

SECURITY-INSECURITY THE RAY WAY
-OR-
HOW THE AIR FORCE LEARNED TO STOP
WORRYING AND LOVE THE RAY BOAT

‘We’re lovers, we’re fighters, we’re goddamned submarine riders.

We smoke, choke ,and chew rope.

We dance, prance, and romance.

We make love to’.....

You know the rest, if not, leave it to you’re imagination and whatever you come up with would, I’m sure, be within the realm of bubblehead probability. Those of us who do know the rest, will fall right in step with the sea story I shall unfold here today. If you’re expecting something akin to The Rhyme Of The Ancient Mariner, don’t even bother to set the sea and anchor detail. If you can identify with the pride and unorthodox stealth of the RAY, read on and enjoy.

BEER AND BIRDS

*T*wenty and seven years ago, USS RAY (SSN 653), on one of it’s many Captain Hurt volunteered sojourns to sea, actually got to make landfall some where other than D&S Piers, Norfolk. This one was *the sooo* lush and exotic Port of Canaveral on the Banana River on Florida’s east coast. A secluded portion of the Cape Kennedy launch complex used by SSBN’s to load up on what then was top of the line Polaris Missiles.

It was only a weekend berthing and I had duty on Sunday, sooo, the liberty time was limited. On Saturday, a carload of us went to the Cape Kennedy space museum, toured the exhibits and returned to the RAY boat to eat. Next came the true boater’s liberty!

There was one saving grace at Port Canaveral, *The Green House!* A building just big enough to house three pool tables, a bar, a bathroom, a TV, pickled eggs- pigs feet and Slim Jims, a bartender, an inexhaustible supply of beer (two kinds... warm and cold), and an open door policy for all swigging swabbies. Saturday night was RAY NIGHT at ‘The House’ for me and, as I recall, a significant number of other RAY boaters. Oh, did I mention that the Green House was painted, of all things, green on the outside?

The ‘Yeo’ (Yeoman 2nd class Keith) and I put ‘The House’ to *OUR* ‘test’ and found that even with help from fellow shipmates, the supply was so massive we never got to the warm beer. With that noted, I’d like to point out the saving grace of the Green House. Seems it was only about 100 yards from the berth RAY was tied to. Still, at 2 AM and innumerable bottles of beer later, that 100 yards got very long indeed. Even harder, was getting from land onto RAY and then finding the only hole

(weapons shipping hatch) available to pour ourselves through. Since I had the 0800-1200 topside watch Sunday morning, it was imperative that I get my rest, no matter it would only be about 4 hours of inebriated shuteye. The 'Yeo', in his own heightened state of Budwieser awareness, said he'd wait up for me on the mess deck.

Two seconds after my head hit the pillow, my body was racked with a terrible tremor, like a water slug out of tube #2 without the ram noise.

"Wake up Weeks, it's 0630. Your on topside at 0800."

"What are you talking about, I just got here!" It was the below decks watch just doing what I'd requested a scant few hours ago.

"Yeah, I know, you and the 'Yeo' sat in the mess for an hour before you dribbled yourself this way!"

"OK, OK, I'm up. You can go, I'm up, see?" As I stuck one foot on the bunk room deck.

"Yeah sure, I *know* my relief's up, it's the guy topside *you'll* have to face. Just doin' what you asked." His last words as he went through the hatch to the torpedo room being ever so careful to ensure it 'rang' as it shut.

Sitting up as best one can in a lower bunk, scratching here and there, I employed my tongue to redistribute the malt and hops 'mud' coating every pore of my gums and cheeks. Stirring things around however, only seemed to make it thicker. Resolved to the fate of my enlistment, I arose to the surface of consciousness and attended to the 3 S's (s---t, shower, and shave).

Standing topside watch wasn't that bad a deal, it even seemed to ease my barley swollen head pains. The sky was partly cloudy, there was a slight breeze and the temperature was still only in the low eighty's. The hard part was watching my fellow shipmates go ashore in dribs and drabs. Some to sightsee, some to church, and the real sailors to *THE GREEN HOUSE!* The 'Yeo' was one of those 'real sailors' emerging through the weapons shipping hatch around 1030.

"Hey, 'J'!" He sounded pretty chipper, but he looked fairly close to the way I felt.

"Mornin', 'Yeo'. Where you been, thought you were goin' to wait up for me?"

"I was, but you sat around waiting up with me, so I hit it when you did."

"Oh, I did, didn't I! Looks like you got about as much sleep as I did, where you off to?"

"Too late for church or sightseeing, so I guess I'll watch TV over at 'The House'. Want me to save you a seat?"

"Don't worry about the seat, just save me some cold beer... Be over when I get off watch and change. No other work or watches to worry about so what the hell."

With that done and said, Keith was off in as straight a line for the Green House as he could muster. I could already taste those malt, barley, and hops induced bubbles! Only 90 minutes of watch to go and it felt like an eternity. FINALLY, my relief popped up through the hatch, a hasty transfer of log book, service 45, and I was down the hatch so fast my shadow was left standing on deck. Changed from dress whites to work denim and chambray, lunch eaten, I charged up the weapons hatch ladder meeting my shadow half way. The Green House was calling me and I couldn't trust the 'Yeo' to save anything except maybe a seat.

One hundred yards later, I entered the Eden of 'The House'. True to form, there was the 'Yeo', a long neck in hand, an empty on the bar. Allowing a second or two for my eyes to adjust, I then maneuvered toward the bar.

Glancing furtively at the empty bottle I queried, "That my beer, 'Yeo'?"

"Yeah 'J', didn't want it to get warm so I drank it for you." All the while his mouth, mustache and eyebrows issued that wry Oregonian smile only he could produce.

"Thanks 'Yeo', I can always count on you to look out for my best interests. If you don't mind though, I'll order one for me to taste myself.. Oh what the hell, I'll get you one too." In this place, one didn't order by name, just "gimme a beer". Whatever was cold was what you got and to a 'real sailor', that's all that mattered.

"Your all right 'J', no matter what 'Squeaky' says about you. Hey, I got a quarter on the table, wanna shoot partners against Foster and Shelton?"

"OK, I'll put up a quarter too. That way we're covered if we don't win."

There were a handful of RAY boaters there, all the pool tables were busy and the TV was tuned to some sport.... I think. Didn't much matter, it was just noise to fill the space between the smoke and swabbie BS. That was a long afternoon, we were going back to RAY for dinner, but the pickled eggs and Slim Jim beef sticks (reconstituted brown colored suet) won out.

Round about 1700, some of the night before crowd came in, including 'Squeaky', Rex, 'Hair', and some nukes I think. Never saw too much of the nukes in port, guess they were always too busy doing the maintenance they couldn't do at sea 'cause everything was running.

"Hey Dave (David Rex, ET), ever get that cat started last night?" I asked for everyone's benefit. Saturday night on our way back to RAY, ole Dave decided to try and start this bulldozer. It was a big one, a D-8 or 9. Amazing what one can find to do in a measly 100 yards. As he was attempting to awaken this behemoth, sounded like he kept muttering something about sinking that f---ing boat.

"Captain's lucky I didn't get it started, I'd a set her right on top of the shipping hatch.... Gimme a beer!"

We had played pool all day, turned out Shelton and Foster were either better than the rest of us or less full of beer. We all had fun though, the beer was cheap and no one really cared who won at pool. The 'Yeo' and I had been talking all day about walking out the Banana River to watch the sun

set on the ocean. Let's pause here to reflect on that, we're on the east coast of Florida and we wanted to watch the sun set on the ocean. Setting to the west never really entered the logic pattern so it wasn't a factor..... How much beer was that?

Undaunted by the flaws in our thought train and the lack of enthusiasm from the rest of the RAY pack, the 'Yeo' and I were off, a six pack of beer under each arm. Down to our last two six packs, we were beginning to realize the folly of our thoughts as the sun began to set behind us and still no sight of the ocean. It didn't seem as though the Banana River was this long when we sailed in!

As the despair of our lost goal sat on our shoulders, a new target of opportunity appeared out of the sawgrass and sand. There not more than 50 feet in front of us was a full grown Gray Pelican preparing to bed down for the night. Ever been up close to a full grown pelican? They're about the size of a small German Shepherd and equipped with a huge can opener of a beak.

" 'Yeo', let's catch the bugger and take it back to the boat, think the Captain'll let us keep it?"

" 'J', are you crazy? How the Hell are we going to catch that thing, it'll fly away?!"

"Hey, we're goddamned submarine riders, aren't we?"

"Yeah, but...."

"Never mind but, we got some beer left and the bird's getting ready to hit the sack, so we wait and grab him when he finally knocks out!"

So there we sat, drinking beer watching this big bird slowly settle down. First one leg would tuck up under the body, then the head would do a Linda Blair kind of thing like when the con officer does a sweep with the attack scope at periscope depth. After the sweep, his head would fold back and rest on top of the wing folds. We would then inch forward. The pelicans head would pop up, his foot would go down and we froze till the bird settled in again. This must have repeated a dozen times and six beers or so till we managed to get within about 25 feet.

" 'J', it's not gonna be light much longer, at the rate that bird's goin' down it'll be midnight."

"Yer right 'Yeo', beer's runnin' low too, just 5 left in this sixer. Here's what we'll do, soon's he folds back again, we'll rush 'im. You go for the beak and I'll go for the body wrap."

"It's crazy, but OK, how come I got the beak?"

"Well, I gotta carry this beer!" The notion of setting the beer down temporarily, never occurred to either of us and it would shortly prove to have been a fatal oversight.

Mr. Pelican, unaware of the plight lurking in the shadows, did one more sweep with his 'attack scope' and one foot tucked, lay his head down on his back. This was our key to move in. At about 10 feet, the head came up, the foot went down, and the wings unfolded as Mr. Pelican initiated emergency procedures to come around for a hasty retreat to sea. Sensing the prey was about to elude our 'sneak attack', we initiated a full frontal assault. I ran after the retreating bird as it ran-

flew straight for the water. Yelling guttural noises only Cro-Magnon ancestors would understand and knowing I had only one chance for a 'snap shot', I charged the port tubes firing one at the pelican as it began to lift air about 15 feet out from shore. I came to a halt on my knees at the waters edge as my shot hit the water just below the starboard wing. That's when I realized.... The shot I let fly was our last 5 cans of beer!

" 'J', do you know what you just did?!" I could detect a sinister snicker behind his query.

"Yes, don't remind me!" Looking back, Keith was a full 40 feet behind me. "What the hell you doin' way back there, we almost got 'im."

" 'J', no way was I gonna grab that bird's beak!"

"Thanks 'Yeo', now what'll we do? No beer, no pelican, no sunset... we need another mission."

That's when *the* greatest target of opportunity caught our attention. A chain link fence with signs every twenty feet or so in English and Spanish.... 'WARNING! U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY—NO TRESPASSING.... Pelican, beer, and sunset were abruptly forgotten.

THE FROG AND THE AIR FORCE

*I*n the distance beyond this chain link barrier was the shrine of all bubblehead dreams, a forbidden structure beckoning us to perform the improbable.

" 'Yeo', see what I see, is that a launch gantry or what?"

"I see it 'J' and it ain't no what! You thinkin' what I think you think I'm thinkin'?"

"Yes sir, we got us another mission here and this time it isn't flying away on us, let's go!"

So we walked the fence line 'till we were across from the gantry. Looking at each other, we hit the sand simultaneously digging like a couple of hounds after a rabbit. Of course, due to the sudsy thought filters in our heads, we never stopped to consider if the fence might be charged. Anyway, it wasn't 'cause here I am tellin' the story.

Hole dug and no pelican or beer carrying to slow us down, we were under and in. For the next half hour or so, neither of us spoke a word as we circled and climbed on the gantry structure. It was like an amusement park built for two. At some point I found a bolt that was loose, stuck it in my pocket and still have it today.

That's when Keith broke the reverent silence of this holy place, "'J', what'll we do if a patrol comes around?"

"Don't know 'Yeo', guess we'll tell 'em we're drunk and don't know how we got here."

"Yeah, right! Let's go back, I need another beer. Hey, instead of goin' back along the river, let's see if that road over there will get us back to RAY."

Off we trudge down this road not quite two lanes wide, straight as a navigator's chart line, chain link fence on both sides, and thick scrub pine beyond the fences. By this time, there was little if any daylight left and what looked to be about a hundred miles of road ahead. Resigned to walking no matter our direction, we opted for the macadam path. After what seemed forever, I captured a toad, one of what sounded like thousands croaking an everglade sonata.

"Whatcha gonna do with the little croaker, 'J'? It's no pelican, but at least you finally caught something!"

"Think I'll take him back to RAY and throw him in the AMR bilge to see if there's any radiation leakage through the aft RC bulkhead." Opening a button on my shirt, I slipped the little fellow inside. Cargo in place, we resumed our march down the road to nowhere.

Suddenly, the road offered us two routes. One to the left, leading to a group of hanger like buildings and lots of lights. The other, to the right, leading to an access gate complete with guard shack and lone sentry festooned in beret, crisp uniform, bright white leggings, web belt, service 45, and staring with keen interest at *us*. Figuring it'd been about 2 hours since crawling under the fence and thirsting for the oasis of the Green House, a command decision was paramount.

"What now 'J', more exploring or the guard house to see where we really are?"

"We could go look at those buildings over there 'Yeo', but I don't think that guy at the gate is gonna let us get too much farther. Maybe we should just go ask the sentry for a ride back to RAY."

"OK by me, I'm pretty thirsty anyway. Let's just tell him we went for a walk and got lost."

"Yeah, we'll pretend like we're drunk and can't remember anything."

Another moment to reflect here. Picture this, two sailors who have been drinking all day pretending to be drunk, only a RAY boater could pull that off! Certainly no self respecting and alert security guard would ever fall for that! So, our story set, we walk toward the gate 'pretending' to stagger slightly in 'feigned' inebriation. I never even considered the role my forgotten 'toad in shirt' would play in convincing the sentry our story to be told was 'legit'.

"HALT! Stand right there in the street where I can see you both and don't move." The sentry came out of his shack, leather flap undone and hand on the butt of his 45. The toad in my shirt tried to jump causing my shirt to briefly puff out. His hand on the 45 gripped it a little tighter.

"Hi," The 'Yeo' chirped, "We're tired and lost, how do we get back to our ship?"

"Just stay there where I can see you, who are you and where did you come from?" said the sergeant, his Air Force uniform with AP arm band so stiff with starch it probably could have stood the watch by itself.

It was the 'Yeo's turn to do all the talking. "We're from the RAY tied up down at Port Canaveral, we been walkin' up that road back there and just want to go back to our ship."

"You two in the Navy? How'd you get on that road, it's all fenced off and patrolled."

About this time, my amphibian friend decided to do some hopping in my shirt again. The sergeant took a half step back and pulled his 45 out of it's holster just a bit more. I placed a hand over the froggy lump in my shirt as the sarge looked to be getting sort of nervous.

"What you got there under your shirt, sailor?"

"Uh, it's a frog I picked up back there, takin' 'im back to the ship to check for radiation, sir." The sarge's eyes revealed his inner thoughts.... *Why'd this have to be on my watch....*

"Where'd you say you were from, some ship down at the port? You guys been drinking?"

The 'Yeo' took over as I attempted to keep froggy subdued. "Yeah, we're from the RAY, can we get back by going by those buildings back there? Drinking? Yeah, we had a few beers at the Green House earlier this afternoon, why?"

"How'd you get in here, this is the only way in? No, you can't go by those buildings, that's the assembly complex. How long were you down that road, there's patrols every 20-30 minutes."

The 'Yeo' again, "I don't know, we climbed around on some tower for a while and then walked down that road to here. What patrols, didn't see any patrols anywhere. Assembly complex, for what?"

By now the sarge was really nervous, not only did he have two drunk sailors, but they didn't know where they were or how they got there and one said he had a frog in his shirt. He had, however, loosened the grip on his 45 just a bit.

"Those buildings are for assembling the Polaris missiles and that *tower* is the launch gantry for this site. I've got to call my duty watch officer, you guys stay right there so I can see you while I use the phone." The sarge reentered his shack without turning his back and dialed the phone without looking at it. Judging from his facial expressions and hand gestures, the conversation was a lively one.

" 'J', think we're in trouble? I don't think he believes us, except for the drunk part maybe."

"Hey, we're goddamn submarine riders ain't we? How can we get in trouble, doesn't look like his boss believes him either, so what we got to lose? They should be grateful we're not a couple o' Ruskies. He doesn't know what to make of froggy, maybe he thinks it's a bomb."

'Yeo' could only laugh at that as Sergeant 'Starch' returned.

"You guys're lucky, my duty officer checked with the harbor master and will be here in a few minutes to take you back to the ship. He's going to want some answers though."

"Uh, say, I been thinkin' 'bout my frog here, maybe I should leave him here. Is it OK if I let him go over on the grass?" Sarge got noticeably nervous again, maybe he did think it was a bomb or some kind of weapon. Yeah, a secret weapon, that's how resourceful us bubbleheads can be. A trained killer frog, a true naval amphibious threat!

The sarge, whose hand was back on the 45, was cooperative, but very cautious. "Yes, I guess so, but first, take it out of your shirt real slow so I can see it."

Unbuttoning my shirt, I reached inside in slow motion not wanting to shock the sarge into anything rash. Froggy wasn't so cooperative though, I had to fish around for the little croaker, guess he was getting comfortable in his 'chambray world'. Getting a firm hold, I withdrew him so all could readily see the frog for what he truly was. Looked like old Sergeant 'Starch' breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of four green legs and fly catching mouth.

"OK, you can put him down over there by that rock." The sarge positioned himself so he could watch both of us and so I would walk in front of him.

As I returned to our imaginary cell in the road, the 'Yeo' had a request, "Sir, do you think it would be OK if we used your head, I know I really gotta go, how 'bout you 'J'?"

'Starch' didn't give me a chance to answer. "You guys aren't going anywhere, my duty officer will be here pretty quick, save it for your ship."

As if on cue, a car with Air Force markings appeared and stopped blocking the fence gate. Out stepped another over starched uniform with two silver bars.... Captain 'Starch' we presumed. He conversed briefly at a distance with the sarge and then approached us.

"So you two are from *that* submarine down at the port, huh? How'd you get into this complex, there's no record of your entry at this gate and the port is a few miles from here."

'Yeo' and I answered at the same time with sort of the same words, "Yes sir, we don't remember, had a few beers, went for a walk, climbed on some tower down that road and here we are. Can we go back to RAY now?"

"The patrols didn't see you at all?"

"What patrols?" I answered as the 'Yeo' snickered, "If there's patrols, they're pretty low profile."

Captain 'Starch's collar wilted slightly as his neck grew noticeably red. "You two get in the back seat and sit still, I'm turning you over to your duty officer!"

Captain 'Starch' talked briefly in terse tones with Sergeant 'starch', then drove us back to RAY. It was a silent ride except for the broad 'Submarines rule' smiles the 'Yeo' and I wore. Our turn over to RAY's duty officer was brief and unceremonious.

"Are there any charges?"

"No, just take them off my hands."

"Consider it done, I have custody."

"Thank you Captain, *good night* !"

"Good night Captain, a pleasure doing business."

Of course we had to tell our duty officer the whole story, but hurriedly 'cause we both wanted to hit 'The House' again.

It was the 'Yeo' who asked first, "Mr. Mims, are we confined to bread and water or anything?"

Propping his chin in a hand and pretending deep thought, Mr. Mims' response was as we had hoped. "Well.... There're no charges against either of you and your actions were in line with RAY and silent service credos.... Either of you got any watches to stand yet?"

Jumping at the opportunity, I answered for us, "The 'Yeo' is off and I stood my watch this morning."

"Well, I've got only one restriction for you two, don't go more than 150 yards from the boat, dismissed."

With that said, Mr. Mims, grinning from ear to ear, repaired below embellishments, no doubt, already forming for his own version. I looked at the 'Yeo', who was already halfway down the gangway and followed suit.

Looking back at me with that typical Oregonian smile of his, he offered me some incentive, "The Green House is only 100 yards away 'J', last one buys!"

Since RAY was setting sail in the morning and our restriction reached out 150 yards, what better place to round out the events of the day. As we entered our local Eden, our own embellishments had already formed.

LETTERS AND REQUESTS

About six weeks later and back at D&S Piers, Norfolk, the events at the Cape more or less forgotten, I was passing the yeoman's shack on RAY when he called me in.

"Close the door 'J', I got some stuff that'll put a smile on your face."

"What's up 'Yeo', got some secret scuttlebutt?"

"As a matter of fact, yes I do!" His smile alluded to a tidbit of juicy proportions.

"Can't show you the letter, but the C.O. got one from the Admiral (RAY was flagship for SUBLANT). I guess the Admiral got a letter from the Air Force."

"The Air Force? What's that got to do with RAY?"

'Yeo' just snickered, " 'J', how could you forget, remember the Cape? Apparently, it took the air boys two weeks to find the hole under the fence. They wound up redoing the whole security system at the Cape, some of their boys got reassigned."

Smiling myself now, "I imagine the Air Force Security Commander was pretty impressed. Not only did two drunk RAY boaters wander into his complex and roam for a couple of hours undetected, but instead of getting caught they had to turn themselves in for a ride back to RAY. What'd the Admiral have to say to the C.O.?"

"Gee, 'J', I *wonder* who those guys could have been? The Admiral was *thanked* for bringing to light several discrepancies in security at the Cape."

"Yeah, thanked all right, what about us, the Admiral tell Hurt to use us for water slugs?"

'Yeo' got that snicker look again and made me wait for his answer.... Finally, "Well, the Admiral told Captain Hurt that the Air Force was grateful for the assistance, but that it was requested by the Air Force that RAY not return to the Cape for awhile. He also added an unofficial 'well done RAY' at the end."

We both had a good laugh and wondered, what could a goddamn submarine rider do if he was really serious.... *And sober!* Looking at each other, that silent cue all bubbleheads possess, caused us to chant.....

"**W**e're lovers, we're fighters, we're goddamned submarine riders".....

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