

A Submarine Adventure

A naval anecdote is more commonly called a “Sea Story”. Now normally one telling this type of story would say “This is a no shitter”. At least that was the way I first heard it on the USS JASON (AR-8) where I spent several months awaiting Nuclear Power School at Mare Island CA. In any case after 29 years I find I can now tell “sea stories” for days and not repeat myself - and the interesting part is that they are in fact all true - based on my own personal experiences. Of course, when telling stories, you want to capture the interest of the listener and make it a worthwhile experience for both the teller and the listener. So, what stories should we tell? I am sure most of us remember that experiences at sea can be mind-numbingly boring, depending on where one stands watch and where the boat is operating; for example, engineers standing watch in Maneuvering, especially at periscope depth doing 3 knots. That could be in a fast attack, a boomer on patrol or another similar situation. The same goes for a Torpedoman of the Watch at the Launch Control Panel in the Torpedo-room. And, depending on the sea state, Planesman might also fit into this category. There are also possibly moments of terror or heightened excitement such as: real fire and chlorine gas (from my own experience, while on the surface); flooding in the Control Room due to taking a 30-foot rogue wave down the Bridge Access Hatch on a 594 class boat with water going port and starboard shorting out the MK-113 Fire Control Panel, the Diving Station and the BCP, followed by flooding in the Fan Room and Torpedo Room. Then the 1MC order to override the OUTBOARD INDUCTION valve shut as we were surface ventilating at the time. Emergency blow was initiated, then the order to Override the Forward Group Vents SHUT! Another emergency blow was initiated followed by the 1MC Order to take Manual Control and override the Forward Group Vents shut. Everybody is now out of their bunks taking up stations to Manually Override the Forward Group Vents Shut, manning the Sound Powered Phones and me taking control in the Bow Compartment as senior petty officer. The details of this whole situation are complicated and suitable for a separate “Sea Story”, but you get the drift, boring to terror. And then there are those stories that are just plain funny and those that are directly related to the antics a submariner might get involved in. That is the story I would like to share. I share this story almost every time I speak because it is one of my favorites.

So here goes. Now this sea story is one I tell whenever I make a presentation and it is featured in each of three different presentations I make. The audience can be veterans, sometimes submariners, and at schools including universities: One presentation is STEM Disciplines and military service; another is Submarine disasters, rescue and salvage; and one is ocean engineering, deep submergence operations and oceanography. That last one describes what a submarine does when on special operations and is based on an operation I was on - a “SpecOP” that has

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since been declassified for a HISTORY CHANNEL TV special which aired in April 2000, called 100 Years of Silent Service. I also have been asked to speak at Veterans Day events. One of the elements of my presentations is to add submarine anecdotes so that the listener has an idea, even if small, as to what it is like to be a submariner and how we respond to submarine related events that happened in the water column, and how we interact on cue. Now this sea story took place while on “Alpha” sea trails in 1974 in the Gulf of Mexico after overhaul at the Litton Shipyard in Pascagoula MS. OK here we go:

USS ASPRO (SSN-648) was performing “ALPHA TRIALS” in the Gulf of Mexico. We had completed the shallow dive and had proceeded to the deep dive op area and commenced the deep dive. Now many of you have been in this same situation and may remember what an ALPHA trail Deep Dive test requires. But just in case due to our, let us say: “extended life experiences” - a memory failure may have taken place, I will provide some elaboration. Every one-hundred feet of depth, the boat will hold that depth and, after a twenty minute period of time (called a soak period to allow seawater to transport to the inner pressure hull), the crew and shipyard riders will visually inspect every single mechanical and electrical seawater and hull joint that was broken for the overhaul – mechanical, silver-brazed, weld, etc. All hull welds will be visually inspected (hull patches removed were not re-insulated). To speed up this evolution the engineer department was placed in PORT AND STARBOARD watches so that watch reliefs did not impede this lengthy part of the sea trials. This also provided watch-station coverage and enough extra personnel to perform the inspections. I was the oncoming EOOW and had just assumed the watch in Maneuvering and was filling in the log. Maneuvering is a semi-enclosed space on the 594 AND 637 class boats in the ULER forward and starboard of centerline. The space is semi-enclosed with a forward and aft bulkhead and an overhead. Outboard is the pressure hull and inboard a partial bulkhead with a 4-foot opening for access from the centerline passageway. In Maneuvering against the forward bulkhead are three plant control panels. The inboard station is the SPCP (throttle-man), next outboard is the RPCP (Reactor Operator), the outboard is the EPCP (Electrical Plant Operator). As the EOOW I sit on an elevated seat against the after bulkhead in Maneuvering. The last watch station to be relieved was the Throttle-man. I will call him Petty Officer Throttle-man (I cannot remember his name), he was a 3rd Class Electricians-mate about 5’ 4” high and shaped like a 55-gallon barrel. So, I hear Petty Officer Throttle-man say to me, **“Mr. Campbell, I have been properly relieved as Throttle-man of the Watch by Petty Officer Du-dah, request permission to leave Maneuvering”!** **“Leave Maneuvering”!** **“Leave Maneuvering, Aye”.**

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And Petty Officer Throttle-man lifts the chain and leaves Maneuvering. I do not think anything more of this and continue logging in.

About five minutes later, while still filling in the log, I hear Petty Officer Throttle-man's voice at the access to Maneuvering: **"Mr. Campbell, Sir"**! I look over and there is Petty Officer Throttle-man, standing BUCK NAKED with his dungarees wadded up in his arm. He had his boondocks on and simply looked like a 5-foot 4 inch 55-gallon 'hairy barrel'. He then says: **"I am going to set the record as the deepest streaker and send it in to the Guinness Book of Records"**! I admit I was momentarily stunned and before I could respond he took off running forward and yelling. I heard the ER/AMR II watertight door (WTD) open and slam shut as he continued forward. Recovering a few moments later, I am thinking I had better tell Control what is heading their way. The MC Box is mounted to the false overhead above and a little to my right. So, I hit the 7MC toggle switch **"Conn, Maneuvering"**! Now you all may remember that during this type of communications you must wait for a response from Control before you transmit your communications as this prevents any possible interference with activities or communications already in progress in Control. A few moments later; **"Maneuvering Conn, Aye"**! As the "Aye" is coming over the MC I hear Petty Officer Throttle-man hitting the Control Room yelling. He ran between the MK 119 FC Panel and the Periscope Stand, then between the Diving Station and the Periscope Stand then between COW at the BCP and then aft and port of the Periscope stand crossing aft of the Periscope Stand ECM Stack SINS (I think) inboard then aft to the ladder down to the crews mess, then down to the Torpedo-Room aft, forward through the 37-man berthing area up to the OPS UL then through the OPS/BOW Compartment WTD into the Bow Compartment. Now remember that Control is still awaiting my communications on the 7MC, and I realize I have to say something. So: **"Conn, Maneuvering, I was trying to give you a heads up about a naked hairy guy heading your way, but I was obviously not quick enough"**! When the OOD responded and toggled the 7MC switch, I hear the laughter still going on in Control and he responded without skipping a beat: **"Maneuvering, Conn Aye"**! The Guinness Book of Records, in a letter to Petty Officer Throttle-man, stated they could not accept his record as the world's deepest streaker as the depth he gave was 400+ feet. They need a specific depth. So, submarine security hit again. The reason I tell this story is that with the evolving gender make up of submarine crews, as well as the ever steady requirement for the silent service's need for absolute security, there will probably never be another attempt to set this record by a US Navy Submarine Sailor.