## **Boat Sailors**

## **Generational Difference**

## by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We speak of generational differences between the old boats and the new. Each generation. Each crew forges its memories, recollections, loyalty and love of the force based on the sum total of their experiences. It has always been that way. Most likely, always will.

We are linked! Each generation to each preceding and each following generation by the twin fish, silver and gold we wear or once wore over the pride in our hearts. We earned a designation that forever sets us apart. We are U.S. Submariners.

I have my memories. And each of you has yours. Collectively, they are our history. The human history of the boats we rode, the squadrons we served in and the force we represented.

Submarines have evolved into giant technological wonders that roam the ocean depths at a range below the surface t hat many of us, the older coots, find damn near beyond comprehension.

As I sit here, I wonder what memories a modern day boat sailor will have. Will he hear the gentle slap, slap, slap of signal light shutters in his dreams? Will he remember the sound of chipping hammers and paint scrapers battling ever-present rust? The pride a young kid had in repainting the hull numbers of the boat he loved? Is there a modern day equivalent of the first night in battery charge? Does the crew stay up half the night playing hearts, watching movies, sorting laundry, telling lies and running hot coffee to Enginemen and Electricians?

Do COBs still cuss like creatures formed in the womb of Hell and then take time to come see if you are okay in sickbay?

Do they still want to know if you can stand a little closer to your razor as their way of telling you that you look like shit and need a shave?

Do they still meet the boats with fresh milk, mail sacks and guard mail?

Do barmaids still know your names and what boat you are off of? Does cheap perfume still hang in a pea coat and dress canvas long enough to get you in trouble with your true love? Does your neckerchief still dangle in a bowl of chili, your soup or your beer glass? Do you still own thirteen button blues and a jumper so damn tight it takes two of your mates to pull it on you? Do boat sailors still procure clean white hats from unsuspecting spark-shufflers who live in surface craft radio shacks?

Can you still get great scrambled eggs, bacon and hot toast at 0600 on the rescue vessel for a couple of boxes of fresh doughnuts and a worn out, dog-eared copy of last months *Playboy*?

What benefit did Hyman and his boys, trade you for hijacking your sunsets. Sunrises, coffee on the bridge. Watching sea birds, passing merchant ships, riding heavy seas in lousy weather and filling your lungs with diesel exhaust?

What has the world economy, inflation and the change in sensitivity done to the commercial affection market? It can't still be two tens and a five and you pay for the room, can it?

What has the force substituted for junior officers taking morning sextant observations to figure out where in the hell you are?

Do guys still hang around the galley like vultures waiting for the night baker to pull a load of whatever you've been smelling for the last hour, out of his magic oven? Is ragging the cooks still the cheapest 'best game in town'? Is a smiling, big mouth mess cook still the best thing you've ever seen in the morning?

Can you still calculate how long you've been out by the diameter of the salt stains in the armpits of your last dungaree shirt and whether your socks stick when you throw them at the door of the medical locker?

Do they still produce independent duty Corpsman that can fix anything, cure anything, identify small crotch critters from every exotic location, make tight stitches in a state five sea and clean your clock playing Gin Rummy?

Do skippers still wear steaming hats that look like Noah sent them to the lucky bag? Is green cap brass and a torn visor still a mark of distinction? Do cats still try to cover up deck force foul weather jackets?

Are there still mail buoy watches and goofy Non-Quals roaming around trying to locate the main engine ignition key?

Do topside watches still pee on the screw guards on the 12 to 4? Does the geedunk truck hit the pier around 2200? The Krispie-Creme truck at 0400? The laundry truck at 0800? And the skipper five minutes before morning quarters?

Do boats still maintain illegal slush funds and hold non-reg anchor pools?

Are E-3s still the lads who know everything about every subject ever discussed, except their qual cards?

Do the boys from the forward nest still rob the tender slugs, blind? Can you still hijack anything that will fit in a mailbag?

Do folks in any s quadron outside of Norfolk yell "Oh God, no!" when they see a boat come sliding into the slip with a SUBRON SIX pennant flying aft of the sail?

Can you still buy 'Sly Fox' wine? What in the hell does it cost now? Are Beer Nuts, Slim Jims, pickled hard-boiled eggs and pool queue dust in your beer still the 'Breakfast of Champions'?

Do barmaids still let you pin a set of Dolphins on the seat of their panties the night you qualify?

Do you still have to drink for your Dolphins?

Memories. Collect them... Remember. Remember the little things. They will form the composite of your old man's memories. They will connect you with whatever comes after you.

One day, you will be parked in your old easy chair saying:

"These gahdam sailors today have no idea how damn tough we had it. In the old days we had to haul all those neutrons and protons in buckets and pour the damn things into our hydro super nuke-a-lator and polish all those gahdam magic wands. Stack the pixie dust. And rewind the he Stairmasters. Jeezus, we sure had it rough."

But most of all, be sure to visit the old folk's home and help old smoke-boat sailors find their gahdam teeth.