



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

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

We still give a hoot!

September 2006 Issue



Shipmates & 1st mates

President's Message

We are only a few weeks away from our Charleston, S.C. Reunion. As I always say, it's never too late to register until it's over. If your sitting on the fence wondering who's going to attend call either me or John Leers, we both have the list of registered shipmates. If you don't have the internet for obtaining a registration form, call me, I will get you registered. As of 9/9/06 we have 22 shipmates registered plus guest, giving us a total of 38 persons attending this year's reunion. This does not count the 28 people that the *USS Medregal* (SS 480) will have joining us this year.

As some of you already know, I have erased the hard drive on my computer. Doing this has caused me to loose everyone's e-mail address plus almost everything else that was stored on it. If your not receiving messages from me, send me a message so that I can get your e-mail address added to my program.

I am enjoying my retirement, see you at Charleston. !!!!.

Charleston Reunion:

Having been to Mobile where the Confederate submarine *CSS Hunley* was built, we will get an opportunity to see the real thing and not just a museum replica. Since its location and recovery, the *Hunley* has been the subject of much archaeological study and its mysteries are carefully being revealed. We should get a good look at it on Monday when a tour is planned for the Hunley Museum. You should know that the Hunley is normally open only Saturdays and Sundays and it is being opened especially for us and the *USS Medregal* reunion groups.



One of the items being raffled off at the Charleston reunion is this print of the Sea Owl as it appeared in 1952 after fleet snorkel conversion and before the BQR-4 "nose job". This is a 11" x 14" print on canvas and is mounted on a wooden frame.

America's First Submariner

By Ken Johnson

The first American submariner, Sergeant Ezra Lee, was not even a navy man, but a soldier in the Continental Army. Technically there was a Continental Navy but the strange craft conceived by David Bushnell and named *Turtle* for its strange appearance and similarity in appearance to the reptile was not a part of it.

The British fleet controlled New York harbor and threatened the entire Hudson River valley. In New York harbor on the night of September 6, 1776 Sergeant Ezra Lee entered the *Turtle* and was

towed by longboats to the vicinity of the British ships. Originally the inventor's brother, Ezra Bushnell, was supposed to make the attack, but was ill and Lee was considered the most experienced man



to do it in his stead. His target was *HMS Eagle*, the flagship of Admiral Richard Howe. After he was cast loose, Lee worked his way to the stern of the *Eagle*. From there he submerged underneath the keel and attempted to use a drill to penetrate the hull and attach a gunpowder mine equipped with a clock timer to the vessel. He was unable to penetrate the copper sheathing, lost control of *Turtle* and popped to the surface alongside *Eagle*. With just two small one man-

powered propellers, the *Turtle* was at the mercy of the currents and had very limited maneuverability. Sergeant Lee ultimately was forced to abandon the mine. Although the mine was never attached to the target, the clockwork timer detonated it about an hour after it was released. The result was a spectacular explosion that ultimately forced the British to increase their vigilance and to move their ship's anchorage further out in the harbor. Lee managed to avoid capture and finally drifted to a point where friendly forces rowed out and towed him ashore to safety.

Navy Day 2006

On Friday, October 13, 1775 in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress voted to fit out two sailing vessels, armed with ten carriage guns, as well as swivel guns, and manned by crews of eighty, and to send them out on a cruise of three months to intercept transports carrying munitions and stores to the British army in America. This was the original legislation out of which the Continental Navy grew and as such constitutes the birth of United States Navy. This year again October 13th falls on a Friday

To understand the significance of the decision to send two armed vessels to sea under the authority of the Continental Congress, you need to review the strategic situation in which it was made and to consider the political struggle that lay behind it.

Americans first took up arms in the spring of 1775 not to sever their relationship with the king, but to defend their rights within the British Empire. By the autumn of 1775, the British North American colonies from Maine to Georgia were in open rebellion. Royal governments had been thrust out of many colonial capitals and

revolutionary governments put in their places. The Continental Congress had assumed some of the responsibilities of a central government for the colonies, created a Continental Army, issued paper money for the support of the troops, and formed a committee to negotiate with foreign countries. Continental forces captured Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain and launched an invasion of Canada. *Happy birthday Navy!*

From the Editor

I am pleased to be able to use the Purple Heart stamp again to mail out this newsletter. When the postal rates changed last January from \$.37 to \$.39, the \$.37 version of the stamp was no longer available and my supply soon became exhausted. Due to much pressure and lobbying from veterans groups, the U. S. Postal Service reissued the stamp as a \$.39 stamp. As before, my reason for using this stamp is the hope that all who handle the envelope and those who receive it will pause and reflect on the sacrifices being made for us on a daily basis.



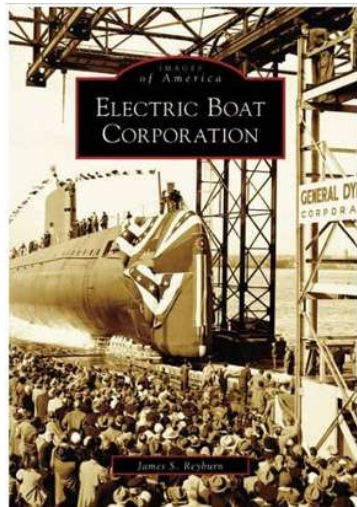
As always a newsletter would not be complete if we were not to remind everyone to pay their dues. Again, the two digits or letters following your name on the mailing label to indicate your dues status according to our records. To review, if there is a "LM" on your mailing label, you are a Life Member 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 the newsletter with a note reminding you to pay your dues before October 31st or you will no longer receive the newsletter by mail.

I am always looking for interesting stories and articles to publish in the newsletter that would be of interest to shipmates. If you have sea stories, unusual hobbies, stories of trips you have taken or any other material you think would be of interest to your Sea owl shipmates, please send them on to me. If you prefer to remain anonymous and not take credit for the story, Howland Owl is always happy to tag on his byline instead.

Book Review: "Electric Boat Corporation" by James S. Reyburn

Review by Ken Johnson

(Note: A copy of this book will be raffled off at the Charleston, SC reunion in October.)



This book is a pictorial history of Electric Boat from its earliest days to the present. The book is one of the "Images of America" series of books published by Arcadia Publishing. The author, James S. Reyburn, a journalist for more than 40 years, was a member of the public affairs department at Electric Boat Corporation for 16 years. He was a writer for General Dynamics, served as a company spokesman, and handled press operations for 33 nuclear submarine launchings. Reyburn is a life member and former

board member of the New London County Historical Society and a member of the Submarine Force Library and Museum, among various other maritime and military organizations.

The book traces the history of Electric Boat through a series of more than 200 historical photographs from its founding by a Philadelphia entrepreneur, Isaac Rice, who combined the John P. Holland Torpedo Boat Company with the Electric Launch Company to the USS Virginia (SSN 774). During World War II, Electric Boat employed 3,000 women to supplement the work force, many trained as welders. In addition to the 71 submarines built at Groton Electric Boat also supervised construction of 28 additional submarines at the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The Elco Division in New Jersey produced 388 PT boats.

This book and its companion Arcadia Publishing book, "Naval Submarine Base New London" by David Bishop are both in my growing library of submarine books.

Back to Sub School

By Ken Johnson

The U. S. Navy Submarine School in Groton, CT began in the summer of 1916 when the submarine base was a mere handful of buildings on what today is the lower base. What would its first class of 24 officers think if they could see it today?

Today's U. S. Naval Submarine school, like the submarines of today, is a marvel of modern technology using some of the most advanced, state of the art computer based teaching aids. Even those of you who read this newsletter would be amazed at how far its methods have advanced since the days when you attended.

I have had two recent opportunities to tour parts of the school and witness first hand some of its teaching methods. My first exposure was during the Cold War at Sea Conference in May 2004 when I visited with a group of Russian submariners. The second was this past April when I visited again as part of a "Back to Sub School" tour. I will briefly describe some of the features of today's submarine school here, but for a more complete description you can visit it's web site <http://www.npdc.navy.mil/slc/nss/invention.htm> and get a more complete and detailed description. It is hard to describe without using some acronyms so bear with me on this.

The heart of today's submarine school is the Automated Electronic Classroom (AEC) which is used as a part of all courses from Basic



Enlisted through Submarine Officer Advanced courses. A key element of this is the Virtual Interactive Shipboard Instructional Tour (VISIT). VISIT enables one to tour a 688I class submarine in

the classroom at an individual computer workstation by utilizing 60 panoramic 360 degree locations throughout the sub. The instructor works with a large display at the front of the classroom. The student can move through these locations using his own workstation, take a look around, point the computer mouse to a piece of equipment and click on it to get a description of its function. While it may not be the same as actual “hands on” experience, it does serve to accelerate the learning process in a very “forgiving” environment.

Another innovation known as Virtual Environment for Submarine shiphandling and piloting (VESUB) utilized virtual imaging helps to teach junior officers shiphandling skills. A head mounted display provides the officer with a 360 degree realistic environment and an experience previously available only “on the job” aboard a



submarine entering or leaving port. By incorporating sophisticated voice recognition software and the ability of the instructor to program in a variety of scenarios, very realistic training simulations can be run. This is a product of the NAVAIR Virtual Environment Training Technology (VETT) program. It can actually be used to train the entire navigation tracking party.

Finally, if your diving trainer experience was on an old Askania trainer, you will be amazed to see the Virginia class trainer. With its multi-function touch screen displays and joystick controls, you would probably think you were at the controls of the Star Trek starship Enterprise rather than a multi-billion dollar submarine.

Enlisted sailors attending sub school first go through Basic Enlisted Submarine School (BESS), a 30 day program that teaches attendees the rigors of undersea life, such as damage control, firefighting, and boat handling techniques. After BESS, sailors will either go to a boat or to an A school, depending on their rate. The A schools housed at NAVSUBASE NLON are Machinist's Mate (MM), Electronics Technician (ET), Sonar Technician (STS), and Fire-Control Technician (FT).

Officers applying for submarine duty no longer go first to submarine school, but first go through Nuclear Power School followed by land or training ship based reactor prototype training. Finally they attend a three month Basic Officer Submarine School (BOSS) before reporting aboard a submarine. The only non-nuclear trained officers aboard our nuclear submarines today are Supply Officers. After a period at sea aboard an operational submarine, officers return for Advanced Officer Submarine School (AOSS).

The Navy's Nuclear Field “A” School and Nuclear Power School are located at Charleston, SC. The Nuclear Field “A” School provides enlisted personnel for preparatory courses in mathematics and hands-on training in laboratories specially designed to teach required technical skills. The 24-week Nuclear Power School follows. The curriculum which includes thermodynamics, reactor principles, radiological fundamentals and other specialized subjects, provides the basic academic knowledge necessary to understand the theory and operation of a nuclear propulsion plant.

All officers slated to serve aboard submarines are college graduates with technical training and they also attend a 24-week graduate-level course at Nuclear Power School. Subjects include those taught in the enlisted curriculum, but in greater depth and additional courses in electrical engineering and reactor dynamics are taught.

After Nuclear Power School, both officers and enlisted personnel are assigned to one of the Program's prototype propulsion plants or moored training ships for additional training and actual watch-standing experience. During this period under the guidance of experienced instructors they learn to operate a nuclear propulsion plant under normal and potential casualty conditions.

Perhaps the most amazing part of modern submarine training for those of us who went through Submarine School in the '60s or earlier is the training that can take place aboard the submarine itself. Highly realistic simulations can be set up on board ship in such a manner that it can be difficult to tell whether the scenario is real or simulated.

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:

Matthew Morse, RMC 60 – July 11, 2005

Donald M. Johnson, TM 49-51 – August 30, 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.*

(Shipmate Mike Polhemus and I participated in a special honor ceremony for Shipmate Donald Johnson that was given during calling hours by an honor guard from the USSVI Groton Base.)

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

September 2006 Issue



Medical Study of Submariners in World War II

By Ken Johnson

Recently a document titled "Medical Study of the Experiences of Submariners as Recorded in 1,471 Submarine Patrol Reports in World War II" was made available on line at the web site of the Historic Naval Ship Association. This document was prepared in 1947 by CDR Ivan F. Duff, Medical Corps, USNR and published by the Bureau of Medicine. The entire document, posted on line as a 268 page Adobe PDF document is 259 pages in length. Since it is a series of images of the pages, it is not "searchable" as a PDF document, but it contains an index that helps locate particular topics. For those who may be interested in finding and reading it on line, the link to it is <http://www.hnsa.org/doc/pdf/duff.pdf>.

There is much information in this document that can give the reader a flavor of what life was like for those who served during this time and the living conditions that they endured.

One of the many services performed by submarines on patrol was lifeguard duty. During World War II 110 submarines in 200 separate pick-ups recovered a total of 542 American and Allied airmen downed in Pacific waters. Perhaps the most famous of those picked up was a future U. S. President, Lt(jg) George Herbert Walker Bush. He was rescued by the USS Finback (SS 230) in September 1944 after bailing out of his damaged Avenger torpedo bomber. Some of the statistics in this document are that 82 percent were picked up within 24 hours. Sixteen percent spent less than 30 minutes in the water. Chances of survival for those in the water for more than 4 days were slim. Two percent or 11 of these men were either dead upon recovery or died shortly after recovery.



Sea Owl, of course, rescued the six aviators shown here during war patrol number three on July 2, 1945. We have a positive identity of two of the men in the photo. H.E. Spivey AOM1c is listed in the war patrol report as having a broken arm so he is the one

standing on the left. Lawrence S. Sullivan, ARM2c is standing on the right in the picture. We know because of an email received from the husband of his niece, informing us that Mr Sullivan had passed away on November 19, 2003 at age 81. R.A. Cross, Ensign USNR, D.L. Cahill, Ensign USNR, J.N. Clark, AMM2c, and E.H. Bruch, AOM2c are the others in the photograph.

They expressed their gratitude later as follows: "We 'zoomies' wish to extend our most grateful thanks and appreciation for the most elegant care you have given us. There was never a more welcome sight to us than that of seeing you coming over the horizon heading for us. Many times we have looked for submarines but with a different eye. With a 'lets bear a hand, we don't want to be caught sitting here like a bump on a log' we crawled aboard. Really men, we wish to thank you, from the bottoms of our hearts, for the fellow-ship and good feelings you have shown us. We will always remember you and for ever have a warm spot in our hearts for the submariners of the USS Sea Owl."

The record for the most aviators rescued during a single patrol belongs to USS Tigron that rescued 30 during war patrol number 2. Next was USS Tang that rescued 22 during her second war patrol followed by USS Ray that rescued 20 during her seventh war patrol.

Most of us have no idea what it is like to be depth charged. This report can give you some idea of the physical and mental effects of depth charge attacks on submarine crews based on quotations taken from many patrol reports. Some of these accounts are pretty horrific. Of course, it can only report on the effects on those who survived such attacks and not on those who did not. The closest perhaps it comes are the accounts at the end of the report in Chapter 7 which is titled, "Experiences of Survivors from Submarines Lost During World War II". Some of those who survived the loss of USS Grenadier, USS Tang and USS Perch were interviewed for this report. Perhaps the most tragic of these was the USS Tang, sunk by its own torpedo after making a surface attack. This was the 24th torpedo fired on this otherwise very successful patrol. After frantically attempting to evade the erratic torpedo, she was struck abeam of the After Torpedo Room. The aft most three compartments flooded immediately and Tang sank, washing those on the bridge, including CDR Richard O'Kane, the CO, overboard. As many as 45 made it to the Forward Torpedo Room but 32 of them died there attempting to escape while Tang lay on the bottom. Some who managed to escape drowned before they were rescued by the Japanese. Ultimately, only nine members of the Tang crew survived.

Shipmate Stan Ainley

By Ken Johnson

I am pleased to report that Shipmate Stan Ainley is recovering nicely from recent knee replacement surgery. I visited Stan at a nursing home in Greenville, RI shortly after he was discharged from Roger Williams Hospital. He is now at home recovering and celebrated his 83rd birthday on September 20th.



The 50's

September 2006 Issue



A "Shore Story"

By Mike Polhemus

As many of those of us who were stationed in New London (Groton/Gales Ferry actually !!) know, there was - and still is - an "upper base" and a "lower base". This meant different things to different folks but to the Master-at-Arms ("MA") Force it meant another opportunity to hassle us smoke boat (as Dexter Armstrong would say !) sailors. These "MA" folk (I'm being very kind here) were almost exclusively surface craft sailors and they delighted in "injecting themselves" into our daily lives in other than a kindly way. You need to realize that these chaps did not come from the top of their classes. And seldom were any of them rated higher than E4. If there was an E4, he was singular in number and the rest were usually E3 with a smattering of E2s. I don't know if they lacked "jurisdiction" on the lower base or whether it was simply a matter that they were obviously outnumbered there and chose to stay away, but for whatever reason they tended to stay away from lower base waterfront areas. The "38th parallel" between the lower base & upper base was the train track railroad crossing just east of the towering chain link fence that separated the upper & lower base areas.

After a full days work cleaning bilges, painting the boat, conducting field day - or whatever - we dragged our filthy, stinking selves up the hill to the barracks along the Military Highway where we luxuriated in showers with plenty of hot soapy water after shedding our dirty dungarees into hermetically sealed plastic bags to be taken out to Fusconi's for much needed decontamination and pressing. It was at the railroad crossing that the MA folk started "hassling" us. We called these MA people "bubbleheads" because they wore plastic helmets that resembled a bubble. Yet some years later (around 1976 or 1977) the term "bubblehead" was adopted to mean a submariner ???

But I digress. Dungarees were allowed on the lower base on weekdays but the minute you stepped on the upper base you had to be in the upper base uniform of the day - which was undress blue in cooler weather - undress whites during the summer months. These "bubbleheads" (MA folks) would hide behind bushes or equipment "parked" along the railroad track and challenge us as we proceeded to the barracks. They invariably issued us "tickets" which found their way through the "system" eventually to come to rest on some shore duty person's desk at the "Squadron". At first, little resulted, but later someone "turned up the heat". I always thought it was Gaines Smith - the base "sheriff" who lived on the upper base in the little white bungalow near the swimming pool - but that was (and is) pure speculation on my part. The effect of all this was to require us to change our scroungy bodies into the undress uniform on the boat, carry the dirty dungarees up to the barracks & isolate the undress uniform from our other worldly goods in our locker (so things wouldn't get too stinky) and get the undress blues cleaned at least weekly. They had to be dry cleaned - so that added to our budget on a monthly paycheck of around \$95 (take home) - which did nothing to endear the bubbleheads to us.

I really don't know what possessed me to do it, but when I was advanced from E2 to E3 I took two of the removed SA patches (each with two silver/white "bars") for the blue jumper, trimmed



them on an angle to match the bars, butted them together and hand sewed them together. I never fancied myself a good seamstress but this "assembled" patch with four bars was a piece of artwork. From 18 inches away you would have trouble seeing where the two patches were joined.

Not one to waste such a piece of artwork, I sewed them on an undress blue jumper and wore it around the boat. Needless to say it drew lots of comments - and quite a few compliments for the excellent sewing. One afternoon I grabbed and donned the "four stripe" jumper for the trip up to the barracks. And as luck would have it, the bubble heads were laying in wait at the railroad crossing. I positioned myself in our group as far from them as I could without attracting attention but one of them circled us and when he saw the four stripes on my sleeve he challenged me for an explanation. I coolly explained that I was a "Senior Seaman". He immediately sought the advice and support of his bubblehead cohorts whereupon I asked if he had not heard about this rating and threw a look and facial expression at those in our group as if to say "Where's has this guy been for his time in the Navy ? It worked ! He "backed off" and they let us go on our way.

A couple of weeks later I drew US Post Office & Guard Mail duty which required visiting a number of places on the upper base to pick up & drop off messages & mail. This was a good deal and many memorable hours were spent socializing at the Dealey Center gedunk with guys off other boats. It was a good chance to catch up on (and pass along) scuttlebutt. Whilst socializing, I caught sight of the bubblehead I had hoodwinked with the "Senior Seaman" stripes down at the railroad crossing. He was looking directly at me, stabbing the air to point me out and heatedly talking to some buddies. None of the group appeared to have their "bubblehead" head gear with them so I figured they would just pass up the situation but lo and behold they got up en mass, came over to our booth and commenced to challenge me and harass all of us in general. I had purposely kept my left arm (with proper E3 stripes) buried from sight and at an opportune time got up, turned so they could see these stripes and said "I've had enough - if anyone wants to make anything of this ridiculous conversation they're welcome to do it but I'm carrying classified matter and don't have time to play games". I glanced back when I got close to the door and I believe his buddies were questioning his eyesight or soundness of mind. Later on I "filled in" the chaps who shared this incident with me (both those at the railroad crossing and the sailors who were sitting with me at Dealey Center) and we all had another good laugh. Fortunately I never saw this particular bubblehead individual again.





The 60's

September 2006 Issue



The Last of the Diesels

By Ken Johnson

The latest issue of American Submariner Magazine has a feature article called “*The Last Diesel USS Dolphin (AGSS-555)*”. Ordered in 1960 and built at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, *USS Dolphin* was commissioned in 1968. By this time most WW II vintage diesel boats were being retired from service as nuclear submarines began to take over their duties. Many remain as museum artifacts around the country, but few remained in service as the growing fleet of nuclear powered attack submarines entered the fleet.



Dolphin was a unique, special purpose submarine not designed to be a weapons system, but as a deep diving test platform. With a test depth in excess of 3,000 feet, she was able to test systems and equipment at depths well beyond that at which other submarines could operate. The pressure hull was a round cylinder with hemispherical end caps and a minimum of hull penetrations.



One year service aboard *Dolphin* qualifies crew members to wear this special deep submergence insignia on their uniform. Enlisted ratings may wear the silver and officers the gold version.

With a crew of only 41 and with a very limited number of other deep submergence craft that would make one eligible to wear this insignia they are rare.

On May 21, 2002 tragedy came close to causing her loss. *Dolphin* was conducting training exercises about 100 miles off the San Diego coastline when a torpedo shield door gasket failed, and water began to flood *Dolphin*. Due to high winds and 10- to 11-foot swells in the ocean, approximately 70-to-85 tons of seawater entered the ship, an amount dangerously close to the reserve buoyancy of *Dolphin*. Only quick and courageous action by crew member John D. Wise, Jr., MMC (SS), saved the boat from sinking. Wise, realizing what needed to be done, dove into the 57-degree water of the flooded pump room. Not knowing if the room's equipment had been secured, and with less than a foot of breathable space in the compartment, he ensured the seawater valves were lined up allowing the dewatering to commence. Once the valves were aligned, he remained in the pump room for

more than 90 minutes in order to keep a submersible pump from becoming clogged. His courageous efforts prevented the loss of the ship and crew, according to the citation letter from Adm. Vern Clark, Chief of Naval Operations and earned him the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. The NMCM is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, distinguishes themselves by heroism not involving actual conflict with the enemy. For acts of lifesaving or attempted lifesaving, it is required that the action be performed at the risk of one's own life. To rise to this level, it must be clearly established that the act involved very specific life-threatening risk to the awardee “Everybody was doing their job, and I happened to be at that spot at the right time. I only did what needed to be done. I was only thing about getting the water off the boat,” Wise said.

Dolphin was abandoned and towed to port following this.

Dolphin underwent three and a half years of repairs and upgrades following this at a cost of \$50 million, completed sea-trials during the summer of 2005 and returned to her duties for one year. This past summer the Navy decided to retire *Dolphin*, citing the \$18 million her operations cost annually. She was decommissioned on September 22, 2006.



The Modern Diesel Boat

By Ken Johnson

Other Navies continue to operate diesel-electric submarines. The Russian Kilo class is being built in several variants for domestic use and export. Germany today produces a submarine which uses a diesel engine and fuel cells to supplement the installed battery. These are also being built for domestic use and export. The irony is the Swedish “*Gotland*” submarine which uses a Stirling cycle engine to supplement its diesel and battery continues on for an additional year to operate with our Pacific Fleet out of San Diego, giving our ASW units practice in detecting modern, quiet running non-nuclear submarines. This is under a lease agreement that was negotiated with the Swedish Navy which provided the submarine complete with crew.

Outside the U. S. Navy, the diesel boat is alive and well. Nations which cannot afford the expense of operating nuclear powered submarines continue to use these alternatives to build a formidable submarine arm for their navies.