

In 2012 we made over 200 postings on our Facebook page of “Tidbits of Submarine History”. We are providing some of our favorites in this issue of *The Klaxon*. They may not be the most historically significant but we hope you find them as entertaining and enlightening as we did.

Angler Rescues Refugees

On 15 February 1944, USS ANGLER (SS-240) left Midway Island to begin her second war patrol. Several weeks later, Major General Douglas MacArthur received word that the Japanese were massacring the civilian population on the Philippine island of Panay; he asked the Submarine Force to send a boat to evacuate an estimated 20 United States citizens who had reportedly been hiding from Japanese troops for years. ANGLER got the job.

Mary Sevilla, 15 years old at the time, remembered living “like nomads” on the island for almost 4 years. “Father had been killed,” she said, “and Mother kept us four children together and moving from one remote encampment to the next.” The Sevillas’ luck changed when they were discovered by a group of sympathetic Philippine guerrillas, who led them on a harrowing two-week journey across the island to a camp that was already crowded with other Americans. The evening after their arrival, the guerrillas escorted them all to a beach, loaded them into canoes, and told them to paddle out into the ocean. “Suddenly,” Mary recalled, “a submarine surfaced right next to us!”

When they opened the hatch, ANGLER’s crew was shocked to discover that there were actually 58 refugees; they sprang into action to make room for their new guests. During the 12 days it took to reach Australia, ANGLER’s crew dealt with infestations of cockroaches and lice brought aboard by the refugees. They also cut meals to two per day in order to stretch the food supply. Not one of the refugees died on the trip to Darwin.

Crevalle’s Jocular CO

On 22 February 1943, PCU (Pre-Commissioning Unit) CREVALLE (SS-291) was launched at Portsmouth Navy Yard in Kittery, Maine. After her commissioning four months later, CREVALLE would go on to complete seven war patrols, win five battle stars and four Navy Unit Commendations, and sink close to 52,000 tons of shipping. The sub was commanded, from commissioning through her first two war patrols, by Lieutenant Commander H.G. Munson, with an acute but dry sense of humor.

The CREVALLE was off the coast of Luzon in pursuit of a wildly zigzagging Japanese carrier which the sub chased for nearly two hours before launching a spread of torpedoes. The carrier’s crew, clearly angry at being fired upon, returned the favor with her five-inch and machine guns as CREVALLE, running on the surface, steamed by at about 400 yards’ distance.



Photo: “Bull” Durham

“Mindful of the necessity of keeping the initiative but feeling that it had just plain run out on us,” notes the patrol report, “we decided that retirement was in order and so we neatly executed

the maneuver known as getting the hell out of there.” Given that escape required the sub to dive, members of the crew who remained topside scrambled to get below. “An argument arose later,” the patrol report continues, “as to who left the bridge first, the C.O. [Commanding Officer] was of the opinion that he led the way, the OOD [Officer of the Deck] stated definitely that he was first in order to tend the hatch, and one of the three lookouts firmly stated that he observed (from below) both these officers descend. In whatever order it was accomplished, we must have resembled a totem pole or else gone through the hatch three abreast. The incentive was there. Like the Arab, we quietly folded our tent and stole away, running silently (this ship runs very quietly when silenced). . . .” All in all, it was a successful day – the Japanese carrier sank and CREVALLE, along with her crew and their jocular captain, escaped.

Thomas Edison’s Piano

On 10 March 1962, crowds gathered at General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, CT for the commissioning of USS THOMAS A. EDISON (SSBN-610), the U.S. Navy’s eighth ballistic-missile submarine. From the very beginning, THOMAS A. EDISON was intimately connected to the man with whom she shared a name. Edison’s grandson, Peter Edison Sloane, welded his initials into the boat’s keel when it was laid in 1961, and his daughter, Madeleine Edison Sloane, served as the vessel’s sponsor a year later.

But THOMAS A. EDISON was also connected to another famous name: Steinway & Sons. Cy Young, the boat’s construction captain, was determined that the sub have one unique accessory: a full-size piano. He promptly journeyed to New York and paid \$1,500 for a Steinway, which he had shipped back to Groton in a specially made stainless-steel, felt-lined box. The piano was loaded onto the sub during a second shift, when questions were less likely to be asked, and remained in its box until all the major hull openings had been closed and there was no chance it could be removed. Then it was unloaded and strapped to the bulkhead in crew’s mess. From there, it passed into legend. A brief article on the piano, titled “*This Equipment Secured During Ultra-Quiet, or Don’t Shoot the Piano Player He’s Doing the Best He Can*” noted that THOMAS A. EDISON “stands apart from the



rest of the United States submarine fleet. . . [as] the only sub. . . with a piano as optional equipment. There are a few problems with having a piano aboard. It can’t be played during ‘ultra-quiet’ and not many piano tuners will come aboard to tune it. Aside from that, it has provided many hours of musical enjoyment for the crew.”

The piano would remain aboard the THOMAS A. EDISON until her decommissioning in 1986, after which it was transferred to the Navy Museum in Washington, DC.

Clean Sweeps

When one thinks about submarines, the image of a straw broom is not likely to crop up. But strangely, these cleaning implements have a long and storied relationship with sea-going vessels. In the mid 1600s, Dutch admiral Maarten Troop, having just won an important naval battle in the First Anglo-Dutch War, had a crew member hang a broom from one of the ship’s masts to signify that he had swept the British from the seas. Legend has it that his opponent, British admiral Robert Blake, responded by hanging a whip from one of his own masts to indicate that although he had lost this battle, he still intended to whip the Dutch into submission. During World War II, American submarine crews, eager to showcase their many accomplishments, revived the practice. If a boat sank every target with which she engaged over the course of a patrol, the crew would attach brooms to the periscopes so their success, a “clean sweep,” would be on display as they entered port.

In recent years, subs have displayed their clean-sweep brooms in a variety of contexts. When USS CHEYENNE

(SSN-773), supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, put all the TOMAHAWK missiles she launched on target without any duds or failures, her captain determined that constituted a clean sweep. Other boats, like USS OHIO (SSGN-726, after her conversion to a guided-missile boat) and USS VIRGINIA (SSN-774) have hoisted brooms after successful Alpha sea trials.

Perhaps the most unusual clean sweep was achieved in 2000 by the Military Sealift Command (MSC), which controls most of the Navy’s transport and replenishment ships. When the Y2K bug prowling through the command’s computers was finally vanquished, an MSC crew member proudly hung a broom from the yardarm of the flagpole outside the command’s headquarters to celebrate the virtual clean sweep.

