

The Brotherhood of Submarine Sailors

It has been almost sixty-five years since I qualified to wear submarine Dolphins, and I'd like to express my views on the very real brotherhood of submarine sailors.

In the early fifties, we had only smoke-boats of course, and riding those boats were many "old" enlisted guys in their twenties and thirties, some wearing WW II combat patrol pins. Most of these "old" guys were career men. Also aboard were kids (like me) who had enlisted for four years or so. The career men were our mentors. Only with the passing of decades have I come to realize and appreciate the importance of these mentors to the Navy and to those of us who were doing our growing up in the Navy.

Our mentors were amazingly tolerant, patient, good-humored, and above all highly knowledgeable about what makes a submarine operate efficiently and safely. They prepared us to qualify for Dolphins, enabling us to enter the brotherhood of submarine sailors. Moreover, they accepted us as full members despite our youth and inexperience.

This same attitude of brotherhood has been evident in the USSVI Virginia Base to which I belong. Most of the members are much younger than I. They have far more submarine duty than my four years, and they have experienced nuclear-powered long deployments. Even though I rarely attend Base meetings or participate in activities, my Dolphins assure me a sense of belonging.

Throughout the years, I have felt that same ready acceptance by those who had qualified for silver Dolphins, gold Dolphins, or both silver and gold Dolphins. For example:

In the seventies in Seoul, South Korea I met WW II sub vet, Charlie Brown, who had qualified for silver Dolphins, and we quickly became friends.

Much later, in Greene County, Virginia I came to know retired VADM Dudley Carlson who had qualified for gold Dolphins. Incidentally, Carlson insisted that the term submariner should not be pronounced "sub-MARINER" but rather "submarine-er". He felt that "sub-MARINER" suggested some sort of sub (inferior) mariner. A fine point but an excellent one.

Through a mutual friend here in central Virginia, I had the good fortune of meeting Bill Sage, who qualified for silver and gold Dolphins. I got to know Bill well. He had hit most of the enlisted, warrant officer, and officer ranks from seaman recruit through W4, to Commander. Bill recently died and now will patrol eternally with Charley Brown, Dudley Carlson, and those others from the brotherhood of submarine sailors who have preceded him or will join him.

In closing, to all of the career submarine sailors whose mentoring has made it possible, and continues to make it possible, for green kids (as well as older sailors changing careers) to qualify for Dolphins and be welcomed into the brotherhood of submarine sailors.... THANK YOU.

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The following was received from Warren by e-mail as a comment on his essay above: "Main point is that I went aboard the Grampus (SS-523) in February 1952 as an E-2 kid out of Sub School and left the Grampus for civilian life in July 1955 as a qualified E-5 submariner adult. Many career submariners contributed to that growth."