



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association
Web Site: <http://home.earthlink.net/~purtellr/index.html>

We still give a hoot!
March 2003 Issue



President's Message

Shipmates & 1st Mates,

I truly hope that this newsletter finds everyone doing well. This winter is one that we in the Northeast won't soon forget.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the loss of our Astronauts onboard Columbia. Accidents as this only bring the dangers of going into space back to reality. It is a dangerous business that these brave people accept with open arms. As I was watching TV coverage on this, I could not help but think of the shipmates that we lost on submarines and how similar these accidents are. This is a dangerous business, no matter if it's in space or under water. It's still space. The conditions are very similar. When something goes wrong, you are very much on your own. There was some talk, if only for a short time, of canceling our space program because of this accident. Where would our submarines be today, if after our first accident the submarine program was cancelled. Space accidents will happen again, as do our submarine accidents. Space travel will become safer because of accidents, much as did our submarines of today. Astronauts & submarine sailors live in the same dangerous world.

We are working on our Mobile reunion. We are making contact with tours in Mobile. See the Mobile reunion material in this newsletter for more information.

Beginning with this issue, the newsletter is being sent only to those shipmates who are less than 2 years behind on their dues. There are 88 shipmates that have not paid dues in the past two years. If you have not paid dues, pay it now. Dues are due on the 1st of Nov each year.

We hope to see many of you at our Groton picnic this year. Picnic dates are June 6th thru 8th. See other section for more information on the picnic.

The Halfbeak Challenge

By Ken Johnson

As many of you may already know, I left Sea Owl in April 1965 to assume the duties as Engineer Officer of the USS Halfbeak (SS 352), a Guppy II at the time attached to Squadron 10 in New London. Since Sea Owl was my first and qualifying boat, she remains special, and I think most submariners feel the same about their first and qualifying boat.

Following the last issue of "Hooter Hilites" which contained a tribute to Capt. Ned Beach there was discussion among some, including me, that the Navy should name a future submarine in his honor. From some Halfbeak shipmates, I heard the opinion that Adm Eugene B. Fluckey should be so honored as well. It happens that in 1947 Eugene Fluckey was one of Halfbeak's first CO's. Anyway, to get to the point, at one point I received a copy of an e-mail from a Halfbeak shipmate stating an opinion that "we all know we have the best officers and best boat in the Navy". At this statement, my true loyalty to Sea Owl came forth and I answered by saying that "I had a few Sea Owl shipmates who may take

exception to that." What followed was a challenge to a beer ballgame to settle it. With memories of Lamar Taylor in his wheelchair, Bill Belt on oxygen, Tom Gilbert's heart problems, etc. I suggested a beer ball game might not be a fair contest and preferred a less strenuous, more intellectual challenge instead.

I then issued the following three challenges:

First Challenge: Who publishes the best newsletter? In my e-mail issuing this challenge, I quoted an e-mail I had received from Carl Hansen, editor of Halfbeak's newsletter, stating how much he liked my first issue of "Hooter Hilites" and warning that he might "steal" some of my ideas and use them in future Halfbeak newsletters. As part of my challenge, I said "I have no copyright on my newsletter ideas. Halfbeak is free to copy them any time you want."

Second Challenge: Which boat better supports the USSVI Creed. In support of my argument for Sea Owl, I pointed out that our recent reunion was held at King's Bay, GA to coincide with the WW II Submarine Veteran's Memorial Service and that the Sea Owl ship's bell was used to "toll the boats" during the service. In addition, I mentioned that the Sea Owl ship's bell resides at the USSVI - Groton Base clubhouse and is used at each of their monthly meetings to "toll the boats" lost during that month. I also mentioned the Sea Owl Association's generosity in supporting the USSVI - Groton Base "Caring and Sharing" program.

Third Challenge: (The best of all, I thought.) Which boat was the best shot? In support of this I offered the following which I received from Shipmate Ken Florey, "Do you remember the time we were working with the Halfbeak and hit her in maneuvering room portside with the Mk 16 torpedo? We hit it far enough back that it didn't get any tank but did knock off a bunch of cork on the bulkhead near where the port screw went through the hull. Mess up the packing gland some as well. Number 6 tube had a nasty little habit of firing once in a while when you raised the ready to fire lever. The final depth setting was not yet entered when the tube was "ready to fire." We obviously had a good solution."

In addition, I offered the following two examples:

During WW II Sea Owl torpedoed and sank at least one Japanese destroyer and one Japanese submarine. Under the command of Carter Bennett, her first CO, was one of the first submarines to successfully fire the "Cutie" torpedo during her first war patrol. Details are not recorded in the war patrol report, at least none that I have seen, because the "cutie" was so secret at the time that it couldn't be referenced in a Confidential war patrol report.

While I was aboard in the early '60's, we made an approach on a carrier during ASW exercises with a carrier task group. Capt Russ McKechnie fired a spread of four Mk-14 exercise torpedoes at the carrier. One actually hit the side of the carrier and sank. We never recovered it. I know about this one because I was ATDC operator during the approach.

I concluded this challenge by asking, "Did Halfbeak ever actually hit anything?" By this time I felt that I had "stunned" my worthy opponents and rendered them speechless so I offered a unilateral cease fire.

Admittedly, my challenges were carefully chosen as ones where I felt Sea Owl had a definite advantage. After all, Halfbeak had no war record, since she was commissioned in 1946. Had I issued a fourth challenge it might have been, "Which had the better diesel engines?" No contest here. As Halfbeak's Engineer Officer how I often longed for the reliability and relative simplicity of the Fairbanks-Morse 38D8-1/8 diesels as compared to the GM 278AS.

In reality, Halfbeak could have beaten Sea Owl in many categories, such as who had the most highly decorated CO or CO who achieved the highest rank. Clearly with Eugene B. Fluckey as a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor and my own Halfbeak CO, Arthur S. Moreau, Jr who went on to become a 4 star Admiral they had us there. As a Guppy II, Halfbeak would have excelled in many areas of performance over Sea Owl, a Fleet Snorkel boat with a big, bulbous bow. As for appearance, Halfbeak in her later years with sleek, Guppy II lines and high sail was a pretty boat particularly when compared to Sea Owl which was somewhat of an "ugly duckling" in her later years from some angles at least. As a WW II Fleet Boat, however, Sea Owl's classic Portsmouth lines were, in my opinion, superior to Halfbeak's EB lines.

In response to my declaration of a "cease fire", I received the following from Halfbeak Shipmate Billy Reeves: "You and other shipmates have a first love with Sea Owl. A lot of us have a first love with Halfbeak. There is no reason that we cannot love all our shipmates and whatever boats they served on, whether in war or peace. We all served and would go wherever we were sent. Shipmates do not have to compete with each other. Let us all be happy with the blessings that all those that have gone before us and came after us have provided. God Bless America."

This was my reply: "Well stated! I would be hard pressed to choose THE best officers and THE best boat in the Navy. Please note, I never made such a claim for Sea Owl. There is a special bond with the boat where you first qualified in submarines. I guess that's why Groton Base has you announce that at the beginning of each meeting.

Competition, incidentally, is healthy. Did not we once compete for E's against each other, at least within our respective squadrons? You guys deserve a lot of credit for having such a highly successful first reunion in Groton back in June. I only regret I was not able to make it. My challenges were offered from the perspective of an Association that has matured over the years and apparently gone through growing pains along the way. If in the process we have come up with some good ideas on how an association can best serve its boat, its members and the Submarine Force, we are always eager to share them with others. God Bless America and All Who Defend Her!"

Thus the "cease fire" became a "truce". It was an exchange, done in a spirit of fun with the best of intentions, that I enjoyed and the outcome and conclusions drawn on both sides are ones that I wanted to share with all of you.

Membership Dues

Membership dues pay for this newsletter. It also gives our storekeeper money to purchase items that are available. Without your dues, we would have to purchase these items with our own

money, then hope that we were paid back. Dues enable us to purchase items used during our raffles. They are very important. Dues for one year is \$10.00 and due on November 1st of each year, unless you joined after June 1st, then you are exempt until November 1st of the following year. Make your check out to "Sea Owl Association" and send it to John Leers, 1453 Marty Drive, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-2425.

Beginning this year, we will be sending out Membership Cards to those shipmates who pay their dues. This card will tell you that you are paid up to date and when your dues is due again. These cards are being prepared by shipmate John Leers, your Association Secretary/Treasurer.

Lifetime Memberships are also available at a cost of \$100.00-- no more writing checks; no more remembering if you paid or not. Lifetime Memberships receive a Certificate from the Association, also prepared by shipmate John Leers.

Newsletters

During our business meeting held at St. Marys, and beforehand during a meeting of the officers, we decided that those shipmates that have NOT paid their dues for two years or more will NOT receive the Newsletter via US Postal Service.

Those delinquent shipmates can still receive the Newsletter via their computer, as a PDF by getting in touch with Ken Johnson at JAMGraphic@aol.com.

This does NOT apply to our Sea Owl veterans of WWII, they will always receive a Newsletter regardless.

If you haven't paid your dues for two years or more, this will be your last newsletter received by US Mail.

Sea Owl Reunion 2003 - Mobile

Our base hotel in Mobile will be the Lafayette Plaza (<http://www.lafayetteplazahotel.com>) Room rates for shipmates will be \$66.00 per day plus tax. Shipmates can call 1-800-692-6662 to reserve a room at this rate. Let the hotel know that you are coming in for the Sea Owl reunion. Our buffet will be on Saturday 11th, in the Lafayette Plaza Bayview room, which overlooks Mobile bay. I have not yet come up with total information on the buffet yet, that material will be available in the next newsletter. Our hospitality room will, of course, be in the Lafayette Plaza. I'm looking into having a catered event at the Military Park, site of the USS Drum & USS Alabama. There will be more on this in next newsletter. Our tour operator is sending me information on getting tours of local homes & the gardens in Mobile. This is something that our wives said they wanted at Mobile. I'm also toying with the idea of having a poker night, for those shipmates who may want to play poker. This is something that could be done in a poker player's room.

More material on the Mobile reunion will be in the next Newsletter which should be coming out in June.

Groton Picnic

We will be having our summer picnic in Groton, CT, again this year. The dates are June 6th through the 8th, 2003. Events so far include a buffet dinner at the Groton Motor Inn Friday, June 6th from 6 to 10 PM. Price for the buffet is \$20.00 per person.

Saturday June 7th 11 AM - 6 PM

Family Picnic at Sutton Park (large pavilion)

Price: \$ 15.00 per person (children 5-12 \$7.00, under 5 Free)



The 40's

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World War II Veterans Registry of Remembrances

Those vets of WWII can register with the National World War II Memorial Commission. Those vets who may be interested can get a registration form by calling 800/639-4WW2 or from their web page <http://www.wwiimemorial.com>

Your shipmate Jim Campbell MM 45-47 is registered with this site. He has also posted his picture there. Thanks Jim for sending in this information.

Thomas Dykers

By Ken Johnson

Perhaps more than anything else, my attraction to the Submarine Service and interest in becoming a submariner was inspired by watching the TV series, "Silent Service" during the 50's. The host of this series was Radm Thomas M. Dykers, USN (Ret) and his booming voice narrated heroic episodes of submarine exploits during World War II. While some actual footage was often included, much of each episode was played by actors and several upcoming stars appeared in them. Usually at the end of each episode, Radm Dykers interviewed one of the real people from that episode. This was great stuff and should be available for the History Channel today, but is not for some reason.

There was a Sea Owl connection to Thomas Dykers, but it was to Cdr Thomas M. Dykers as Sea Owl's Division Commander in 1944. In that capacity, he made certain that Sea Owl was prepared for combat by supervising the training of the crew. Prior to this, he commanded the USS Jack. He retired in 1949 at the rank of Rear Admiral and went on to produce "The Silent Service" series.



The above photograph from Shipmate Stan Ainley's large collection of photographs shows Stan receiving his combat pin from Thomas Dykers on Guam in 1944. Any other stories about Thomas Dykers that WW II shipmates may have are welcome.

A Visit with Carl Bryson

By Ken Johnson

On Saturday, March 7th, Roy Purtell and I had the pleasure of visiting Carl Bryson at his residence in Groton, CT. Carl, in case you may not know, is one of the 33 survivors rescued from the USS Squalus in May 1939 off Portsmouth, NH and one of only four of them still alive.



In this newsletter I have written an article which speaks of the 40th anniversary this coming April of the loss of USS Thresher. This remains still the greatest death toll in a

single submarine loss.

I plan to attend the memorial service at Portsmouth on April 5th and had inquired as to whether Carl might like to attend with me. I had seen him on the National Geographic Special, "Lost Subs: Disasters at Sea" and realized that he was rescued from the Squalus on the day I was bom, May 25, 1939. After contacting Carl, I learned that he was Engineer aboard the USS Sunbird which also spent several days searching for signs of Thresher in April 1963 as did Sea Owl and Seawolf. Carl declined my invitation, but invited me to visit him at the "old folks home" where he lives in Groton to see some of his memorabilia. Since Roy was planning to be on Groton on Saturday, we decided to take him up on his offer and had a delightful chat with him.

The rescue of Carl Bryson and 32 others from the USS Squalus in 1939 remains today the most successful submarine rescue in history. The book, "The Terrible Hours" by Peter Maas, tells the story of this rescue. Another book, "Back from the Deep" by Carl LaVO, tells the remarkable story of the Squalus, including her service during the war as USS Sailfish and the strange relationship between Squalus/Sailfish and her sister boat Sculpin. If you have not read this book, I highly recommend it.

As Sailfish, this boat went on to conduct twelve war patrols earning a Presidential Unit Citation for her tenth patrol. On December 26, 1944 Sailfish departed Pearl Harbor for New London where she served as a training boat until June 1945.

Carl went on to serve as an instructor at the escape tank in Groton during the war and also made one war patrol on Tench. Carl retired in 1966 after 30 years service and went to work for Electric Boat, eventually retiring from there as well. Carl calls himself one of the "youngsters" where he currently resides and maintains an active social schedule. Roy and I were most impressed with him.

Incidentally, Oliver Naquin, who was Commanding Officer of the Squalus, went on to become Chief Engineer of the USS California, a position which he held on December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. Our own Lamar Taylor, Commanding Officer of Sea Owl from 1952 to 1955, served aboard the USS California as a junior officer in the Engineering Department at that time as well.



The 50's

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Sea Owl's Budding Author

By Ken Johnson



This is a photo of Dick Boyle (LTjg 53-56) and Tami. (Dick is the one on the left.) Last fall, when I first became acquainted with Dick through an unlikely source, retired Soviet Navy Captain Dmitry Zubkov, I learned that Dick was working on a book. Recently I asked if he would be willing to give us a preview of what it is about and what it is like to do research for a book, meet deadlines, etc. Here is what Dick sent.

“Proposed Title: **TEST DEPTH Evolution of the Modern Submarine From 1860 to The Present**

Overview: A history of development of submarines propelled by machinery. Covers all nations who designed and built their own submarines.

Chapter 1: Birth and Growing Pains: 1860-1902

Chapter 2: Emergence and War: 1903-1918

Chapter 3: Ambivalence and More War: 1919-1945

Chapter 4: Imitation and Innovation: 1946-1954

Chapter 5: The True Submarine: 1955-1959

Chapter 6: The Age of Polaris: 1960-1967

Chapter 7: The Quiet Revolution: 1968-1980

Chapter 8: The Arctic: 1981-1990

Chapter 9: Confusion: 1991-1994

Chapter 10: The New World Order: 1995-2003

Writing accurate history requires a lot of research in archives here and in Europe. Valuable contacts have included Royal Navy friends from my active duty days and other European friends developed from attendance at International Submariners Association meetings from the late 1980s to the present. Many retired U. S. Navy submariners and others have been a tremendous help in keeping presentations accurate.

Writing requires discipline, which sometimes drifts away. I'm up to Chapter 6 as of Feb 03 and have set a goal of Jan 04 for the completed manuscript."

I can only offer the advice that according to his “Message to Today’s Submariners” once inspired Radm Eugene Fluckey:

“Press on. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not: Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not: The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent”.

Who uttered these words? Would you believe “Silent Cal”, President Calvin Coolidge, in 1923?

Keep at it Dick! We look forward to having you do a book signing at a future Sea Owl reunion. See you at Chatham in May.

Shipmates, look for more information in the next “Hooter Hilites” about the next International Submariner Association convention at Chatham, UK which Dick and I plan to attend in May. Better yet, come to the Groton Picnic in June for a personal account of my experience in attending my first such convention.

The BQR-4 Sonar

For those interested in Cold War submarine history, there is an excellent paper on the subject called, “The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy’s Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines” by Dr. Owen R. Cote, Jr. of MIT. You can find it at <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ship/docs/cold-war-asw.htm> on the Internet. According to Dr. Cote, the BQR-4 sonar, the type housed within the prominent bow of Sea Owl in her later years, was a significant advancement in passive submarine sonar in the early 50’s. First deployed aboard the SSK boats, the BQR-4A was installed aboard Sea Owl in the mid-50’s, doubtless converting Sea Owl into a formidable element of the first line of defense of that era, Barrier Patrols in the GI-UK Gap.

Shipmate Mike Polhemus has provided me with much information recently about the BQR-4 and 4A which is what was installed aboard Sea Owl and some sea stories, one about rice that I need to look over and edit a bit before publishing so that I don’t offend anyone. We would like to hear more stories about these patrols that we can include in future issues of “Hooter Hilites”. Many of us who served aboard Sea Owl in the 60’s know that she was primarily involved with providing ASW services of a different nature and Submarine School support operations.

Sailor Rest Your Oars

We have learned since the last newsletter of the passing of this shipmate:

Bill Farnsworth, LT 52-54 – December 29

We extend our deepest sympathy to family and friends of Bill our departed shipmate.



The 60's

March 2003 Issue



Thresher Remembered

By Ken Johnson

April 10, 2003 marks the 40th anniversary of the loss of the USS Thresher (SSN 593). Those who were aboard Sea Owl on April 10, 1963 will never forget the feelings that were going through our minds as we and Seawolf raced to the last reported position as reported in the message that no submariner wants to receive. Sea Owl and Seawolf were conducting routine operations together off Long Island at the time. You may also remember that at the time an aerial photograph of Sea Owl appeared on the front page of several newspapers. I had at first thought of including that photo here, but this one seemed more appropriate in remembrance of the sacrifice of the 129 souls aboard Thresher on that day.

My own personal thoughts and feelings at the time, as a young Ensign aboard my first submarine for less than 4 months, were hopes and prayers that it was some mistake or communication failure, that Thresher would reappear and report that some minor problems had prevented her from communicating. I did not know that first news reports that had gone out simply stated that a New London based submarine was overdue and presumed lost in the Atlantic without identifying it by name. My mother knew we were at sea at the time. The extension of our operations due to the search and the appearance of Sea Owl's photograph on the front page of newspapers did little to relieve her anxiety and it was not until I was able to call her on our return to port that she would believe I was safe. Subsequently, I rarely told her when and for how long I would be at sea.

Thresher's legacy was and continues to be a heightened awareness of the danger of submarine operations and a need for greatly enhanced quality control measures in submarine construction and maintenance. The SUBSAFE program was a direct result as was development of the Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle (DSRV). There was, of course, a lengthy investigation to determine the cause of the tragic loss of our most modern nuclear submarine and

the full story is well documented in Norman Polmar's excellent book, "The Death of the USS Thresher".

The recent loss of the space shuttle Columbia has caused some in the submarine community to reflect on the loss of Thresher and Scorpion and the relative anonymity of the loss of a submarine as compared to the spectacular views shown over and over on television of the actual destruction of Columbia and of Challenger 16 years ago. There was, of course, no CNN in 1963 or 1968 when Thresher and Scorpion were lost. There were also not any cameras to record these events, yet in sheer numbers and human tragedy the loss of so many lives in the loss of these submarines represents a sacrifice we must never forget.

Tom Gilbert Update



As this newsletter goes to "press", I have evidence that "bionic" shipmate, Tom Gilbert, is alive and well and busily preparing for our next reunion.

As you know, Tom is one of the "Founding Fathers" of the USS Sea Owl Association. He recently has gone through a series of medical procedures and his heart has finally been stabilized by a pacemaker.

Navy Seal - USMC Equivalency

By Ken Johnson

Back in December the Russian Sub Museum in Providence, RI came out with a new T-shirt design that says "Our Museum Can Sink Your Museum". Well, I had to have one and some of my fellow Russian Sub Museum "comrades" issued me a challenge to wear it to Battleship Cove in Fall River, MA. "Not without a few USS Saratoga Marines to back me up", I said.

Well, that got me thinking. Submariners are more familiar with Navy Seals than Marines. With limited space aboard, a submarine needs to pack as much firepower into as little space as possible. I wondered just how many Marines it takes to equal one Navy Seal. Not having a definitive answer to this, I asked around. Many declined to offer an opinion. My nephew, Brian Porter, a Naval Academy graduate who chose the Marine Corps said it would take two Seals to equal one Marine. Well, I knew he wouldn't give an unbiased answer.

The best answer came from Pat Taylor, (XO 66-67), who recalled an exercise where 8 Navy Seals went ashore to prepare the way for a 40 Marine landing party. So, for lack of a better figure, I guess the ratio is 5 Marines to 1 Navy Seal.

Incidentally, in case you didn't know, Governor Jesse Ventura's real name was James Janos, SK3 when he was a Navy Seal.

Ge, I hope I didn't offend any Marines here. ☺