

## **The Men Who Wore The "Pin"**

**by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong**

They returned, thousands of them. No, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands... Faces weather beaten, tanned. Smiling as they stepped down from trains all over America . Smiling that smile, universally recognized as that 'Damn!! It's great to be home!' smile.

They were home again... Those that were left. The survivors of a generation who left their homes and families to undertake the obligation of freedom-loving men to go into combat and ultimately defeat some of the most vile proponents of evil. They wore the story of their deeds and where they had been in rows of multi-colored, mute reminders above their pockets. What they had seen, what they had done and the personal losses they had suffered, would forever be in their minds when they looked up at their national colors floating gently in the breeze.

They are rapidly passing into the cold pages of history. The awesome respect in which they were held a half-century ago has given way to the gentle view point of the Monday Morning Quarterbacking of those who have grown up in a world of safety and extravagance, Of promiscuity and excess made possible because of their self-sacrifice.

Soon it will be impossible to find a combat pilot who stared at oncoming aircraft through a rotating propeller blade... A sailor who passed 40 mm shells to a loader in a battleship gun tub... A soldier who carried rifle ammo in eight round clips and ate crap that resembled dog food out of an olive drab can, in a Dutch ditch, in the rain.

Men who fought wars that lasted years, rather than days and ended with a clear-cut result. For those of us who rode boats that went below the surface, there were men who rode our boats when the close aboard sound of fifty pounds of TNT detonating would be clearly heard through several inches of steel. That 'steel' was U.S. built pressure hull and audible public prayer could be heard in every compartment. And when it was over, hardened men could hug each other, secure in the knowledge that no one would feel that they might be gender-confused.

These same men knew the sound of torpedo hits and the telltale sound of the result of such hits as the bulkheads of an enemy target collapsed while the enemy vessel made it's way to the bottom. Pressure-folding steel is a sound most of us will never hear, thanks to what these men did.

They had executed their war way beyond the established battle lines...Deep within the home waters of the Jap Empire. At a time when the Jap emperor and his militaristic toadies were assuring their easily duped people that they were secure, the people of Japan witnessed their merchant ships burning all along their coastal horizons. Ships, whose burning hulks were disappearing nightly, compliments of our Undersea Warriors.

So they returned. What was left of them. They crossed the brow of boats that wore freshly painted enemy flags... Flags that chronicled their kills... A silent statement of their contribution to our victorious effort in the Pacific. It may have been a Silent Service, but little Jap flags painted on the sides of conning towers made it clear that the presence of our submarine force had been felt.

And above the jumper pockets of the men crossing to the pier, could be found the sterling silver representation of a submarine. The pin itself and each star worn below it, represented a war patrol which resulted in excess of ten thousand tons of enemy shipping sent to the bottom.. The man or men who wrote the requirements for the awarding of that insignia wrote those requirements in such rigid and specific terms that the pin has never been watered down and reduced to the 'Crackerjack' prize that so many other military badges have become.

Today, the U.S. Submarine Combat Patrol Pin remains a symbol of men who have gone to sea and have drawn blood in defense of their country and way of life at the risk of their personal safety, If not the sacrifice of their futures.

Someday, the powers that decide such things will come to their senses and will stop naming our submarines after geographical locations and hack politicians and start naming our undersea warships after the heroes who wore 'The Pin'. Why they feel compelled to look elsewhere when we have such towering heroes of our own makes no sense to this old E-3. They named a whole class of tin cans after Admiral Arliegh Burke, proving that they can do it right... At times.

But, the men who parked torpedoes in the sides of so many enemy ships, held no inflated sense of their own importance. When you try to thank the old meat-eaters, they always reply with, "Hell, I was young, scared and just doing my job."

Volunteering for submarine duty in wartime has never been routinely expected of U.S. Sailors. Volunteering has never been an exercise in goat-roping the timid and reluctant. The Draft Board never forced any citizen to fill the ranks of the Submarine Service. Any man, who found wartime employment inside a pressure hull, was there because he put himself there. "Just doing my job." Right.

Who in their right mind would choose a line of work that included sitting, sweat-soaked in darkness; 400 feet below fresh air and sunshine listening to canisters of high explosive detonate and shatter gauge faces and incandescent bulbs? No, can't buy, "Just doing my job."

To buy that, would mean that our Submarine Force was comprised of the world's largest collection of complete raving lunatics. The last idiot who called a World War II submariner a complete lunatic is still trying to get used to his new glass eye, figuring out how to talk with his new teeth and walk upright.

They are ours. They handed us an unblemished record of service 'faithfully performed'. A gallant record of deeds performed by incredibly brave and dedicated men.

Their ranks thin daily. We do not have a lot of time left to buy them a beer! Listen to their amazing stories and thank them for what they gave us and left in the pages of the history of The United States Navy.