



FLAMIN CAIMAN TALES

www.flamincaiman.org

SEPT 2010

COMMANDER'S SCUTTLEBUTT

It is time for another Flamin Caiman Tales. We are headed to San Antonio, Texas in May 2012. We already have a list of hotels which can accommodate our reunion. We will start finalizing this list next year. Just a reminder, if you move, change your email address or phone number, please, please let us know so we can keep in touch and avoid the cost of sending mail to bad addresses. We have closed our on-line Caiman Storeroom. Until further notice, hats, buckles, shirts, etc., will only be sold at the reunions. Our sailing list is up to 1220 and we have 330 members but we lost many of our shipmates this past year. I just heard that The Detailer is out of eternal patrol billets. Please stay healthy and take care of yourselves. We want to see you all in San Antonio in 2012. Diesel Boats Forever!

John "Yeo" Fagereng, Commander

DONATIONS

I did not have enough room in the last newsletter to list all the donations. George Breault ETC(SS) (56/60) and Robert Mehrling EMCM(SS) (64/67) had to cancel after they sent in their registrations. They donated their payments to CAIMAN. Harry McGill EM1(SS) (70/72) had family commitments but donated \$100.00 to help with the reunion. John Luce EN1(SS) (60/66) donated a two foot cement CAIMAN for a mascot at all our reunions. It is a heavy sucker - too heavy for my two-wheeler - but I will get someone to pack it to all our reunions along with the diving alarm.

REUNION LOCATION

We received emails from a few shipmates who did not like our decision to have the reunion in San Antonio and several others that agreed with our decision. We can't please everybody, but we try. Yeo and I voted last which caused Reno to win by one vote. Yeo and I both agree that our votes should not have decided the location of the next reunion. Not counting our votes, San Antonio won. Many shipmates approached us after the dinner and stated that they did not like the reunion back to back anywhere. Also many stated that part of the fun of our reunions is visiting different locations. Because of the many comments, Yeo and I decided on San Antonio. We believe that this decision will please the majority.

ROASTS

As you all know, we roast a shipmate at each reunion. I need stories. All I need is a couple stories about each candidate; I can make up the rest. You can mail them to me, email them, or call me. Don't let a little thing like the truth stop you from sending me a good story about your shipmate or shipmates. No one is off limits either and there are no rules – remember Goat, they will be told in mixed company. Help preserve history by ensuring the important stories are passed on to all our shipmates.

SHIPS STORE

The ship store on the web site has been shut down. Our supplier has decided to scale back his business and semi-retire. We have talked to another supplier in Oregon that only has one job – supplying people like us. This is the same company who supplied the blue tee shirts that Bob Walters donated for our Reno reunion. Their prices are great and they handle more products. For the time being, we plan to have the ships store available only at the reunions. If you have any questions please contact Smitty.

DUES

I dislike sounding like a broken record – we are all old enough to remember that saying – but dues are due. Dues are \$10.00 if you want to pay as you go from reunion to reunion or to avoid me bugging you, its only \$75.00 for life. This small amount from each member helps keep the CAIMAN Assn running. It pays for newsletters, and office supplies, etc. and the most important items – door prizes and free refreshments and munchies at the reunions.

ASHES

Submarine Veterans of WWII and USSVI traveled from California, Oregon, Nevada, and Washington to scatter the ashes of Robert G. "Lenny" Hill EMCS(SS) (CAIMAN 58/59) and his wife, Mary Ann, into the Snake River at Hell's Canyon near Halfway, Oregon, on 29 May 2010. This was their request.

ETERNAL PATROL

Again, I have shipmates to list in this section. I wish I didn't have to put this section in our newsletter. We received a copy of these orders:

Cason, George RMC(SS) (68/68) 6 October 2006
Long, Lewis STS1(SS) (70/71) 25 February 2008
Axtell, Robert D. CAPT (59/60) 8 October 2009
Jeffords, John TM1(SS) (66/69) 23 December 2009
Sternburgh, Thomas HMCS(SS) 21 March 2010
Roach, John S. PHM1(SS) 45(?) June 18, 2010
Maher, Donald EN2(SS) (51/?) 23 June 2010
Winder, Warren ENC(SS) (60/63) 8 July 2010
Kopacka, William F. LCDR (44/45) 24 July 2010
Sailor, rest your oars.

NEWSLETTER

I am sure many of you noticed that this edition of the newsletter (Sept) is a month late. As a good submarine sailor I can come up with many excuses. The truth is it is all Yeo's fault. Actually, Yeo and I, even in retired life, manage to get busy once in a while and just did not get the newsletter out in time. We did think about it tho.

**"Of all the branches of men in the forces
there is none which shows more devotion and
faces grimmer perils than the submariners."**

Sir Winston Churchill

Once Upon a Time

By Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One of the benefits of growing old is the gift of time... Time to look back and revisit your collective 'Life Experiences',

For old smokeboat sailors, that means time to shuffle through memories of pissing against the wind in faded soft dungarees, frayed raghats and zinc chromate-spattered broghans. You can close your eyes and be transported back to a time when men wore acid-eaten uniforms, breathed air worse than the primate house at a poorly managed zoo, whittled mold and rot off food of advanced age being reclaimed by the gods of putrification, and surgically carving off the stuff and eating it. You survived and built up an immunity that could handle leprosy, lockjaw and cobra bites. We survived. Submarine duty was rough.

Many of us 'hotsacked'. For those of you who missed that life experience, hotsacking was sharing sleeping arrangements (to put it in easily understood terms). A system that required lads at the entry level of the undersea service profession, to crawl onto a sweat-soaked flashpad just vacated by another bottom-feeding shipmate. Lads of today's modern technically advanced undersea service would find it damn near impossible to imagine a day when lads who hadn't showered in weeks, climbed a tier of racks sharing sock aroma on par with three-day old roadkill, with his bunkmates... A time when raghats communally shared blankets that looked like hobo camp hand-me-downs.

It was a time when the common denominator of the naval supply system was the cockroach, with the longevity of Jack LaLanne. Cockroaches that could deflect claw-hammered blows and could reach rodeo entry size.

In the late 50's, the submarines built in the twilight years of World War II were rapidly approaching an advanced age comatose state. The navy quit making many of the replacement parts for these seagoing antiques, so we cannibalized the boats in line heading to the scrapyards. It was like harvesting organs from a dead Rockette to keep the chorus line going. After decommissioning, the old boats would have electricians and machinists crawling all over them with shopping lists and wrenches.

Memory is a wonderful God-given gift. There were sunrises and sunsets, rolling seas, visits to exotic places, and ladies with loose panty elastic and no AIDS. There were consumable combustibles on par with the liquids that propel hardware to outer space.

It was a time when the world's population loved the American submariner. Boat sailors in port meant good times, hell-raising and calling in the night shift at the local brewery. It was a time when the United States Navy had no recruitment problems, paid no incentive money and had to kiss no butts to entice grown men into accepting their manly obligation to their nation. Men signed up for undersea service, motivated by patriotic obligation, a sense of history and adventure, and to follow the gallant submariners who rode the boats against the Japanese empire. We wanted to wear the distinctive insignia universally recognized as the symbol of the most successful and demanding submarine service on earth.

We were proud. We had a right to be. We were accepted as the downline fraternity brothers of the courageous men who put Hirohito's monkey band all over the floor of the Pacific. We rode their boats, ate at their mess tables, slept in their bunks and plugged the ever-increasing leaks in the hulls they left us. We patted the same barmaid butts they had patted when they were far

younger and half as wide. We carved our boats names and hull numbers on gin mill tables in places that would give Methodist ministers cardiac arrest.

We danced with the devil's mistress and all her naughty daughters. We were young, testosterone-driven American bluejackets and let's face it... Every girl in every port establishment around the globe both recognized and appreciated the meaning of a pair of Dolphins over a jumper pocket. Many of these ladies were willing to share smiles and body warmth with the members of America's undersea service.

It was a time when the snapping of American colors in the ports of the world stood for liberation from tyranny and the American sailor in his distinctive uniform and happy-go-lucky manner, stood for John Wayne principles and a universally recognized sense of decency, high ideals and uncompromised values.

It was in every sense of the term, 'A great time to be an American sailor'.

There were few prohibitions. They were looked upon as simply unnecessary. It was a time when 'family values' were taught at family dinner tables, at schools, the nation's playing fields, scout troops, Sunday school or other institutions of worship. We were a good people and we knew it.

We plowed the world's oceans guarding her sea lanes and making her secure for the traffic of international commerce. But at eighteen, let's face it... We never thought much about the noble aspect of what we were doing. Crews looked forward to the next liberty port, the next run, home port visits, what the boat was having for evening chow, the evening movie after chow, or which barmaids were working at Bell's that evening. We were young, invincible and had our whole lives ahead of us. Without being aware of it, we were learning leadership, acceptance of responsibility and teamwork in the finest classroom in the world... A United States submarine.

It was a simpler time. Lack of complexity left us with clear-cut objectives and the 'bad guys' were clearly defined. We knew who they were, where they were and that we had the means, will and ability to send them all off to hell in a fiery package deal. We were the 'good guys' and literally wore 'white hats'.

What we lacked in crew comfort, technological advancements and publicity, we made up for in continuity, stability and love of our boats and squadrons. We were a band of brothers and have remained so for over half a century.

Since we were not riding what the present day submariner would call 'true submersibles', we got sunrises and sunsets at sea... The sting of wind-blown saltwater on our faces... The roll and pitch of heavy weather swells and the screech of seabirds. I can't imagine sea duty devoid of contact with these wonders. To me, they are a very real part of being a true mariner.

I'm glad I served in an era of signal lights... Flag messaging... Navigation calculation... Marines manning the gates... Locker clubs... Working girls... Hitchhiking in uniform... Quartermasters, torpedomen and gunner's mates... Sea store smokes... Hotsacking... Hydraulic oil-laced coffee... Lousy mid rats... Jackassing fish from the skids to the tubes... One and two way trash dumping... Plywood dog shacks... Messy piers... A time when the Chief of the Boat could turn up at morning quarters wearing a Mexican sombrero and Jeezus sandals... When every E-3 in the sub force knew what paint scrapers, chipping hammers and wire brushes were for... When JGs with a pencil were the most dangerous things in the navy... When the navy mobile canteen truck was called the 'roach coach' and sold geedunk and pogeey bait... When the breakfast of champions was a pitcher of Blue Ribbon, four Slim Jims, a pack of Beer Nuts, a

hard-boiled egg, and a game of Eight Ball.

It was a time when, if you saw a boatsailor with more than four ship's patches on his foul weather jacket, he was at least fifty years old and a lifer. A time when skippers wore hydraulic oil-stained steaming hats and carried a wad of binocular wipes in their shirt pockets. In those days, old barnacle-encrusted chiefs had more body fat than a Hell's Angel, smoked big, fat, lousy smelling cigars or 'chawed plug', and came with a sewer digger's vocabulary.

It was a time where heterosexuals got married to members of the opposite sex or patronized 'working girls', and non-heterosexuals went Air Force... Or world Peace Corps.

It was a good time... For some of us, the best time we would ever have. There was a certain satisfaction to be found in serving one's country without the nation you so dearly loved having to promise you enlistment bonuses, big whopping education benefits, feather bed shore duty, or an 'A' school with a sauna and color TV. It was a time when if you told a cook you didn't eat Spam or creamed chipped beef, everybody laughed and you went away hungry... And if you cussed a messcook, you could find toenail clippings in your salad. Our generation visited cemeteries where legends of World War II undersea service were issued their grass blankets, after receiving their pine peacoats and orders to some old hull number moored at the big silver pier in the sky. We were family... Our common heritage made us brothers.

There came a point where we drew a line through our names on the Watch, Quarter and Station Bill, told our shipmates we see them in hell, shook hands with the COB, paid back the slush fund, told the skipper 'goodbye', and picked up a disbursing chit and your DD-214. We went up on Hampton Boulevard, bought a couple of rounds at Bells, kissed the barmaids, gave Thelma a hug, then went out to spend the rest of our lives wishing we could hear, "Single up all lines...", just one more time.