxygen was donated to the local hospital.)

At 1833 local, we touched down at our final Southwest Asian destination to a warm welcome from our Flight Landata colleagues. After a short debrief we were on our way to dinner at the base mess hall. This was the first of a number of meals I was privileged to share with our fighting men and women. They're young, purposeful and growing up fast. They make us proud. After dinner, I'm shown to my quarters. It's a plywood "B" hut, 48' long and about 16' wide flanked with sandbagged bunkers on each side. Inside it's subdivided into six

cubicles per side separated by thin plywood walls with a plywood bed, a chair and a table. You learn more about the next door neighbors than you really want to know but compared to the after battery, it's luxury accommodations. The structure has an air conditioning unit stuck in one end which provides some cool air if you leave the cubical door open. The head and showers are 200 yards away over a boulder strewn path flanked with razor wire.



I spent the next several days on business matters meeting with the members of our site team, pilots, systems operators, mechanics and logistics managers. All in all it was a great opportunity to spend time with our people and understand in greater detail the challenges that they face. They are a brave and dedicated group and I'm proud to be part of their organization.

18 July 2200 Local,

I'm aboard a military flight making my way to Dubai for the trip home. We have one stop to make and then we will land in Dubai. By 0100 local I've finally sorted out my baggage transfer to British airways in the chaos of Dubai International Airport and put my head down at 0200 local in the Airport Hotel.

19 July 0900 Local 0600Z

Departed Dubai on BA 108 for London and a transfer to AA155 to Boston. I'm finally homeward bound at the end of twelve demanding, exciting and informative days. I'd seen a lot, experienced more than I can process and feel a great deal of satisfaction in being able to see first hand the superb accomplishments of our people in their mission to support our military.



Sea Owl Association Vice-President

As you may know, Tom Moniz has asked not to continue as Vice-President of the Sea Owl Association. He has agreed to continue as Sea Owl's Historian. Ken Nichols has stepped forward and offered to take his place as Vice President.

Roy has accepted his offer subject to approval by those who will attend our reunion at Virginia Beach in September. Meanwhile, if there is anyone else who might like to be considered for this position, please notify Roy.

Groton Picnic Raffle Prize

Sharp 40" LCD Television Model LC-40D68UT



Key Features

- * 40" Class (40" Diagonal)
- * High Performance LCD Panel
- * 3 HDMI® Terminals
- * Full HD 1080p (1920 x 1080) Resolution
- * PC Input



As always, 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:

- Albert Burkhart – TM1 62-65 – December 29
- Francis Maguire - ENCS 51-57 – January 7

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.*

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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- President** – Roy Purtell, 4 Garden Court, Troy, NY 12180-1307, (518) 272-8614, e-mail roy@ussseaowl.com
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The 40's

March 2011 Issue

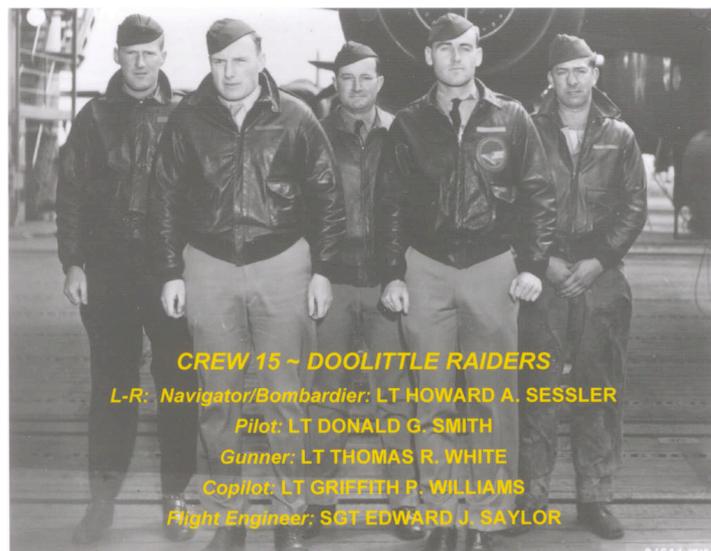
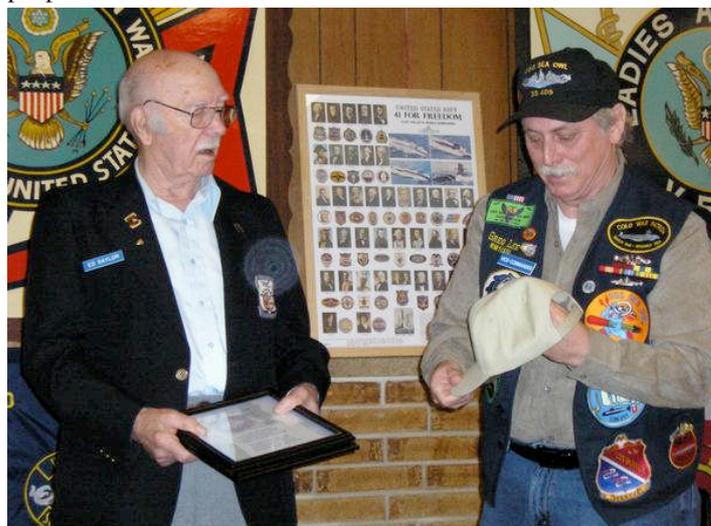


Jimmy Doolittle Raider

By Ken Johnson

Shipmate Greg Lee recently emailed me these photographs with the following description:

“In 2008 I had the honor and privilege of meeting one of the Raiders, a gentleman by the name of Ed Saylor. He was the flight engineer on aircraft 15. A very honorable man. He was a guest speaker at one of my submarine veterans meetings. Had a great story to tell. Attached is a photo of Ed and I. I was presenting him two hats making him and Honorary Submariner. Early in his speech he made a comment about us submariners. He said he didn't know how we could ride submarines nor could he do anything like that. No reflect back to what this honorable man did on April 18, 1942 - took off from an aircraft carrier in an Army Air Corp twin engine B25 bomber and raided Japan. Crash landed off China and was rescued by the Chinese people.”



CREW 15 - DOOLITTLE RAIDERS

L-R: Navigator/Bombardier: LT HOWARD A. SESSLER
Pilot: LT DONALD G. SMITH
Gunner: LT THOMAS R. WHITE
Coptail: LT GRIFFITH P. WILLIAMS
Flight Engineer: SGT EDWARD J. SAYLOR

He also included a link to a YouTube video of Jimmy Doolittle's granddaughter, Jonna Doolittle Hoppes. She wrote a book about her grandfather called “Calculated Risk: The Extraordinary Life of Jimmy Doolittle – Aviation Pioneer and World War II Hero” which is an excellent read.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgt8PMoRGG8&featur> Note also she does this without notes and teleprompters.

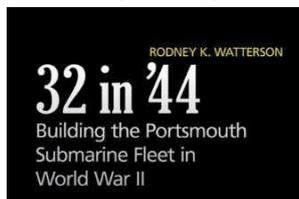
WW II Submariners

By Ken Johnson

Recently on Ron Martini's submarine bulletin board someone asked the following question: How many submariners served during WW II, how many are still living?

This is Pat householder's reply: “Between 15-16,000 men served in submarines in WWII including the 3,600 killed during WWII. On the www.ussvi.org website under the Eternal Patrol button, there are 12,048 WWII submariners listed on eternal patrol. There are another 2,922 living members enrolled in SVWWII, so the total still living is somewhere in the 3,000 range.”

“32 in '44: Building the Portsmouth Submarine Fleet in World War II” by Rodney K. Watterson



Editor's note: I learned about this book too late to read it before writing this issue of the newsletter. I did order it from Amazon though so maybe I will write my review in the June issue. Meanwhile, this is what Amazon says about it:



“In the 1930s, the Portsmouth Navy Yard in New Hampshire built less than two submarines a year, yet in 1944 it completed an astonishing 32 submarines, and over the course of the war produced 37 per cent of all U.S. submarines. This book analyzes the factors behind the small yard's record-

setting production, including streamlined operations, innovative management practices, the Navy's commitment to develop the yard's resources as an alternative to private industry, and the yard's ability to adapt quickly to a decentralized wartime shipbuilding environment.

The author highlights similarities between Portsmouth's efforts to accelerate production and those of private shipyards. He concludes that private shipyards deviated little from construction plans, while at Portsmouth a continuing dialogue with the Navy resulted in design changes dictated by feedback from the frontlines.

Established on 12 June 1800 during the administration of President John Adams, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is the oldest continuously operating shipyard in the United States Navy. 32 in '44 analyzes the factors behind the yard's record setting submarine production that made such a significant contribution to the winning of the war.”



The 50's

March 2011 Issue



Remembering Francis Maguire

By Ken Johnson



I knew Francis from the many Groton picnics he attended. Francis served 20 years as a WWII, Korean conflict and Vietnam War participant retiring as Senior Chief Engineman, and as Chief of The Boat in USS Sea Robin (SS407). He served on three submarines; USS Haddo (SS255) during WWII (completing four successful war patrols), USS Sea Owl (SS405) and USS Sea Robin (SS407) during the Korean conflict and the Vietnam War. He also completed a five year teaching tour at Submarine School, New

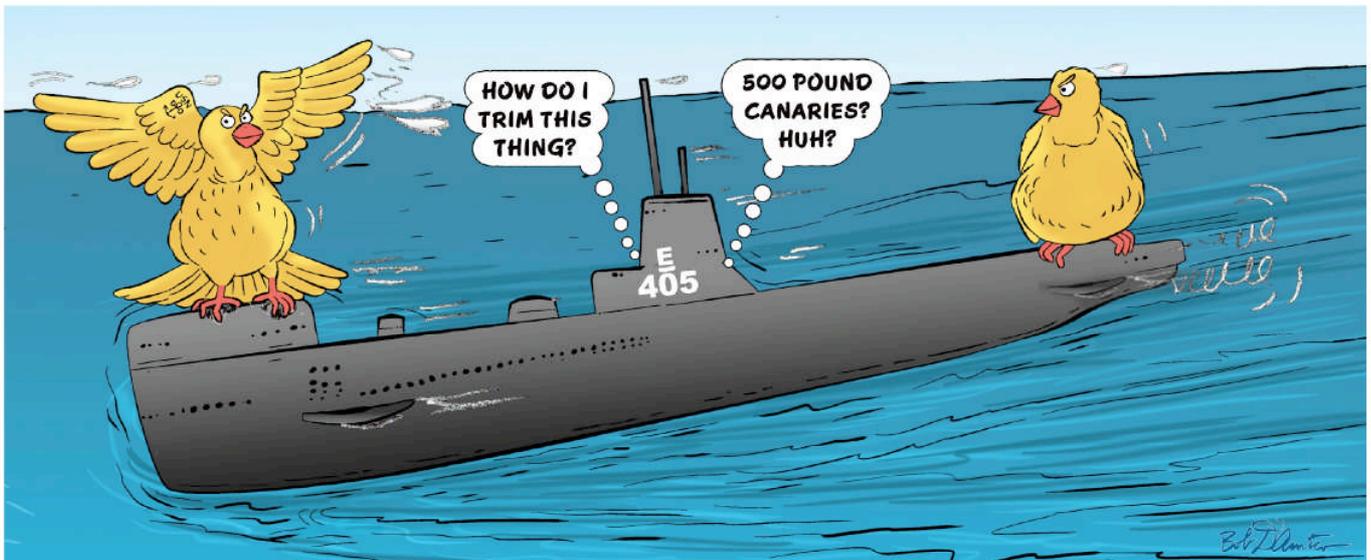
London, CT and a two year tour on the Deputy ComSubLant Staff for Engineering and Material Readiness of submarines in the Atlantic Fleet.

He retired after 12 years from the City of Norwich Dept. of Public Utilities. He was also a member of the BPOE#430, Fleet Reserve Branch #20, Saints Peter and Paul Church, and a life member of Submarine Veterans of WWII.

Francis' wish was that in lieu of flowers, memorial donations be made to Sts. Peter & Paul Church or in Mr. Maguire's own words, "have a good strong straight shot of 100 proof whiskey and wish me well. Amen." Your Sea Owl Association sent a donation of \$50 in his memory to Sts Peter & Paul Church. (Instead of 100 proof whiskey I wished him well with a shot of 80 proof Absolut vodka.)

Cartoon Bob Explores One of Sea Owl's Legendary Denizens and Explores How it Tormented One Diving Officer in Particular

More Submarine Wildlife Stories



I am sure all submarine JOs have a "trim party" as diving officer. During mine and before I noticed several members of the crew sneaking back and forth through Control on their way to either the FTR or ATR, the Chief of the Watch tried to explain my trim problem was the 500 pound canary pacing the deck. Allegedly the "fate" of the 500 pound canary involved the cooks serving chicken one day and the crew refusing to eat it and walking around with black arm bands for several days. When Capt McKechnie asked the reason, they said it was because the cooks had "killed" the 500 pound canary and tried to serve it to them. He went along with the gag and we held a formal Navy burial service topside, complete with gun salute and committed a wreath of chicken bones to the sea. There is a photo of the burial service that I published once in Hooter Hilites (I don't remember the exact issue). It came by mail from Shipmate Bob Russell who was the Quartermaster who participated in the burial service.



By Ken Johnson



The 60's

March 2011 Issue



Remembering Albert Burkhart

By Tom Moniz



Sadly we lost another crew member and WW2 sailor, Albert Burkhart. TM1(SS). Burkie, as we all called him was a colorful character to say the least. With his booming voice he reminded you of popeye. I know he made war patrols on the USS Tilefish and went through some bad depth charging. I believe he qualified on the S-48

He could strain your senses yet he had a heart of gold. I know he made a good impression on me.

Seeing him in Hagerstown was a real thrill. I heard him before I saw him. There was no mistaking his booming voice. I swung around and there he was. I spent a good part of two days taking with him and meeting his equally colorful son.

What really impressed me was when I saw Admiral Fluckey coming down the stairs. I had just finished reading his book on his war patrols, during one of which he earned the Medal of Honor. I introduced myself and was talking with him when I heard Burkie yelling "Hey Gene" and Admiral Fluckey looked up and yells "hey Burkie" seems they were old war buddies. I am really proud of the picture I have with all three of us together.

While talking to Burkie at Hagerstown, I asked him if he ever knew who put the chopped up rubber bands in his pipe tobacco. He stood up and pointed his finger at me and yelled "It was you, you SOB. I knew it was you and we rolled over laughing.

Seems he had the after torpedo room watch, and he used to walk around the room and blow pipe tobacco into the sleeping guys faces, and laugh when they woke up or got sick as the ship was rolling.

So one day I chopped up a rubber band and mixed it with his pipe tobacco. Everyone knew about it. We watched him light up his pipe, and the tough old man smoked the whole bowl and never said a word, but the torpedo room smelled like burnt rubber. It was 35 years later that I dared tell him it was me.

I called him several times at home, but he started to get dementia and he moved. I never was able to find him.

At San Diego a few years ago I was talking to a man who was on the Tilefish and asked if he knew Burkie. He not only knew him, but was his brother in law! He promised to send me his address, but never did, and I neglected to get his.

Another little known fact was that his wife was the one who painted the Sea Owl plaques that were given out or that hung on the mess hall bulkhead. Yes, I truly will miss him and just couldn't let his passing go without telling a little about him. He was my friend.

Remembering Edgar Bobbitt

By Ken Johnson

On April 10th please pause to remember our shipmate, EM2(SS) Edgar Bobbitt. Edgar enlisted into the naval service at Odessa, Texas, in March 1960. He completed his basic training at the U.S. Naval Training Center, San Diego, California, and attended the

Navy's Electrician's Mate School. In late September, Edgar volunteered for submarine duty and was enrolled in the Submarine School at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut. His first assignment was in the submarine U.S.S. *Sea Owl* (SS 405), where he became qualified as a submariner and was awarded his silver dolphins. Edgar was selected for advance training in nuclear power and successfully completed the course of instruction at the submarine base and at Windsor Locks, Connecticut. He was assigned to his first nuclear-powered submarine, U.S.S. *Thresher* (SSN 593) on January 29, 1963.



We all know too well what happened to Thresher on April 10th that year. Here is how Tom Moniz remembers it: The Sea Owl was out on maneuvers somewhere east of Boston, I was oblivious to where we were. I remember half dozing in my bunk in Hogan's alley. We were submerged, soon I became conscious of the BQC chirping outside of the hull, but paid it no heed, as I had no idea that it could be deciphered.

All of a sudden from the foot of my bunk, I heard a large commotion, and some cursing. Immediately I jumped up and confronted Gerry Bodeker RM1 who was hastily getting his shoes on and rushing out of the alley. I asked what was going on and he exclaimed that a sub was down. Immediately I heard the surface alarm and we started up all 4 engines and started steaming toward the last sighting of the Thresher, SSN-593 at flank speed.

At the time I had no idea which sub it was, but at flank speed in rough weather it wasn't a pleasant run. I had a "delicate" stomach back then, and surface travel did not agree it. As I remember we were several hours away from the last posit of the Thresher. Upon arriving we searched for debris on the surface. I seem to remember seeing plastic reactor sheathing material and other debris floating on the surface in very rough seas. Later we went down to 400 feet and were circling over the site, with the Seawolf, SSN-575 circling below us at 700 feet.

Seems that some hammering noises were heard, and we had some hope, not knowing that the Thresher was 8,000 feet below us, and there was absolutely no hope for them. It was determined that the noise was coming from a surface ship, and they were ordered further away so we could search in quiet. But after what seemed like hours we finally realized there was no hope.

I sure did some soul searching after that, not realizing until the list of fatalities was published that I knew some men that were on board. I was very close to Jim Snider, and had visited him in Vallejo and met his wife and two daughters, What a horrible knot in my stomach to read those names.

Edgar Bobbitt whom I believe I may have relieved when I came aboard, was also on the list of fatalities. How ironic, here was the very boat he had served on, and she was searching for him. May they all rest in peace!

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