

Submarine Recollections

The Worlds Greatest C.O.B.

By Dave Eberhart in August, 2005

I would venture to say that anybody that's ever ridden a boat for more than a summer cruise will tell you that they had the greatest Chief of the Boat, and while I won't call them liars, I'd say they just have misplaced loyalty if they weren't talking about TMC (SS) Possell.

I don't know how long Possell (whom from now on I will refer to as COB-out of respect and the simple fact that it's easier to spell) had been in the Navy when I met him in the Mid 60's aboard the 346, but I do know he qualified on the old "S" boats prior to WWII. Damn, over 25 years and he was already an E-7. Yeah-but for how many times. He used to tell us that he'd been up and down the ladder of rank more times than most of us had climbed the After Battery ladder to go on liberty. I believed him. It seems that a year or two earlier (when he was younger) he'd been a steamer and had paid the price for over exuberance on the beach. This was a good thing, as he tended to understand those of his boys that leaned to the same traits. His motto "Bust your ass when something needs to be done and party when you get the chance." Actually, he had several mottos one of which " If you give a boat sailor three steel balls and lock him in a room, then check on him a half hour later, he'll have eaten one, lost one and screwed the other one up" and the always popular gem "If the Navy didn't issue it to you in your sea bag, it ain't the Navy's problem". The last one was generally aimed at some married maggot who put in a chit to stay in port from daily ops or so because his wife's back hurt, his tricycle motors had the flu, his dog had worms or his cat had eaten the neighbors canary, all carried the some value to COB. Oh and for those of that have spent a few hours under the sea, it is understood that the aforementioned mottos were actually equipped with a wide variety of explicit adjectives sprinkled liberally throughout the statement. I'm not leaving these adjectives out from respect to sensitive ears, it's just that I don't believe my spell check knows the, and I don't want to pass the afternoon hitting the "accept button".

Now COB stood about 5'10" and weighed about 210-but he looked 6'6" to us with his shaved bulldog head, square shoulders and gravelly voice that sounded like a combination of mean dog growl and throaty rumble of a running jimmy under a load. His eyes carried that steely "been there-done that-got the T-Shirt" look and his sense of humor was so dry you were never sure if he was kidding or you were getting your ass chewed. Naturally, the safe thing was to assume you were getting you ass chewed.

I mentioned bulldog face because COB had a bulldog named Mike and if you ever happened to see them together you would swear they were both from the same litter. Summer Sunday mornings were spent by COB sitting in his back yard reading the paper and drinking beer with Mike. It seems Mike could match COB beer for beer and

that in itself was no mean feat. One Sunday morning the usual ritual was in place when Mike suddenly started barking and ran around to the front of the house. COB could hear Mike barking and growling around front and became mildly curious so he got up to see what Mike's problem was. As he rounded the corner of the house he saw Mike dragging a squealing, arms flailing, deaf mute around the front yard by his pants leg. Mike didn't know the man was a deaf mute and like any good dog in his cups, just plain didn't like to be ignored. COB rescued the man and helped him pick up the pencils that he'd been trying to sell. In COB's own words "I felt so damn bad I bought two pencils".

Like any really good COB, the crew loved him, the XO was afraid of him, and the Capt did as he was told. The man was absolutely unflappable in any crisis situation. If a casualty happened when he was in the area he just took charge and got it resolved. If he was somewhere else in the boat he simply sat back, relaxed and drank his coffee. He was always as steady as the helm in a glass sea.

COB always wore a crumpled up Chiefs hat topside whenever we got underway or pulled into port. It was his good luck hat that had been passed on to him by an old chief the first time COB made E-7. The bill was so cracked that scotch tape held it together and the fouled anchor was an absolute emerald green. He never went to sea without it.

The COB was scheduled to leave the boat and take over sub school for 2 years before his final retirement when we got back from a trip to San Juan. The crew had been struggling for months on what to get the COB when we got back to New London for a going away gift. He had every plaque, bell, pen and pencil set and trinket you could think of from all the boats he'd been on and he was just too special to us for just another plaque.

One of the Chiefs got the idea of having his underway hat bronzed and mounted for him since he wouldn't be getting underway anymore after we got back. Seemed like a good idea at the time-so they stole it and sent it off to New London to have the job done.

Have you ever heard stories about a mean old grizzly being awakened in the middle of hibernation? When the COB discovered his hat missing the grizzly wouldn't have stood a chance. He roared through the boat threatening everybody from the Captain on down with keelhauling, disembowelment, gutter stomping and just plain murder if he ever found out who had his hat. The next three weeks were the longest three weeks of the entire crews lives. Trust me, your simply not safe within five feet of a pissed off grizzly bear and there just isn't anyplace with five feet of space on a Diesel Boat.

The morning after our arrival in New London the crew was standing at parade rest, shaking in our boots, not knowing if COB was going to club us with our gift or just toss us all over the side, as the obligatory congratulations and we're gonna miss ya

speech was given by the Capt. When he finished and shook the COBs hand he said "Oh and by the way, the crew got together and got you a little something that we all think shows how we feel about you." We were ready to duck on the count of three as the Captain handed the COB a box. The COB still had a scowl on his face as he opened the box but when he saw what was inside his face lit up and tears started streaming down his cheeks. We had suffered through hell to give him the one thing that would have lasting meaning to him. Oh yeah, and the deck gang gave him a can of "Neverdull" dull to go with it.

Possell, where ever you are, we the crew of the SS346 and probably half of the submarine force that served in your time salute "The World's Greatest Chief of The Boat.

Sea Stories

By Dave Eberhart in March, 2005

Sea stories are, and probably always have been, the fare of men of the sea. I have a picture in my mind of a Viking crew all huddled together in their Long Boat, ducked down low for protection against the cold North Atlantic, chewing on dried Cod and salted meat, chugging mugs of Mead and regaling each other with tales of victorious battle and beautiful Irish maidens they met while pillaging an Irish coastal village. The only difference between the Vikings and sub sailors is that, being none to fond of 28 degree salt spray, we sit around a table munching on Beer Nuts and Pretzels, spinning yards and sipping on a tasty one.

Now everyone knows that the only difference between a sea story and a fairy tale is the introductory clause. Still, our fascination with a good sea story is in the art of the telling, always keeping in mind that there's a nugget of fact in every good sea story, we listen with rapt attention to every detail. It's not that the teller is "lying", simply that time, memory and a few cocktails tend to give a different vision of events, which brings about the evolution of the story. For instance, in the first telling the introductory clause is "I once heard" which soon becomes "I once saw" and eventually, after a few more years of telling and retelling, the bard becomes the bloody hero of an epic tale. Even a premier story teller, like my old friend Art Randal, once confided in me that he couldn't always recall which boat, what time frame or even if he was actually involved in some of his stories. (Sorry Art if I spilled the beans, but you know there are no secrets on a Smoke Boat.) The reality is that sailors just don't really care how straight the facts are-it's the quality of the story that counts.

I have noted over the years that very few sea stories are tragic. It seems that sub sailors have a way of turning some rather unpleasant situations and conditions into humor. Head doctors be damned-it's our way of coping.

For those of you, like me, that enjoy a good stroll down memory lane, might I suggest <http://www.olgoat.com/substuff/abr.htm> affectionately called the After Battery Rat. This site is Library of Congress for sea stories. The yarn spinning is superb and there is something for smoke boaters and nukes alike. I promise that you will spend hours of chuckles and memories at this site. It's a wonderful place for reference to bring your own memories into sea story form. (Keep in mind that there is less than six months to convention time and the gathering of story tellers). I'm willing to bet my last pair of clean skivvies that every writer there will swear each word of their story is gospel.

If you wish to build your repertoire of sea stories, I'm sure they won't mind if you borrow a story or two as long as your introductory clause is "I read about an event on ol goats site"- at least for the first few tellings, and then carry on from there.

In closing, I would like to propose a toast to the many "brothers of the fin" who are such wonderful writers at that site and mention that I'm looking forward to renewing old acquaintances of mine from the boats I rode. Maybe I'll find out if there really is any truth in half the stories I tell-just maybe I was actually there. Shipmates-enjoy.

My Favorite Boat

By Dave Eberhart in August 13, 2000

The earlier message by "Too Tall" got me to remembering again (This board is good for that). Do any of you guys that rode multiple boats have a favorite? Do you remember why? Maybe some of the men that rode single boats can relate to a favorite car. You know, the old 49' Ford convertible, or 55' Chevy with wide bench seat and the four on the floor that kept poking your girl friend in the back while her shoulder got wedged under the steering wheel (or maybe that's just me). Back to my point.

Of the 324, 346 & 565, my favorite was the 346. Maybe it was mostly crew, we had one of the great COB's and for some of the time a lousy skipper, but part of it was the old girl herself. She took us to places that I'm sure are on the charts someplace, but I have no idea where. She carried just about enough food for those extended runs up North when your relief didn't show up and almost enough fuel to get us back to a safe haven. She carried us through storms in the North Atlantic and Arctic that movies could be made of. She recovered when a nuke trainee, trying to qualify on the stern planes, threatened to send us to a cold dark grave. She provided me with a bunk that after a three day run of no sleep felt better than the distant arms of a favorite sweetheart. Even when we corralled her into a harbor, her shiny brass valves and gleaming chrome levers contrasting the red naugahyde covers, (hiding just a few of her many secrets) drew OOHs and AAHHs and big round eyes from the hundreds of fortunate people that were invited to take a tour.

Night after night she would welcome her boys back to her womb, somehow making the metal deck plate under the after battery hatch a little softer for those of us that celebrated a wee bit too much. Our legs always seemed to go limp as we dropped (with a resounding thump) into her belly and landed on our pride. The echoing snores coming from Hogan's alley, the goat locker, as well as the forward and after room meant all was well and we were home.

I saw a picture of the USS Corporal (SS-346) as she now looks, still looking beautiful, her crew, all dressed in whites, standing topside with pride, as she serves, as always, with pride. Only now she is in the Turkish Navy.

Someday I'd like to tour her, just like hundreds of other people have done. Maybe she'd remember me.

A Journey of Yesterdays

by Dave Eberhart in December 2004

[This story is a republished post made on Ray "Olgoat" Stones submarine bulletin board. The author, Dave Eberhart, prefaced the story with these words: I really can't explain why I'm posting this. Maybe it's my therapy for a sad but proud time. Maybe it's because I honored my son's half-jesting request not to wear my "The best marine is a submarine" T-shirt at his graduation from MCRD. I don't know. You decide.]

The old man leaned back in his chair and stared at the wall looking at, but not really seeing, the photos of the boats that had been his home in his youth. Unfamiliar emotions raged through his mind. He'd just watched his son pack a marine corps regulation 70# studio apartment suite (God only knows why they call it a pack) into the back of his car and head for the base. 4 in the morning-the military always swings into action while the rest of the world slumbers on in peaceful dreams-times have not changed.

The hardest thing he'd ever done-watching his son go off to war. Be proud. Don't show fear-only his wife is allowed to shed tears. Proud-obviously, worried-absolutely. It is one thing to be young, dumb and bullet proof when you are young, but quite another when it's your son's turn. What an amazing young man his son had become. Always looking for the toughest nut to crack, the highest mountain to climb and the biggest obstacle to overcome and a thirst for knowledge that seemed unquenchable. He'd excelled in sports and gotten straight "As" all the way through graduate school. He'd joined the Corps while in graduate school. He'd wanted something to do with his summers. Gahd damnit-why couldn't he have just played baseball all summer.

With out realizing it he caught himself staring at a photo of his first boat. It suddenly occurred to him that he needed to see and feel a real one. He poured a

thermos of coffee, kissed his wife goodbye (not a good time to leave but something he had to do) and hit the highway.

He arrived at the museum and paid his fare, went out to the pier and gazed at the beautiful old girl as he waited the 30 minutes for the next tour start. In his mind he watched the fuel gang taking on diesel and the working party loading stores. She was getting ready for her next great adventure.

He gradually became aware of others gathering near him and he moved away as he waited. He wanted the boat and it's ghostly crew to himself and his memories.

The tour guide came out, formed up the group and started the herd headed on deck. He waited to be last.

What's this? A stairway going down into the forward room? It makes sense, but he had been looking forward to climbing down the ladder through the escape trunk one more time. After a disappointing arrival in the forward room via the stairway he moved to the after end of the room as the guide discussed the fwd tubes. He looked around at the array of valves, switches and gear and realized that he he still remembered what each and every one of them did. He also saw all of the gear that was missing. He glanced at the skids and watched the torpedoemen muscling the 4000 lb skimmer killers around the room. Shoving them out and in the tubes for maintenance and hanging the brass "Tube Loaded" sign on the door. He glanced at one of the few remaining bunks and thought about the times he had casually sat on one with a .45 tucked under the pillow, guarding a tube loaded mk 45 while the boat suffered through another day of visiting ship. He looked up at the overhead where the top of the ladder should have been and remembered the lucky torpedoemen that were assigned the fwd ladder watch during visiting ship. Their sole purpose being to assist any shapely young ladies with thigh length skirts, making sure no well-turned ankle missed a ladder rung and both feet landed firmly on the deck plates. Yeah right. He remembered the Northern Runs with the sterilized milk cans frozen in the bilges. Only the room watch occupied the room and he was wrapped in a goose down comforter with fog coming from each breath. He remembered his first dive as a student. He'd been assigned the FwdRoom where he and five other young kids were told to "Sit on those life jackets and don't move". With the sound of the diving alarm came the hydraulic whirring of the bow planes rigging out. Quickly followed by the klunk of the vents opening and the gurgling of water into the tanks as the boat nosed. He was in love. This was it. This is definitely what he wanted to do.

He followed the group through the hatch into the Fwd Battery. It was a little humorous seeing how many different positions these people could take to get through a simple hatch. Past the Goat Locker, wardroom, staterooms, radio and the yeoman's shack. Not many memories here except the time the steward filled the Captain's vinegar curette from a special bottle of vinegar the cook kept in the galley. The Captain was a little surprised at the not unfamiliar flavor of his new salad dressing-bourbon. The

cook got the word mo-scosch and emptied the bottle before the skipper arrived at the galley to inquire as to source of this not unpleasant taste. Naturally said mass manipulator of 5-way beef denied any knowledge of its origin. The skipper just chuckled and turned away-he'd accomplished his mission.

He followed a pair of stretch pants that lived up to their name and whose tinsel strength was being severely tested. "WIDE LOAD should be stenciled on that bulletin board" he muttered to himself and followed it into the Control room.

Here were shadows. In his mind he heard the diving alarm and the room came alive. Vents were pulled, masts were lowered and negative was flooded, The board turned green as the upper conning tower hatch slammed shut and main induction closed. The lookouts dropped down from the bridge and took their stations-manning the stern planes and rigging out the bow planes. To his dying day he will swear he heard the cook yell "Main Induction shut and locked" from the After Bsttery. The whole process of taking a ship underwaterwent smoothly and perfectly as his boats had done hundreds of times That's not to say nothing ever happened. Heremembered the time Main Induction failed to close as she slid under. Everything but the Mess Cook was blown. The boat had shuddered and shook as she fought to regain the surface. A successful surface was quickly followed by the usual rounds of morbid humor to relieve the tension. We didn't pull any more high-speed crash dives after that. As a Guppy III she had simply outgrown being that nimble.

And then there was the time a Nuke ET was assigned to the boat to get qualified before being transferred to a Nuke. Apparently the Navy in all it's infinite wisdom figured that it was cheaper to lose a Diesel than a Nuke if they screwed something up. The Nuke did. He couldn't remember just what occurred but the Nuke was on the stern planes as the boat approached test depth. Something happened and the Nuke panicked and jammed the stern planes into full dive. "The down angle was instantaneous and severe. So severe that no one was left standing. Everybody and everything surfed forward. A quick thinking radioman clambered out of his shack in the after end of control and hand over hand made his way to the HP manifold where he hammered bow buoyancy blow open which took the angle off and allowed the crew to regain control. The inclinometers had to be unscrewed and the bubble tipped out of the riser. He couldn't remember if the Nuke ever qualified but he remember the new nickname "Bubbles". 87 guys figured the radioman should have gotten a medal. He didn't--quick thinking and swift action are simply expected and received from the men in the Submarine Force.

He looked at the Control room table and thought about how he learned to spin a tack on it and the cockroach races in the clear plastic cube designed to be a maze for a marble. Someone took a piece of scotch tape, put peanut butter on it and stuck it to the bottom hole of the cube. He then dropped a roach, probably a bunkmate, in the top and watched the roach find his way to the peanut butter. Next, of course, came the quarter gaskets stopwatch and Cockroach racing became a sport. Everybody acquired a stable

of thoroughbred racers and TA-DA Downs came into being. He remembered the water ways being stuffed with cans of food and the covered in boxes of canned goods to walk on. All fo those extra food store came in handy on those long, cold Northern Runs.

About this time, unbeknownst to him, the guide had been watching him and came over to where he stood. He wanted to know if he had served on a submarine. He answered affirmatively. He was asked if he would like to guide the tour. He declined. The guide was apparently a very astute young man and suggested he take his time as there wasn't another tour for an hour. God Bless that young man. The group went to the After Battery and he stayed behind.

The sign on the lower Conning tower hatch said "closed to the public". So what-nobody's around. He climbed up and looked around. There wasn't much to see. The chart table was there but the TDC and radar were gone. The helm was there. How many hours had he spent driving a 321 ft tube through the ocean with nothing but a revolving dial to guide him. He turned, sighed and dropped below.

By now the After Battery was vacant. He sat down at a mess table and looked around. Yep, there is port and there is starboard Safety Flood Valves. He looked at the deep sink and remembered the messcook from Texas that claimed to be a quick draw artist. He claimed to have one notch in his gum from quick drawing against a tree and shot himself in the foot. Oh yeah. How aobut the new kid on board that was mess cooking during an ORI. An inspector placed a piece of paper on one of the tables that had the word FIRE written on it in big letters. The mess cook was supposed to see the paper and yell "FIRE IN THE AFTER BATTERY". The inspector returned to the Control Room to wait for the alarm and observe the crew's swift action. When this did not occur, he went back to the After Battery to see if the mess cook might be blind. Instead, what he found was another sheet of paper on top of his with bigger letters spelling "WATER". The Inspector was hopping mad and the young man instantly became a member of the crew. So much for taking drills to seriously. Real Fire and Flooding happened all to frequently. Just a part of life on the old boats.

He remembered the Engineman that had eaten twenty-seven lobster tails and claws in one sitting. He thought about the surprise the cooks got upon lowering the AB doubler hatch after a Northern Run and finding a bag of rotten potatoes. We were tempted to taste it to see if it could possibly be Vodka. Fortunately, common sense overcame that idea and it went, un-tasted, over the side for the fish. He thought about nights of celebration upon their return from another successful mission. He could still feel in his mind the sore shins from the combination of clambor, slide, fall and trip his way down the After Battery ladder, landing with a solid thunk on his ass on the deck plate-a deep sigh of glad to be home and staggering off to his bunk for a good solid two hour nap before the day started again. Oh yes, what about movie marathons in the AB for the weekend duty section prior to getting underway. All the single-johns stood that duty. He would sleep the first three days at sea with no concern about a missed movie.

He thought about meals at sea in rough weather on the surface. What ever possessed the Navy to buy round bottom metal pitchers for ship's. He'd always thought he'd like to meet that idiot some day. Now he didn't care. It was just a memory.

He heard noises in the Control Room and glanced at his watch. His hour of yesterdays was gone. It was time to leave the boat and return another day for the rest. Too many memories for one trip. He looked forward to returning soon. But for now it was time to return home and comfort his wife. Humor would not relieve her tension like it had for him and his shipmates in yesterdays.

The drive home took an eternity. Too much time available for emotions to return. He knew exactly how his wife felt. He too felt the fear but he would refuse to show it. He had to.

One thought kept coming back-- The Boats will never leave you and the memories of adventures will always live.

The old man was never much for praying—he'd never felt the need. What more could he possibly want but the love of the woman he had married and the son he'd watch grow, much too quickly, into manhood. Yes, he was blessed. Yet silently he muttered these words.

Lord, I have but one request: "May my son live to have such memories as have I--Amen."