



Hooter Hilites

A Publication of the USS Sea Owl Association

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

We still give a hoot!

December 2006 Issue



**USS SEA OWL SS-405 REUNION
CHARLESTON, SC
November 1, 2006**



Back row: 1 to r; Norm Friberg SN 47-48, Dan Hicks IC 59-60, Bill Brinkman FN 59-60, Ken Boyer IC 59-60, Mike Toomey ET 63-64, Mike Jansen (Maysonet) TM 59-62, Jerry Morrison EM 53-55, John Leers YN 53-57, Dick Meinke EN 63-66, John Solan EM 62-66, Ed LaBreck EM 64-66, Jim Leiser ET 49-52, Jim Campbell MM 45-47, Henry Fulkoski, EN 68-69, Leonard Marcoux EM 63-66
Center: 1 to r; Edmond Gibbons TMC (COB) 59-64, Gerry Farr QM 62-64, Don Clouse EM 52-54, Walt Deal TM 62-65, John Barnes MM 64-65, Lamar Taylor CO 52-55, Bob Kail ET 64-65, Bob Kristian (Kostyna) FT 44-45, Bob Schlichenmaier QM 44-48, George Rashley ENS 56-57
Front row: 1 to r; Francis Rabaey TM 53-55, Tom Moniz EM 62-66, Ron Hornsby HM 65-68, Roy Purtell TM 66-68, Doug Jensen MM 63-66, Howie Stein IC 59-61, Frank Kenyon ST 68-69, Ken Johnson LT(jg) 62-65, Mike Polhemus SO 56-57

A Few Words About the Above Photograph

This was taken by a professional photographer in front of a green screen and the picture of the Sea Owl as she looked in the early 1950s was added digitally later. This is similar to the way that television weathermen are shown in front of the weather map. Missing from the photograph was Nate Dexter EN 59-60 and Capt Dave Wessinger CO 58-59

President's Message Shipmates & 1st Mates:

As I prepare this message, we are approaching the Holiday Season, a time for all to enjoy their families and a time to look forward to a new and exciting New Year. Carol & I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Our Charleston reunion was every bit as exciting and fun as we expected it to be. Shipmates Gerry Farr and Walt Deal were the reason this reunion went as well as it did. Gerry kept everyone in soda, beer and anything else they wanted to drink, as did Walt keep the hospitality room supplied with enough chips to feed all of Charleston. As we had the USS Medregal SS 480 in the hotel with us to share our dinners with, I must mention Terry Trump was also instrumental in helping with tours and the entertainment that we had during our luau dinner. I know a few girls that will forever remember Elvis as they have never before.

Reunion 2007 will take place in St. Mary's, GA., home to Kings Bay Submarine Base. My plans right now are to gather everyone in St. Mary's during the 1st week of November 2007. We can attend the SubVets of WWII Memorial service that takes place each year during this week. We will have our reunion during this time in St. Mary's, then the week following our reunion we are planning on taking a cruise onboard a ship from Jacksonville, FL. Shipmate Howie Stein IC 59-61 is working on putting together this cruise. As of right now, we are inviting other boats that are also having their reunion in St. Mary's to cruise with us. It should be a great two weeks; try to make it. !!!!!!!!! There will be more information forthcoming on this reunion & cruise as I get it. Check our web site at www.ussseaowl.com for all current reunion information.

Our 2007 Reunion

Next year, as mentioned above, we are planning something different for our reunion. The first two days will be at St. Mary's/King's Bay, GA coinciding with the annual memorial service.

We will follow this with a 5-day cruise leaving on 3 November out of Jacksonville, FL with ports of call of Key West, FL and Nassau, Bahamas. Shipmate Howie Stein has done much work researching different cruise options and setting this up. The ship will be the Carnival Celebration. You can check out at the following web site: http://www.carnival.com/Ship_Detail.aspx?shipCode=CE.

If you plan to take the cruise, you need to contact Kayla Davidson at Cruises Only who is setting up and handling the cruise details. She will give you the latest information and details. Her phone number is 1-800-244-7447, Ext 38225. A \$200.00 deposit is required per person which is refundable if you cancel no later than 90 days in advance, or August 4, 2007. Rates are \$355.00 per person for inside cabin and \$405. per person for ocean view cabin. For 3 or 4 person rates Kayla will advise. These rates include shipboard meals, entertainment, port charges and taxes. Not included are shore excursions, alcoholic beverages and gratuities. You need to contact Kayla Davidson by January 17, 2007 and when you do use the following reference number for this cruise, 15722117.

There was some discussion at the Charleston reunion as to whether passports would be required to make the cruise or not. This is the subject of changing laws and regulation and the bottom line is that a passport is strongly recommended.

America's First Successful Submariners

By Ken Johnson

In the last issue I had an article about Ezra Lee who manned the Bushnell Turtle during the Revolutionary War. Ezra Lee was not

successful in his attack on British warships in New York Harbor. It would be 87 years before a submarine would successfully attack and sink an enemy warship.

During the Civil War the Union Navy fleet blockaded Confederate ports in an attempt to starve the South into submission. The harbor at Charleston, SC was one of these ports, but the South had a secret weapon, a submarine the *H. L. Hunley*. During the Charleston reunion, we visited the H. L. Hunley Museum. This photograph represents forensic reproductions of the H. L. Hunley crew as they may have appeared in life. From left to right they are LT George E. Dixon, Arnold Becker, C. Lumpkin, Frank Collins, Cpl J. F. Carlsen, Miller, James A. Wicks and Joseph Ridgeway.



On February 17, 1864, after two previous crews had died aboard on unsuccessful dives, these men set out and made history by sinking the Union steam sloop, USS Housatonic. Unfortunately they also subsequently died before reaching shore under circumstances still a mystery. They had made a place in history, however, since this was the first time in history a submarine sank another vessel in combat.

From the Editor

Let me start by wishing all of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. By now I think you are familiar with the dues status as indicated on the mailing label and I will only repeat the following. 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.

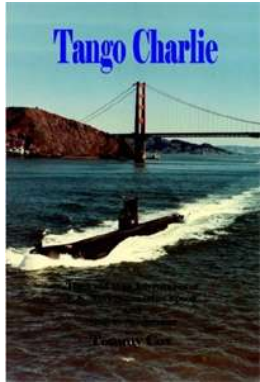
Since the Charleston reunion I have been very busy working with the International Center of Worcester, helping as I can with two visiting groups from the former Soviet Union. The first of these was a group of ten young business leaders from the Republic of Georgia who were participating in a USAID program titled, "Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development". They were here for five weeks. This group was followed immediately by a group of five top city officials from the city of Kaluga, Russia who participated in an Open World program titled, "Effective Local Governance".

It seems that since I retired just over two years ago my life has taken on a whole new purpose. I have discovered that quietly behind the news headlines there are a host of people working to create better relations with those in other countries who have been our adversaries in the past. I have made new friends in places I hardly knew existed and have discovered that as a "citizen diplomat" for my country I

can make a difference in how others view and understand the United States. In many respects, accompanying and video taping various meetings with the Kaluga city officials has been a "civics lesson" for me and an opportunity to meet Worcester, MA city officials and others that I only knew from news interviews on radio and TV.

Book Review: "Tango Charlie" by Tommy Cox

Review by Ken Johnson



This book is a must for anyone who is a fan of Tommy Cox and his music. It is the story behind Tommy's songs as well as a biography of his life as a Navy "spook", singer-songwriter and Child Support Enforcement Officer for the State of Maine.

Tango Charlie was Tommy Cox's Navy call sign and, of course, is the phonetic representation of TC, his initials. He began writing songs during his missions. "Spook" is the term used by submariners to describe those extra crew members that

a submarine carried on "special ops" missions. Generally they held the rate of Communications Technician (CT) and technically they did not exist as part of the submarine crew.

The Submarine Force Museum

By Ken Johnson

At the south end of the submarine base in Groton, CT just outside the gate is the Submarine Force Library and Museum which is the home of Historic Ship USS Nautilus. Over the past year they started a new program of having volunteer docents, mostly USSVI Groton Base members, on duty from Friday through Monday. I signed up for this program and since March have been doing at least two, three and a half to four hour watches a month as a museum docent. There are usually two docents on duty for each watch and the watches are four hours long during the summer and three and a half hours long during the winter when they close at 4:00 PM rather than 5:00 PM.

Back in August I decided to become a member of the Submarine Force Library & Museum Association which supports the operation of the museum. While the museum, and in particular Historic Ship Nautilus, is supported by the U. S. Navy directly, the exhibits and actual operation of the museum, itself, are dependent largely on private donors and revenue generated by the Museum Gift Shop.

Over the next year I have learned that the Museum Association has planned and will be implementing a number of improvements. These include installing wireless Internet access, placing the Library catalog on line, improving various displays and making the museum an even more attractive field trip destination of students in grades K-12, particularly in the areas of math, science and history.

One of the tasks I have taken on is to develop an updated floorplan of the museum. Eventually this may be used as the basis for a handout to museum visitors or even as an on line "image map" and basis for virtual tour of the museum.

In a recent post to Ron Martini's submarine BBS I stated, in part, the following: "In my opinion the highest purpose of a museum, be it a submarine museum or other, is to educate and interpret history. I am sure there are many opinions on how best to do this." I further stated, "While in Russia last may, I had the privilege of visiting a small, one room museum in St. Petersburg dedicated to the 3rd Division of the Soviet Northern Fleet. The main purpose of the

museum, which is part of a local library is to educate Russian school children about the Cold War."

Ron's response to my post was, "The Creed of USSVI calls on us "To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates..." How do we do that? Ken says we need to "to educate and interpret history."

This is true but first you need the tools. The tools are the books, the memories, the videos and the memorabilia that still exists out there but obviously in decreasing numbers. There have been several attempts by a couple of authors and ongoing work by Naval Submarine League and the U.S. Naval Institute to preserve the memories through their publications the the Institutes Oral History Program.

There is a new USSVI National Library in North Little Rock (near the recently returned Razorback) that is striving to become a major source of submarine lore in the middle of the country.

The West Coast has the Keyport Undersea Museum and Library. The East Coast has the SubForMus&Library at Groton and the Paine Collection at Annapolis.

The Annapolis facility is open to visitors and the 3rd floor (Special Collections and specifically the Paine Collection of 3700 pieces) is also open to research through appointment or afternoon.

I do feel USSVI should be doing more in the area of physical preservation of memorabilia and this and the books are the means for education."

I believe the Submarine Force Museum & Library is on the right track and am pleased to do my part in assisting them. I encourage others among you, my Sea Owl shipmates, to do the same in any way you see appropriate to your ability.

Sailor 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 shipmate:

Peter F. Springer, SN 48-50 – November 2, 2006

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

*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.*

(I participated along with shipmate Mike Polhemus in a special honor ceremony for Shipmate Peter Springer that was given during calling hours by an honor guard from the USSVI Groton Base.)

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The 40's

December 2006 Issue



Sea Owl World War II Deck Armament

By Ken Johnson

During this fall's maintenance shutdown at the Submarine Force Museum in Groton the 5"/25 submarine deck gun was installed as an outdoor display. This gun is believed to be the one installed aboard the USS Flasher (SS 249) at war's end. This is identical to the deck gun installed on the aft deck aboard Sea Owl during World War II.



The 5"/25 deck gun constructed largely of corrosion resistant metal was designed especially for use on submarines. Its 125" gun barrel was short by comparison to other naval 5" guns, but longer gun barrels would be advantageous only for more stable platforms and the shorter barrel was well suited for submarine use. It was capable of firing a 54 pound projectile 18,000 yards.

The short movie shot during Sea Owl's third war patrol shows a few scenes of Sea Owl's 5"/25 gun in action against some junks.

WW II Shipmates at Charleston

By Ken Johnson

Three WW II Sea Owl shipmates made it to the Charleston reunion, Bob Kristian, Bob Schlichenmaier and Jim Campbell. Including "plankowners", Bob Kristian and Bob Schlichenmaier. (Since Jim Campbell came aboard after Sea Owl's second war patrol, he is not a "plankowner.") I was able to interview Jim Campbell and Bob Schlichenmaier on camera during the reunion and since Bob Kristian lives not far from me in Massachusetts, I will get an interview with him at a later date. The interview with Bob Schlichenmaier was particularly informative as he was Leading Quartermaster and as such was responsible for the accurate recording of all significant events in the Quartermaster's Notebook. This interview has helped me to interpret the video of action during Sea Owl's third war patrol in 1945 and I can use much of it to narrate the final DVD version I hope to complete

after the first of the year and have ready for distribution to shipmates who may want a copy.

Later in his Navy career, Bob became a certified diver, served aboard submarine rescue ships and participated in tests at the Navy Underwater Acoustic Test & Evaluation Center (AUTEC) in the Bahamas.



Bob Kristian (who went by the name Kostyna while serving aboard Sea Owl) and Bob Schlichenmaier are shown here following the unveiling as "plankowners" of the Sea Owl addition to the Charleston Ramada Inn's "Gallery of Honor". The photograph was signed by all shipmates attending the Charleston reunion and will hang in the lobby along with a large number of similar tributes to Navy ships and other military units who have held their reunions there over the years.

In addition to Bob Kristian and Bob Schlichenmaier, I was able to interview Jim Campbell who made war patrol three in 1945 aboard Sea Owl. Each of these interviews I do with one of our World War II shipmates adds to the preservation of the wartime history of Sea Owl and will eventually be added to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project archive. So far I have done a dozen such interviews with half of them being Sea Owl shipmates and over the winter months I hope to get them all submitted to the Library of Congress and begin another phase of interviews.

Third War Patrol DVD

By Ken Johnson

I hope also after the first of the year to complete a DVD of the Sea Owl's third war patrol in 1945 and make it available in the spring. I have had much practice recently with capturing, editing digital content and producing DVDs of various subjects using Adobe Premiere Elements as a software tool. I have finally found with this software a working environment where I can achieve the result that I want. Now I can continue to refine my techniques and can produce an end product worthy of the USS Sea Owl and those who served aboard her in her earliest years.



The 50's

December 2006 Issue



Captain Dave Wessinger

By Ken Johnson

The Charleston reunion provided my first opportunity to meet Captain Dave Wessinger, Sea Owl's Commanding Officer from 1958-60. The insert in the below photograph is Capt Wessinger in



1958 as Commanding Officer of Sea Owl. Capt Wessinger is now 82 years old and resides in Pinehurst, NC.

I was pleased to be able to interview Capt Wessinger before he left for home, particularly after learning that he served aboard the USS Pickerel in the early 1950s. I asked him if he was aboard when they made the high angle surface and he said he was the diving officer. I am sure most if not all of you have seen this picture.



You may be interested to learn the background of this. Pickerel was a new GUPPY II submarine conversion and had been involved in practicing high angle maneuvers, something the "Nukes" call "angles and dangles". As a result the crew was fairly well used to large angles. On this particular occasion, they were trying to see how large an angle they could achieve and still remain under control.. Contrary to what some may think, on this particular day

this surfacing was done as a "photo opportunity" and not an emergency surface as commonly practiced on modern nuclear submarines. As Dave described it, they started near 400 feet at a speed of 15 knots. (While Sea Owl could not achieve such a speed under water, it was quite possible for a GUPPY II.) They put full dive on both bow and stern planes while blowing bow buoyancy and the forward group. As the boat began to rise, they shifted to full rise on both bow and stern planes. The photograph shows them breaking the surface at an angle of 48 degrees. (This is as measured from the photograph as on board inclinometers do not register this large an angle.)

I asked whether this had caused any damage on board. The only thing Dave mentioned of significance was that the mercury spilled out of the main gyro containment enclosure and it took some time and effort to remove it all from the pump room bilges. Otherwise, the crew had become accustomed to large angles and items were properly stowed.

During his later career, Capt Wessinger was assigned to BUPERS and took part in improvements to compensation for submariners. This included helping to secure submarine pay for off crews of SSBNs and other benefits.

Several shipmates who served with Capt Wessinger missed his presence at Charleston since he only stayed briefly. Anyone who served under him can contact me and I will send them a copy of the interview on DVD. After the first of the year I will be preparing copies and submitting the interview to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. I will also be providing a copy to the Submarine Force Library in Groton as I plan to do with each of the interviews I conduct.

The angle achieved by the USS Pickerel on the occasion of the dive described by Capt Wessinger did not come near approaching that of the USS Chopper on 11 February 1969 which undoubtedly holds the record for the maximum down and up angle for any submarine that survived the experience. On that occasion, while operating in waters off of Cuba, Chopper experienced a series of casualties that resulted in an uncontrolled nearly vertical dive. It is estimated that before its descent was stopped the bow section reached a depth of 1,011 feet at a down angle in excess of 75 degrees. During its subsequent rise to the surface, Chopper achieved an up angle of about 82 degrees and broke the surface nearly vertical. This, of course, was not a controlled dive and serious damage to a number of systems resulted.

It is truly a miracle that there were no serious injuries though undoubtedly there were numerous instances of soiled underwear on board following this event. You can imagine that many objects became unguided missiles during both the descent and subsequent ascent at such angles. Following the incident, Chopper was able to return to port under her own power, but significant structural damage to her pressure hull was discovered during subsequent inspections and Chopper was decommissioned in September 1969. Later Chopper served as a Naval Reserve boat in New Orleans and was also used for salvage and rescue training. Chopper suffered an inglorious end when she sank in 1976 while being used as a target.



The 60's

December 2006 Issue



The Last of the Diesels

By Ken Johnson

I received these photographs along with a note from Mike Arons too late to include in my article about *USS Dolphin* in the last issue.



This was taken at the decommissioning ceremony and these are members of Dolphin's commissioning crew who attended. In the front row, l to r, are Henry Gadreault, Pat Smith and Richard Abbott. In the back row, l to r, are Mike Arons, bud Ottoson and George Seele.



Mike writes: "On Sept 21 I left Arizona and headed for San Diego for the decommissioning of the *USS Dolphin* (AGSS 555). It has been many years since I was stationed on the *Dolphin*. August 17, 1968 the *Dolphin* was commissioned at Portsmouth, NH. The crew of 21 had 3 sailors from *Sea Owl*, Mike Arons, Dennis Grage and Jim Harris.

I arrived at San Diego Sub Base a little after 1700 for the *Dolphin* reunion and dinner. Of course I was late but not the last to show up. So I grabbed a beer and started looking for familiar faces. I guess people change after nearly 40 years. There was a large display of *Dolphin* and its commissioning crew, (plankowners), and there I found faces I recognized. There were eight of the

plankowners showed up for the reunion and decommissioning. The Capt's wife and the XO's wife were there but both the Capt and XO have passed on, so about half the crew was there. It was great to see them all and it was really sad to hear of the ones who are gone. The decommissioning ceremony was the next morning, Sept 22, and it was a cloudy morning with the breeze off the ocean. The setting was right to say goodbye to the *USS Dolphin* (AGSS 555), our last diesel boat."

Review of the DVD "Sea Spies"

By Ken Johnson

I recently acquired a DVD copy of the National Geographic special, "Sea Spies". This is an excellent and very informative history of the Navy's SOSUS system, narrated by Robert Ballard. During the Cold War, this was a highly classified subject and as I recall it even the name SOSUS was classified as SECRET. It is an acronym for SOund SURveillance System and was a series of deep ocean listening arrays strategically placed to monitor the deep ocean sound channel. It was particularly effective against Soviet submarines, both snorkeling diesel and the relatively noisy early Soviet nuclear submarines.

In the late 1930's it was discovered that sound would travel great distances at depths in the ocean between 3,000 and 4,000 feet and if detected by two or three listening stations, the location could be "trilaterated" fairly accurately. It was proposed in the latter part of World War II that this phenomenon was used to locate downed aviators at sea. The theory was that a downed pilot could release a small explosive charge designed to detonate within the deep sound channel. Coordinated listening stations would compare the time of receipt and at least three data points could isolate the source fairly accurately. In 1968 *Scorpion* was located by such triangulation.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the concentration of SOSUS listening stations around the Caribbean area was of great value in tracking the four Russian Foxtrot submarines deployed to the area around Cuba. Based on this success, SOSUS was greatly expanded to provide coverage worldwide from an eventual total of 22 facilities and became a key element in Cold War strategy..

I recall the comments made by former Soviet Foxtrot submarine commander, Rurik Ketov, at the "Cold War at Sea" conference in Rhode Island back in 2004 of how they could not understand how a U. S. Navy P2V patrol plane would appear overhead so soon after they began snorkeling. SOSUS was detecting and classifying them then vectoring out patrol aircraft to localize them.

The period from 1960 to 1980 was the "golden age" of SOSUS, but the traitor, John Walker, had begun feeding secrets of the SOSUS system and its effectiveness to the Soviets around the late 1960's. Suddenly new Soviet submarines, notably the *Akula* class became quieter and undetectable. This class is, in fact, referred to by some within the U. S. Navy as the "Walker" class.

In the 1990s, SOSUS was declassified and its function today is reduced to tracking whales and marine life from 3 remaining sites.

Bonus features on this DVD include an early submarine noise reduction training film and newsreels of the launch of *USS Thresher* and the Cuban Missile Crisis.