

# Brother of the 'Phin

by Larry Dunn

I chanced upon a sailor once  
with an emblem on his chest.  
It appeared to be two angry sharks  
on a trash can for a rest.

His white hat was wrinkled and dirty;  
his neckerchief tied too tight  
and he had only one eye open  
as he staggered through the night.

He was young and scrawny and wiry;  
with knuckles cracked and oozing.  
I could tell from the way he looked and smelled  
he'd spent the night whorin' and boozin'.

But as he pulled abreast, he squared his hat  
and said "Sir, do you have a light?  
I'm due back aboard by quarter to four  
Or the COB will be settin' me right."

As I fumbled around for my lighter  
he pulled some smokes from his sock  
"and I'll be damned lucky to make it," he muttered  
'Cause I'm steamin' against the clock."

Through the flame of my well-worn Zippo  
I could see a smile on his face.  
"But, you know -- it was damn well worth it.  
That 'Bell's' is a helluva place."

He sucked the smoke deep down in his lungs  
and blew smoke rings up towards the moon  
Then he rolled up his cuffs, pushed his hat to the back  
and said "Maybe there'll be a cab soon."

In spite of the time he was losing  
He was wanting to shoot the breeze  
So we sat on the curb, like two birds on a perch  
as he talked of his life on the seas.

I asked about the thing on his chest  
and he looked at me with a grin.  
Then he squared his hat, snubbed out his smoke  
and said "I'm a Brother of the 'Phin."

"I'm one of the boys who go under the sea  
where the lights from above don't shine;  
Where mermaids play and Neptune is king  
and life and death intertwine."

"Life on a boat goes deep in your blood  
and nothing on earth can compare  
to the feeling inside as she commences a dive  
going deep on a hope and a prayer."

"I've sailed some fearsome waters  
down below the raging main  
and I've heard that old boat creak and groan  
like the wheels of a railroad train."

"It's the one place on earth where there ain't no slack  
where you don't have more than you need;  
where each man is prince of his own little space  
and each lives by the submarine creed."

"There ain't much I've done in this fickle life  
that would cause other men to take note,  
But I've walked in the steps of some mighty fine men  
who helped keep this country afloat."

"They slipped silently through the layers  
down below that raging main  
while up above enemy men-o'-war  
laid claim to the same domain."

"Brave sailors were they  
in their sleek boats of steel  
silently stalking their prey  
and closing in for the kill."

"They died as they lived  
unafraid, proud and free  
Putting all on the line  
to secure liberty."

"Their bones now rest in glory  
down in Neptune's hallowed ground  
But their souls stand tall at the right hand of God  
Awaiting the klaxon's next sound."

"So, it's more than a 'thing' that I wear on my chest  
It's a badge of the brave, proud and true.  
It's a tribute to those who have gone here before  
riding boats that are still overdue"

"It's the "Dolphins" of a submariner  
worn proudly by the few  
who've qualified at every watch  
and touched every bolt and screw."

"They know the boat on which they sail  
like they know their very soul  
and through the fires of hell or the pearly gates  
they're ready for each patrol."

"But when in port they take great sport  
standing out from all the rest.  
For deep inside they burn with pride  
for the dolphins on their chest."

Then he stood erect, squared his hat  
and pulled his neckerchief down to the 'V'  
He rolled down his cuffs, put his smokes in his sock  
and squinted back towards the sea.

"I can hear them diesels calling  
So I'd best be on my way.  
We'll be punchin' holes in the ocean  
when the sun peeks over the bay."

As I watched him turn and walk away  
I felt honored to know such men.  
for they bring life to Duty, Honor, Country  
these "Brothers of the 'Phin."

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Larry Dunn July 2003