



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

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

We still give a hoot!

September 2008 Issue



President's Message

Shipmates & 1st Mates:

Here we are again the temperature is dropping some of the leaves are beginning to turn, winter is only a few months away. I am in no way complaining rather thinking of our friends & fellow sailors in Galveston, TX that have lost everything. They are indeed a hardy people, our hearts and thoughts go out to them.

Our reunion in Manitowoc, WI was a great success, I believe many of us were really pleased at how nice this area is.



Front row, l to r: Roy Purtell, Tom Camenish, Doug Jensen, Ken Johnson
2nd row l to r: Dick Meinke, Bob Laird, Lamar Taylor, Don Clouse, Leonard Marcoux
3rd row l to r: Walt Deal, Howie Stein, Mike Jansen, Pete Bailey, John Solan, Frances Rabaey, Mike Polhemus, Mike LaRose, Norm Friberg, Bill Toomey, Bill Brinkman

We enjoyed the people and the area very much, would like to take a trip through this area again. My thanks to Captain Lamar Taylor CO 52-55 for taking the initiative for setting up a tour of the Manitowoc Crane assembly plant, something that I was not able to do prior to our arrival. Thanks Captain !!! Also I would like to thank shipmate Doug Jensen MM 63-66 for all that he gave to make this reunion a great one. Doug arranged for everyone to have a free shirt, emblazoned both on the front & back promoting our reunion. He also donated several very nice items that we had a silent auction for. Doug your Shipmates thank you for all you did. It was sincerely appreciated by all. !!

One item that I did arrange was attending the Rotary's lobsterfest. I do think that everyone that attended had a very nice time mixing with and talking to the people of Manitowoc. Food was good also, that always helps.

Looking forward to next year, our 2009 reunion will take place in San Diego, CA Sept 8th thru 12th during the same time as the International SubVets, USSVI, and many of the SubVets of WWII. This may be the largest gathering of SubVets ever gathered in one place. You will not want to miss this one.

For Convention information see this web page:

<http://www.usvisandiego.org/Convention2009/index.htm>

The Convention site is at the Town & Country Resort, there phone number is (800) 772-8527 room rates are \$119 and up. When you phone for these rates use the code: USSVI-SUB. Do not put off getting your room reservations, they will go very fast. I'm hoping to get a hospitality room for Sea Owl sailors to gather. We have not had our reunion coincide with a National Convention is several years for various reasons. We will try to make this as comfortable for everyone as possible. Check regularly with our web page usseawol.com for updated material through the year.

One last note: I have received a e-mail from the wife of shipmate Bruce Lewis TM 68-69 that Bruce may be receiving his Eternal orders within a few days. Keep all your shipmates in your Prayers as we morn those who sail onto Eternal Patrol to join our already departed shipmates. God Bless !!

From the Editor

There is something strange about traveling from Massachusetts to Manitowoc, WI to attend a LobsterFest and eat Maine lobster.



As you can see those shipmates who attended enjoyed the food and chance to meet some of the "locals". Some may have also attended SputnikFest which was going on as well. It seems that on September 6, 1962 a chunk of debris which was identified as having been a part of the remains of Russian satellite Sputnik 4 landed on a Manitowoc street. These folks decided to make it an excuse to have a party and act a little crazy. They even dress up a large, fibreglas cow at a local dairy in aluminum foil for the occasion (maybe Roy will post a photograph of it on the Sea owl web site).

We also enjoyed visiting the Wisconsin Maritime Museum and USS Cobia right next to our hotel. Cobia is beautifully restored and on display even though it is NOT one of the 28 boats that were built at Manitowoc during WW II.

Shipmate Bob, D'Amico just seems to get better with his Sea Owl cartoons and I have once again given over the entire '60s page to it! I turned Bob loose at this year's Groton picnic to gather material for at least the next cartoon. Bob is open to any other ideas for cartoons for future issues as well.

This month Shipmate Bruce Blessington, in addition to teaming up with Bob D'Amico for this issue's cartoon, returns as a contributor and I hope you enjoy reading his latest. He has embarked aboard his boat, "Dress Blue" for a journey down the East Coast

At the business meeting in Manitowoc we proposed, and those in attendance voted to accept, a change in Life Membership rates for the Sea Owl Association. Considering the ever increasing average age of our membership, the change is as follows:

Age 60-75: The new Life Membership rate is \$75.00.

Over age 75: The new Life Membership rate is \$35.00.

We hope that this change will encourage more shipmates to become Life Members.

As always a newsletter would not be complete if we were not to remind everyone to pay their dues. I am including in this newsletter a membership card with your membership status. Also, the two digits or letters following your name on the mailing label indicate your dues status according to my 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 "08" would mean you are paid up through October 2008, etc. If you have reason to believe that this status is in error, please let me know. Since the membership cards and mailing labels are generated from the same database, they should agree.

I have also published a Treasurer's Report in this issue as per our Association bylaws which call for this twice a year. If you have any questions about Association finances, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Treasurer's Report

The Sea Owl Association account is a Free Business Checking Account which I opened with Commerce Bank in Holden, MA after assuming the duties of Association Secretary/Treasurer. Total funds on hand after payment of 2008 reunion expenses: \$6,494.33 of which \$4,000 has been invested in a 12-month Certificate of Deposit at an APR of 3.5% which will mature on September 10, 2009. Since the Free Business Checking Account pays no interest, the CD provides an opportunity to put some of the Association funds to work over the next year.

Ken Johnson, Sea Owl Association Secretary Treasurer

Russian Submarine Salvage – Final Report

By Ken Johnson

After working diligently since the beginning of June, Navy and Army salvage divers finally raised the bow of the Russian Juliett submarine from the bottom of the Providence River on July 25th. The stern still remained on the bottom and was finally raised to the surface on August 4th after adding additional flotation bags at the stern. By September 8th the Navy was prepared to turn back the responsibility for the submarine to the Saratoga Museum Foundation after installing four steel flotation pontoons to the stern.

A series of photo essays showing salvage operation can be found at www.saratogamuseum.org/juliett/index.html. For the most part these are official Navy photographs taken by Navy photographers and released for public use. UI have a number of my own photos that I plan to post eventually on line to supplement those already on my web site, www.oakhamgraphics.com.

Dress Blue Dispatch #4: Night Watch

By Bruce Blessington

Sunset has morphed into nautical twilight and the celestial lamplighter is making his rounds. First the planets; mighty Jupiter leads with its silver-white appearance in the southeastern sky. Then one by one, the first magnitude stars are illuminated, followed by their more distant and fainter companions. Finally as night descends, the Milky Way, our galactic home address, star population: billions, makes a glittering splash across the sky extending from southwest to northeast. We are Boston bound, gliding across the Gulf of Maine on a gentle southeasterly breeze. An unusually favorable wind fills the sails for a comfortable close reach and the log has been ticking along at 4-5 knots. The wind brushes the sea into a glimmering, pebble grained surface. The air temperature is warm, in the low sixties, but the apparent wind laced with a dash of the damps has us rummaging in our sea bags for sweaters and watch caps.

Our Alden Yachts 43, Dress Blue, on this run is crewed by three with my eldest, Bruce Jr. and our friend Rick Wynn aboard. It's Rick's first off-shore overnight adventure and he's determined to savor every moment. Bruce and I have agreed a port and starboard watch bill with Rick proposing to keep each of us company throughout the night.

A few hours ago we enjoyed a delightful dinner of oven roasted spare ribs and corn on the cob served up by Chef Bruce on the cockpit table – delish! As the on-watch, I left the steering to the auto pilot and was able to dive into my ribs while still keeping an eye on the horizon and the radar. No interruptions during dinner. Waving a rib for emphasis, Rick pointed out that on land, fine dining "al fresco" at sunset with an ocean view table would require reservations, a bribe for the maitre d' and lots of head space on your credit card limit.

As dessert was cleared the entertainers arrived; a pod of Minke whales just off our port side. They are on a course parallel to ours, dozens of smooth and swiftly swimming forms. Sleek and black with some grey tones, they undulate and shimmer, surface and sound, as the setting sun tints the scene in orange hues. These Minkes are smaller members of the whale family, about 25- 30 feet in length and quite social. They swim with a beautiful, fluid, porpoise-like motion, blowing as their heads surface and arching their backs to bring their curved dorsal fins into view as they angle beneath the waves again. Close enough to hear the whoosh of their blow holes, we can almost feel the mist generated by their powerful expirations. As fascinated as we are by them, they are underwhelmed by us. After twenty minutes as dusk settles, they slowly draw left and away from us. The troupe has left the stage and the performance is over.

The Chelsea on the bulkhead below strikes four bells. We're half way through the eight to midnight watch. Coffee! I need coffee! Rick obliges and mugs in hand, we again fall into the companionable silence that so often overtakes watch mates at night. The red glow of the binnacle provides just enough light to see the card and the radar backlight is down to its lowest setting. The darkness sets the senses to high resolution and brings the mind home to the immediate. Dress Blue slips through the water, the wake whispers and sparkles with bioluminescence. Tonight, the sparkling water below doesn't quite compare with the spectacular display above. Our words are few and each utterance is low, barely above a whisper, as in a library or even better, a cathedral. This cathedral is built of a moonless night sky, unspoiled by ambient light pollution and supported on a foundation of black diamonds. The fresco of billions of stars on its celestial dome tempts me to lean back against the pushpit and contemplate its

majesty and incomprehensible vastness. What's out there? Is there another blue planet like ours? Are we really alone? If we're not and "they" can see us, what do they see? Would our distant observers see Vesuvius erupting, the battle of Gettysburg or the Wright brothers in flight? For I am seeing the heavens not as they are in this instant, but as they once were; as they were when the light, just now arriving in my eye, began its long journey across space and time. Did it travel a for hundred years, a thousand or a million? I'm really looking back in time. The stars that sent this light may have flickered out long ago.

My metaphysical musings are interrupted by Bruce clipping on to the cockpit jack line. (We stay clipped on off shore at night even in pleasant weather.) He's ready to relieve and I hand off with a position report and confirm that there are no contacts. Rick soldiers on wanting to miss nothing. Minutes later I'm enjoying the luxury of the vee berth in flat seas lulled to sleep by the sound of the bow wave burbling inches away. Sleep comes fast and deep but of short duration as my cell phone alarm rudely jolts me back into the here and now to relieve Bruce.

We are closer to Boston and he's been busy. A homeward bound Gloucesterman had surfaced on the radar's six mile scale. It was closing fast from the east holding a steady bearing which would make the closest point of approach our mid-ships cleat on the port side! We may be sailing but in these situations, the Rules of the Road are supplanted by the rules of "Gross Tonnage and Material of Construction". If you're heavier, longer and made of steel, we'll happily concede you the right of way. After Bruce turned east just enough to generate a bearing change, he finally made contact on channel 16 and went "up one" to 17 for a chat. The fishing boat captain confirmed that he had us on radar and was "thinking about changing course" when he noticed that we'd acted first and thanked us for so doing. He offered that we projected a very solid radar image and he was surprised to learn that we were a sailing vessel. Seems our Blipper radar reflector was doing its job.

I stood the next watch alone as Rick finally succumbed to twenty-four hours without sleep and chose rest over adventure. This four to eight was mostly business, dealing with traffic in and out of Gloucester, Salem and Beverly as well as Boston's northern traffic separation lanes. Despite the activity, I still had time to enjoy a glorious sunrise with Lynn Harbor abeam before we rounded Winthrop and sailed into Boston.



Muffins were emerging from the oven and Rick was emerging from his bunk. The night watch was over and a new, bright day was beginning, perfectly set against Boston's shining skyline.

San Diego Reunion

By Ken Johnson

I cannot emphasize too much the need for you to make reservations at the San Diego hotel as soon as possible. Since there will be both the national USSVI annual convention and International Submariner Congress at the same time, this gathering will very likely be the largest gathering of submarine veterans, both U.S. and international ever. Once full, the Town & Country, the host hotel, will place people in backup hotels. All backup hotels will be on Hotel Circle and will be priced the same as the Town & Country. The quality of the backup hotels will be similar to the Town & Country. However, you may need to travel between the two hotels, sometimes several times per day. Therefore, I urge you to make your reservation now to assure you will be placed in the host hotel.

Remember, you will only be *reserving* the room on your major credit card. *No charges* will be posted to your card until you check out. You must give a minimum of 48 hour advance notice if you need to cancel your room. Parking will be free to registered hotel guests.

Information on registering for specific events during the USSVI Convention and the 46th International Submariners Congress is sketchy at this time and should be more available by the December Hooter Hilites issue. Information on USSVI convention events can be found here www.ussvisandiego.org/Convention2009/index.htm. Roy has suggested the dinner cruise on San Diego Bay on Thursday, September 10th as one he would like all Sea Owl shipmates attending to sign up for.

Sailors Rest Your Oars

Usually 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. I know that there are many shipmates who are struggling with health issues, a few of which Roy mentioned in his message, and these shipmates deserve our continuing prayers and best wishes for recovery.

Ken Gustafson, LT 61-63 – on or about September 20, 2008

Charles B. Scheys, Sr., MM 44-46 – March 13, 2008

I learned of Charles Scheys death on July 10th after the last newsletter had gone out and could not include it in the last issue.

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

*There is a port of no return, where ships
May ride at anchor for a little space
And then, some starless night, the cable slips,
Leaving an eddy at the mooring place . . .
Gulls, veer no longer. Sailor, rest your oar.
No tangled wreckage will be washed ashore.*

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

Sea Owl Association Officers are:

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

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

Secretary/Treasurer Ken Johnson, P.O. Box 561, Oakham, MA 01068-0561, (508) 882-3738, e-mail seaowl@charter.net or oakhamgraphics@charter.net

Storekeeper – Ed Welch, 33 Waco Court, Groton, CT 06340-4719, (860) 446-9104, e-mail ewelch6621@tvconnect.net

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



The 40's

September 2008 Issue

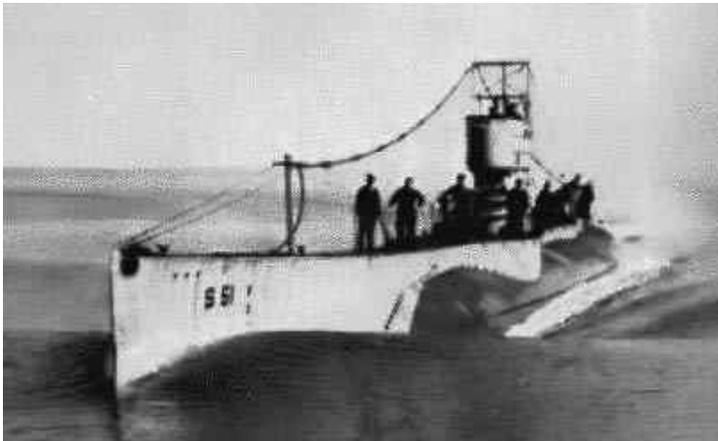


The Salvage of the S-51

By Ken Johnson

(While this took place well before the 1940's, I know that there are Sea Owl shipmates who once served aboard S-boats.)

Recently while on docent duty at the Submarine Force Museum in Groton, I came across the book, "On the Bottom" by Commander Edward Ellsberg in the museum gift shop. This book, published in 2002, is a special edition of the original book which was published in 1929. Subtitle of the book is, "The raising of the U. S. Navy submarine S-51 told by the man who directed the feat that experts all pronounced 'impossible'". It tells the story in fascinating detail of the U. S. Navy's first successful submarine salvage operation which took place in 1926. The book contains treasures that would not have been possible to include in the original edition including an introduction by Captain Edward "Ned" Beach, USN (Ret), a CD containing a song about the S-51 and 1979 oral interview with Rear Admiral Edward Ellsberg, and a DVD containing newsreel movies of the salvage operation as filmed at the time and narrated by RADM Ellsberg four years before his death in 1983.



For those who may be unfamiliar with the *S-51* tragedy, she was struck by the *SS City of Rome* off of Block Island, Rhode Island on the night of September 25, 1925 and sank to the bottom in 132 feet of water within minutes. *S-51* was running on the surface at the time with running lights on. By the rules of the road, *S-51* was required to maintain course and speed and the *City of Rome* was required to pass astern. *City of Rome* failed to properly interpret the visible running lights of the submarine until it was too late to avoid collision. Of the 36 men aboard the submarine, only 3 survived.

On receipt of the position and information about the sinking, the USS *Falcon* was dispatched from New York at best speed to the scene. Already on scene were *S-50* and other ships. (*Falcon*, originally commissioned as minesweeper AM-28 in 1918 was later reclassified as submarine rescue ship ASR-2 and participated in salvage operations of *S-4* in 1928 and *USS Squalus* in 1939 before being decommissioned in 1947.) Once it was determined that no life remained aboard the sub, the operation became a salvage and recovery problem.

At the time of the loss of *S-51*, the Navy was being heavily criticized over the loss of the airship, *Shenandoah*, in a storm over Ohio and the disappearance of a Navy plane attempting the first non-stop flight to Hawaii. Public demand was great that *S-51* be raised and the bodies of her crew be recovered. The problem was that no large submarine had ever been raised in deep water on the open sea.

The story as described in "On the Bottom" is one of determination, bravery and innovation. At least two inventions were made during this operation that are still in use today, a cutting torch that works under water and a special nozzle called the "Falcon nozzle" that was used to burrow through bottom mud and attach lifting chains to raise the *S-51*. It also led to development of better, more reliable underwater lighting. The salvage of *S-51* was under the overall command of Captain Ernest King who as an Admiral during World War II served as Commander in Chief U. S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations. He earned his first of three Distinguished Service Medals for the salvage of *S-51*. As a result of his work with the *S-51* salvage, Ellsberg was promoted to Commander well ahead of his Naval Academy class. He and LT Henry Hartley, CO of USS *Falcon*, also received the Distinguished Service Medal and several sailors involved were awarded the Navy Cross.

As a first-hand witness to the Navy's most recent submarine salvage operation this past summer in Providence, this book was a fascinating look at the Navy's first successful submarine salvage operation back in 1926. At the reunion in Manitowoc I showed a PowerPoint slide show of the salvage operation this past summer of the Russian submarine in Providence followed by the DVD of newsreels from 1926 included in the 2002 edition of "On the Bottom". Back in 1926 there was no such thing as a movie with sound (the first talking motion picture, "The Jazz Singer", was released in October 1927) and weekly silent newsreels shown in theaters were a major source of visual information about events of the day. Newsreels in theaters continued to be shown into the 1950s and were an important source of news before television.

Another book I discovered over the summer at the Submarine Force Library in Groton is titled "Mud, Muscle and Miracles: Marine Salvage in the United States Navy" which was written by Captain Charles "Black Bart" Bartholomew and published in 1990 by the Government Printing Office. This is the history of U. S. Navy salvage operations as written by the Navy's Supervisor of Salvage.

A biography of Edward Ellsberg written by John D. Alden was published in 1997 under the title "Salvage Man". There is also a website (www.EdwardEllsburg.com) run by his grandson, Ted Pollard. Ellsberg left active service in December 1926 to pursue a civilian career, but was recalled in 1927 to participate in the salvage of the submarine *S-4*. On December 8, 1941 at age 51 he volunteered again for active duty service and contributed greatly to the difficult salvage operations presented by World War II. He also found time to write 17 books over his lifetime, the latest in 1960.



The 50's

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Captain Taylor and Shipmates

Captain Lamar Taylor continues to amaze us with his remarkable stamina as he attends every Sea Owl reunion.



Shown here with Capt. Taylor are Bob Laird (EM 53-56), Pete Bailey (QM2 54-56, Frances Rabaey (TM 53-55) and Don Clouse (EM2 52-54). Capt Taylor also showed that he has not lost his ability to get things done by his call to the Manitowoc Chamber of Commerce which ultimately led to our tour of the Manitowoc Crane factory. This turned out to be a very interesting tour and we got to see some very large crawler type cranes in various stages of assembly. It was also good to see a U. S. company with such a backlog of work that they are working 3 shifts, 7 days a week to try and keep up!

We are now just about a year and a half away from Lamar's 95th birthday in March 2010 and he has issued an open invitation to all Sea Owl shipmates to join him in Macon, GA for this celebration. We hope to get good turnout for this event.

Sea Owl Book?

By Ken Johnson

Shipmate Bill Brinkman (FN 59-60) has challenged Sea Owl to produce a book similar to the one published last year by the USS Sea Poacher. Bill is President of the Sea Poacher Association. You may recall I described the Sea Poacher book back in the March 2008 issue of Hooter Hilites. To refresh your memory, I wrote this back then:

The book actually has a host of authors, each of which contributed a chapter with stories of their experiences on board. In addition to war patrol reports, stories and photographs, the book contains a complete roster of all who served aboard Sea Poacher.

Lanny Yeske, who edited the Sea Poacher book, sent me the following back then: "The biggest problem and time sink I had was letting the book contributors submit things in piecemeal. I might get one or two stories one month, and then the next month get a few more, and it could go on for six iterations and retyping. I then tried to get it in some chronological order that made sense and when finally done gave everyone a chance to proof read and

correct, and sometimes those were complete rewrites. If I were doing it again I would make the contributors give only one input (two max) to me the first time around. Most everyone is computer literate and they can do it one time.

Another problem was the guys or widows without computers. So, I would receive hand written things that had to be totally retyped. I should have asked them to find a son or daughter, or friend who would type it and send it via a computer.

Then were the guys who didn't know about computers and also who did not want to right. I became a telephone stenographer for at least five chapters and unless you can write like blazes it is tough. Plus it takes more iterations. I guess I just wouldn't do that again. However, I was hungry for material and would not reject any means of getting contributions."

Well, shipmates, Bill Brinkman has volunteered to edit a Sea Owl book. He just needs contributors! You can get in touch with Bill by emailing him at this address: seapoacher@austin.rr.com if you want to contribute. I have already sent him Microsoft Word files of all three Sea Owl war patrol reports.

Personally, my thinking was to produce a Sea Owl DVD instead which we still could do and include with the book, if we get enough demand to justify printing costs.

Incidentally Bill has also proposed that Sea Owl and Sea Poacher have a joint reunion at Branson, MO in 2010. They have already taken the lead and are well along in planning for it whether or not we choose to participate. As more information becomes available, I will include it in future issues.

The Miller Poster

Among the many things that Shipmate Doug Jensen brought to the Manitowoc reunion was this poster provided by the Miller Brewing Company. After staring at the poster for a while, we discovered that there are two mistakes in the wording. Can you find them? We wonder if the person who made the poster was consuming too much of the product at the time or whether they just didn't have access to a spelling checker.





The 60's

September 2008 Issue



THE HALIFAX LIGHTSHIP GIVES THE USS SEA OWL THE QUARTER MASTER'S TEST OF FIRE



Quartermaster Bruce Blessington **WAS** right when answering Captain McKechnie about his navigational calculations. The Halifax Lightship was temporarily taken out of service, and they didn't bother to tell anybody ... at least on **OUR** boat ... that they had moved from their expected position. Story submitted by Bruce, (shown at left with his wife Marie). He told the story at the 2008 Sea Owl Groton Picnic dinner.

Got a great Sea Owl story that might make a cartoon? Please email cartoonbob@mac.com