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HENRY HOG

by

David L. Ellena

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English

1981

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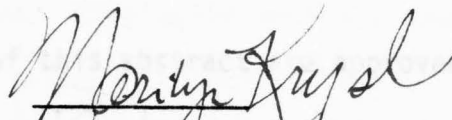
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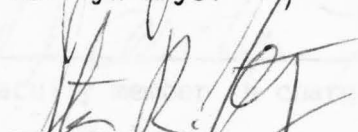
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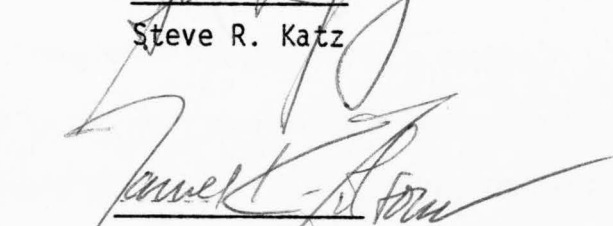
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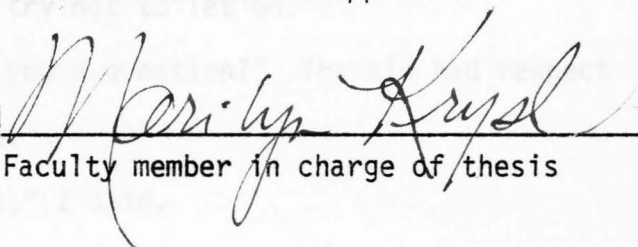
Henry Hog

Thesis directed by Professor Marilyn Krysl

This manuscript is an excerpt from a novel which deals with the contemporary military environment in general, and more specifically with the submarine forces of the United States Navy.

The form and content of this abstract are approved.

Signed

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Marilyn Krysl", written over a horizontal line.

Faculty member in charge of thesis

ONE

He was the first boot I'd seen in two years. I didn't want to talk to him. They sent me to college. Uncle Sam picked up the bill. They sent me back to school, a Golden Opportunity my Dad said. It was my last chance. They paid the bills, they paid me; all I had to do was study--no other duties, no distractions. They washed me out. I failed. I didn't want to talk about it, didn't want to talk to him. But the kid was clean. Polite. He sat down. He didn't know. I saw myself. I liked him. It's not just a job; it's an adventure! I could see he still believed the commercials. He was clean. They would probably send him too. He didn't know. I would try not to let on.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?" The kid had respect written all over his face.

"Cotton balls and spit," I said.

"What? I mean, I beg your pardon...I was just..."

I leaned forward in my seat to read his name on the plastic tag fastened above his coat pocket. "Listen, Peck, where did you go to boot camp, Lakes or Diego?"

"Lakes. Why?" The kid's voice slipped half an octave as his throat betrayed his discomfort.

"Never mind; it doesn't matter. The point is that I've already been where you are. You were going to ask me what I use on my shoes, right?"

"Yes, but how did you know?" A tinge of awe crept into his tone.

"Told you, I've been there already."

Peck flicked an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve. "Um," he said, "what's your name?"

Peck had blue eyes, pretty ones; I looked right in them. "Name's Elldot, David L., B911037, electronics technician, petty officer third class, and get bent!"

"Huh!" Peck flinched, and the little balls of skin, which his smile formed over his cheekbones, vanished as his face went slack.

"That's what he told me; to get bent," I said. "I was fresh out of basic training, on my way home to Honolulu, and the first sailor I met was a crusty old salt. I sat down next to him on a plane just like this one and, just to make small talk, I asked him what he used on his shoes to get them so shiny."

"So that's what he told you...just like that?"

"Yup; didn't even look at me."

"I see, said Peck, and his face bunched up again. "Must have had problems, huh?"

The kid was leaning forward in his seat just a bit. I pushed him back with a stare. "Gregory, you haven't been paying attention; you are the one with the problem! You just got out of basic, right; now what do you know? You know all about marching, and blisters, and short hair, and shaves. And you want to regale your mates with stories about how WHEN YOUR PEACH FUZZ WOULDN'T STAND UP TO A RAZOR, YOUR C.O. BURNED IT OFF WITH HIS CIGARETTE LIGHTER! You want to tell them about the time that your company flunked locker inspection, because your uniforms were not folded just so...so the C.O. made you all strip naked, and refold all your clothes, while you were sitting on the bare wire springs of your bunks. And you had a lower berth, so

the guy above you had his nuts hanging down through the springs, RIGHT IN YOUR FACE! And there was this one guy in your company from Des Moines, who had just one giant testicle. And you want to tell the guys about all the shots you had to take; about how you had to do push-ups, out on this huge asphalt grinder, under a BROILING sun, and you were forbidden to scratch your weapon, so you wrapped your fingers around the piece, and tried not to scream as the gravel bit into your knuckles. And the drill instructor screamed over you, "Ayup!... dayon. Ayup!...dayon. Ayup!... .." Now that's what you want to talk about, isn't it?"

Peck was slumped into his seat like someone listening to an old familiar love song. "Yeah," he said, and so wistfully I had to sneer.

"Well, the point is, Gregory, your new shipmates were there too; they were there, and they were there before you. So nobody wants to talk to you about shoes, or boot camp; and, if they did, they would tell it bigger and better, because their memories have the benefit of a longer period of time to forget the facts of the matter. And that, in my opinion, is why it is fashionable to hassle boots; you aint quite what they had in mind in the first place, and your recent experience, which in your mind must seem stark and startling, in the eyes of your shipmates, doesn't amount to a hill of beans."

Peck took the slouch out of his posture and smiled. "So why are you taking time to tell me all this, Dave?"

"Guess I just never had an eye for fashion, Gregory, and besides I like you."

Peck said, "Oh," in such a noncomittal way, I knew that he be-

lieved what I had been telling him. He looked out the window for a minute to watch the clouds and digest. I pretended to fall asleep. Then, behind slow rolls of a lash, I watched him squirm. For four months the Navy had been explaining reality to Peck, and I had made him wonder. He was comic to watch. I think he wanted to understand and believe me; but he had swallowed the Navy line, and had it lodged deep in his craw--while his mind tried to work one way, his freshly imbedded instincts ran counter. Little creases ran across his forehead as he thought, but his hands continued to pick at imaginary whiskers on his face, and lint on his coat. His eyes kept returning to my shoes, then back to the clouds. And I noticed too that Peck was systematically cataloging all the women in the cabin. "It's not just a job..." I tried to remember my own feelings, when I was in his position: the call of the sea; romantic notions of love in foreign ports. After a while I did sleep.

When I awoke, Peck was antsy. "We're getting close, huh? I yawned.

"Yeah, Dave, look!"

"I leaned over to see out his window, and the sleep drew back from my eyes. We were just off Kahe Point, on the Western tip of Oahu. I watched Mount Maunakapu rise lazy from the shoreline, then the whole Koolaupoko range rolled past. The mountains above Aiea rose angular and green as emeralds--not so brown as the Western slopes--and their peaks were hidden in thick white clouds of light rain. Peck took his nose off the glass, and as he turned to face me I saw that his eyes sparkled bright as the sunlight, bouncing off the flat waters of Keehi Lagoon. He smiled, a little shyly, I thought.

"Dave, I was just thinking; maybe we could--I mean, if you don't have other plans--maybe we could do a little steaming downtown this evening."

There was a jolt then as the wheels of our aircraft skidded on the runway, and Peck stopped ogling a young woman with a baby, who was sitting across the aisle from us. He had been staring suggestively at her as he spoke, sliding his eyes beneath the hem of her skirt as she leaned away from us to wipe the drool from her baby's chin. I had been watching him, and her too.

"Gregory, you see the gal over there, the married one, with the baby; the one you've been leering at?"

Peck grinned. A nasty Johnny Carson/Dean Martin kind of grin. "Yes," he said, drawing the word out, letting his tone rise and fall with his eyebrows. "And, Dave," he said with a condescending grin, "my name is Robert Peck."

"Gregory," I said, "that's my wife and son." And then I smiled.

TWO

Well, it was not a proud moment. I only tell you about it because it stays with me. I remember how Peck sunk back into his seat and melted away under my withering smile, like the last frame of a home movie reel that sticks. I watched him look to the window and try to slide out of focus. I watched him and saw myself again. I wanted to apologize but didn't. I sat on that airplane shooting the

breeze with a kid that, basically, I liked, and never mentioned till the last minute that I was not alone. I saw his confusion and it made me feel coarse...and dumb. But that was 1971. And in 1971 I was dumb. Not ignorant, dumb, either; in those days I was dumb like a fighter who lashes out, not according to strategy, but as a matter of reflex. I laugh about it now, but I didn't then. I see now, as if in a dream, Peck's unblinking eyes moisten as he stares out the window at the breeze in the palms, and I remember that, when I was a boy, my Uncle Joey took me to see a dog fight...

The contest took place in a twelve foot square of dirt, enclosed by a rail fence, around which crowded forty or fifty spectators. The challenger, a hulking young mastiff with hot yellow eyes, pulled whispers of awe from the crowd as he skulked around the ring. After a while a gnarled old pit bull was carried into the clearing by a fat man with matted grey hair and a red handkerchief plugged into the back pocket of his coveralls. The bull's name is Champ. His short coat is pocked with the scars of previous battles and, when his owner first sets him down, he favors one hind leg. Champ carries himself with a kind of human dignity while in the arms of the fat man, but there is nothing noble about the way his hackles rise as his master puts a hand on the top rail and vaults the fence.

My eyes barely clear the top of the fence and, as the two animals rage in the pit, snarling and raking away at each other, I begin to feel queasy. At first blood I close my eyes and, clutching tight with my hands, let my forehead rest on the rough wood. On either side swirl the cries, "C'mon Champ!" and "Sic him Husky; skit-a-holt

boy!" After a while, I realize that I am trembling, and my attention is distracted by my shame. Then there is a loud yelp of a kind which has not been heard before in the match. I open my eyes just in time to see Champ somersault over the mastiff's back, and crash into the fence at my feet. His head droops as he rises on shaking legs, then the younger dog is on his back, tasting the kill. Champ's head snaps upward in terror, and then I am amazed to see him sink his six thousand pound bite into the wood just below my knee.

For several long moments it is quiet as the crowd watches the dumb dog punish the railing. The froth boils from the corners of his maw and thin rivulets of blood trickle in the furrows that line his scarred square forehead. His eyes bulge with furious concentration, but he does not see. He feels only the terrible pain of savage jaws gnashing the cartilage in his broken back, and he clamps harder on the rail. Somebody whimpers close by in the crowd.

I was very young when Uncle Joey took me to the dog fights. There were so many things about the contest that I did not understand, that the earmarks of the scene stayed vivid for years: the hard packed clay in the pit; the smell of whiskey-eyed and stubbled men; the sound of spit and the soft crackle of greasy money changing hands; but most, I remember the pathetic sigh of that dumb mutt, when he heard the crunch of his backbone, and loosened at last his grip on the rail.

It seems odd to me that I should remember that scene now, and not in 1971 when it might have done me some good. That was the Spring I reported for duty aboard the USS Henry Clay, Fleet Ballistic Missile

Submarine. In those days I was determined to succeed, where the Navy had already defined my failure. They washed me out of the College of Engineering at Purdue University; told me to forget about being an engineer, or an ensign. I was supposed to take my four years of enlisted training and go to sea, to be an electronics technician. But I had other plans: I would go to night school, take correspondence courses, and bear down until I wore my way through a degree. That Spring, I was sure I wanted to be an engineer. I was sure I would make it, somehow. I was wrong.

The Navy didn't seem to understand my situation. My father was disappointed. My in-laws were nervous. My wife. Well, in those days, my wife was somewhat remote from my sense of reality. Like my son. I mean, what does a father typically do with a baby? One can only dote so much. I changed a few diapers, patted some gas, and shook a few rattles. Beyond that, I was lost. We seemed to have little to share. The little fart could eat and shit, and be cute and catch colds, and cry out in the night. But he couldn't catch a ball, could hardly walk, and I felt that basically I had very little to give him...or my wife, who had become simply a voice. Rising. Falling. We fought. I was not the man she married. We snarled at each other with bulging eyes, and raked away with insults and ultimatums. I was home in Honolulu for almost two months waiting to go to sea for the first time. When our fly-out day finally arrived, I was glad.

I was glad because, after spending four years in Navy schools of one kind or another, I was going to work in my rate. I had not done especially well in basic electronics; I was mediocre in submarine school; and I had learned practically nothing about inertial naviga-

tion instruments, which were supposed to be my specialty. So I was glad. Also, I was scared.

It had been enough to float to the top of a bell curve in school and be swept along with the class. I did it for four years with barely a ripple in my brow. My biggest concerns had been things like grooming standards, and staying awake in class. Every few days I would have to answer a phone for four hours, or walk around a fence in the middle of the night, to make sure that no communist made off with the company's laundry--or something equally as valuable. That was a joke. But to work in my rate; to be on board ship and maybe have someone's life depend on whether or not I knew what I was doing; that prospect didn't amuse me at all.

Polaris type submarines, like Henry Clay, are staffed by two complete crews. Each crew has the boat for three months at a crack, and while they are out to sea the other crew takes a couple of weeks of Rest and Relaxation, then spends the rest of its off-crew attending refresher schools. When I reported for duty with Henry Clay, Blue, the Gold crew was out on patrol, R and R had just ended, and I found myself in a class with twenty other navigation electronics technicians from Henry Clay and other boats in the squadron.

Fleet Submarine Training Center Pacific is located in a refurbished aircraft hangar on Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor. Half of all the materials discussed at the command are classified to one degree or another, so access to the building is controlled. There are no windows, no distractions; it is supposed to be a serious environment. The first week of my assignment, the subject was SINS Error Propagation. SINS is an acronym for Ship's Inertial Navigation

Systems. Since I was trained as a SINS technician, I am a specialist in the field...it says so in my record.

I had dropped a couple of hints in the ship's office to let them know that I didn't know everything they thought I knew. But no one paid much attention. They liked my modest attitude--very unusual for a SINS tech. "Don't worry," they said, "you'll warm up to it."

In the class room it was cold. The whole building was air conditioned, and the thermostats were set for sixty-five degrees, for the sake of all the electronic equipment. As I sat in the back of the room shivering in my light blue jacket, I listened to a heavy-set chief expound on theories of nutation, coriolus effects, and gravitational anomalies; I watched twenty heads in front of me nod enthusiastically, pecking kernels of knowledge from the air like so many chickens plucking corn from the yard. I wondered, and wondered again, how in hell I happened to be there.

There were diagrams and equations all over the blackboard. The Chief's eyes sparkled, and he made cutesy remarks, as he showed the class how even the most complex formulas could be reduced to clear, and simple mnemonic fragments like, "Mary's Fuzzy Cunt..." which had something to do with electric fields and magnetic propagation; or maybe it was the other way around. I was lost.

I wallowed in my ignorance for a couple of days, trying to reflect the joy in my instructor's eyes, trying to nod at the right times with the rest of the class. But, when I could stand it no longer, I raised my hand and said, "Chief, I remember, vaguely, the twenty-four hour circle plot from Guided Missile School at Dam Neck; so I know what it is, but what does it mean? What is its derivation? I mean,

what is it really?"

The instructor's name was Hope, and he looked at me as if he had lost it. He picked up the piece of chalk which had broken off in his fingers and, as he stood up from the floor, I noticed that his eyes had gone flat as the chalkboard. Everyone in the room swiveled in their seats to see me, and then a lucky thing happened. My Navigation Officer was in the class; fixing me with an unfriendly smile he said, "Knock it off, Elliot!" Everyone laughed as they all got the joke. There I was, a hot running third class petty officer, fresh out of the College of Engineering at Purdue University, and I had asked the Chief to explain something as basic as the alphabet. I had to be kidding! Hell, they knew I was good; my shoes were shined, my hair was cut short to specs. They all turned around again, and Chief Hope picked up where he left off.

It was years before I understood circle plots. At that moment I was looking down the road at four years of service yet to come. I felt trapped. I was trapped in the closed cubicle of that class room, and trapped in my obligation. I was scared, but I decided, the best thing would be to try not to let on.

THREE

I couldn't figure it out. The good life flowed all around me. I saw my friends graduate from college with smiling faces. They got real jobs and lived normal lives. I felt the heat of their movement and

my feet stood still. I felt trapped in the Navy, and trapped in my marriage. I couldn't figure out how I got there. There were answers of course, answers which I faced years later. But in those days I felt only that I must have missed some detail, must have made some choice that altered the flow of my destiny and left me frustrated and standing apart from my friends. It happens every day. It happened before.

Robert McDougal, Marie's father, grew up on a farm in Archer, Nebraska. His father, Edward, grew corn, wheat, oats, barley, alfalfa, and prairie hay. They had no tractor, no irrigation, not even a truck. Together, Edward and his wife, Amanda, worked the farm. At harvest time, Popper McDougal hired some extra hands. They sweated and ate, and Amanda cooked and cleaned, cooked and washed, dusted and cooked for them all. She had no help.

In mid-September 1915, her first son was still born. The county doctor said it was the result of over work. Bad planning, she said. Popper said nothing. For a while he just quit telling the Irish jokes that came natural as breathing to him. He clamped down on his black cigars till the juice blistered his palate. Never again, he said. Amanda weighed but 98 pounds and she wasn't built for child bearing; that's what he said. Popper couldn't bear the thought of risking her with another pregnancy.

For several years Amanda gave Popper his way. Together they worked. They got by. Popper carried some clout in the county, and was instrumental in bringing electricity to Archer. He was appointed to a judgeship. Then Amanda made some judgments of her own and, in

1921, James E. McDougal was born. The following year his brother Jack entered the world under a cloud of thick blue cigar smoke and a double ration of Irish stories that meandered all over the farm and county, till they came back to Popper good as new. That Winter young James, who had just learned to walk, came down with the polio that shriveled his left leg to the bone.

James' ailment left him with one leg shorter than the other, and something else as well. That something got him on the high school football team. It got him into the Army after they tried to reject him, and I suppose if he had been born in another place and time, it might have got him command of the brigade that took San Juan Hill-- that's just the kind of spirit Jame's had. As it turned out, that intangible quality allowed James to marry a vivacious Pennsylvania-Dutch girl who really had other things on her mind.

James would have been happy to take the farm in Archer from his father when the time came. He liked getting up with the roosters. He liked the spongy feel of the cow's teats in his hands and the foam around his upper lip. He liked watching the sun and his eggs rising together. And he liked the power that flowed from the earth through the heels of his boots as he trod the fields. But Archer succumbed, as so many counties did, to drought and the dust that followed. Archer drank the dust and bathed in it, and when no one--not even Popper--could joke about it, they choked on it. The farm shriveled up till it was worth nothing, which is just about what Popper got for it when he struck out for Colorado. James and his brother joined the Army and were sent overseas. When Jack was killed, the Army transferred James back to the States. One night he went to a servicemen's

dance at a Church in Lebanon, Illinois. There he met a buxon girl with gumption and a smile big as his.

Betty Reichert almost didn't go to the dance because she hadn't had time to wash her hair. A friend told her she could perform a quick "dry wash" with common flour, which she did. The result was a strange sort of parody of a white woman trying to pass for white. Betty looked a sight but said, "What the heck, I'll go anyway!" and she did. Betty already had a serious beau, but James simply fixed him with his best grin and stared, and stared, until the poor fellow just withered and withdrew.

While he was in the Army, James invested a little money each month till he made the \$500 price of a half acre lot on the edge of Denver. In 1947 he was discharged from the service and, at that time, he sold his land for \$1,000. James and Betty had some money then and thought they wanted to go into business.

Rationing was still in effect for many items, just after the war, but veterans could get special allotments for business purposes. Stores had limited amounts of syrup and other sugar based products on their shelves, so it wasn't too hard for an unknown to peddle syrup. One day James hitched a ride with a wiry little man who said he was tired of hauling hundred pound sacks of sugar up a ladder for a living. Next day, James and Betty took their \$1,000 and bought the Northern Syrup Company, free and clear.

It was a thrill to be self-employed. It was delicious to think that someday Northern would be as well known as Aunt Jemima's syrup. Of course it occurred to James and Betty that, when the sugar ration was lifted, competition would increase...but the significance of that

detail was overlooked. That year life was pregnant with new beginnings. James got his discharge from the Army; Betty quit the secretary's job she had taken during the war; the syrup business blossomed; and Marie was born.

In 1948 the markets began to be inundated with cheap and popular brands of syrup, and Northern was frozen out. It was a bitter disappointment. The experience certainly didn't turn the McDougals into dour people, but it did leave them in a precarious position. James decided to go back to school, but in order to make ends meet, he was forced to work nights. So, in the evenings when he might have been studying, James drove a street car for the Denver Tramway. Popular slang around town identified him as a "Jockey for the Yellow Terror." Besides the flamboyant nickname, James was blessed with a son. After these two bright spots, pickings were pretty slim. For five years it must have seemed to James and Betty as if the dust had followed them from Nebraska to Colorado. There was a ton of want in those days. Want of elemental things like food and a place to call home. There was the kind of want that adheres to a man's soul in thin laminations of ice, and makes him swear that his children will have an easier life.

Of course it took me a long time to piece together the relevant bits of information, so that I could understand Marie's folks. The first years of our marriage, I was just puzzled over their anxiety and extreme generosity. It seemed that every time I turned around they were laying bucks on us and, along with that, through pursed lips, all sorts of advice. I wondered some, what it takes to develop that vicarious desire to tinker in the lives of your children; does

your own life have to be marred? I thought a lot about other people's lives in those days, looking for parallels. I thought some unnoticed detail would pop out and answer all my questions. It didn't.

FOUR

Actually, in 1971 I was pretty well convinced that my life had in some way been defaced. I'd been flopping around for several years, letting opportunities slip by the board. Marie had been asking some tough questions, all prefaced with, "Why don't you..." and, "When are you going to...?" The Navy didn't bother to ask; they just handed me a set of orders. I was having a hard time shaving the face that stared at me from the mirror each morning, but I had in the back of my mind a feeling that things were about to change. Actually the notion had been put there four years earlier, when I was in boot camp.

Anyone who has been in the service can tell you a hundred stories about basic training, how tough it was, how disciplined. All I can tell you is that, in the ten weeks it took me to get through, I learned how to do a lot of absurd things while I was being harassed. Basics. Take waking up in the morning for instance. Reveille was typically some snot nosed adjutant slamming a waste basket down on the deck, at an hour that we euphemistically referred to as "o'dark thirty." Then it was off to a charming grey edifice which was appropriately name the Mess Hall, where some goon would walk back and

forth behind us, hollering, "Eat and get the fuck out!" It was a bunch of crap all right, but at least we had leadership!

Our Company Commander was a Chief Boilerman named Lindsey who had eyes that never closed, and a snarl that he used with crisp abandon. In ten weeks my company never did anything right for Chief Lindsey; we were always too slow, too sloppy, and definitely too stupid, so that Lindsey was always on the edge of slavering rage. "You pussies! You pukes! You fucking squirrels!" Lindsey would scream at us in patent exasperation. He'd start out low and guttural, then spiral upward till he reached a plateau of nasal disgust. He was rather fond of nicknames. But Chief Lindsey was a sweetheart compared to another man I had the pleasure of meeting while in boot camp. Remind me sometime to tell you about "Hard Card Teres," and 4050 Company.

But I started to tell you about how Chief Lindsey put a seed in my head. Occasionally, when the Chief was rational, he would deliver a favorite harangue. The oration had all the overtones of Tex explaining the spread in the Panhandle to Little Joe; Mom's Dream Boat coming in; and We Shall Overcome. The gist of it was that, yes boot camp was an exercise in chickenshit, but once we got out it would be a whole new ball game. "It's different out there in the fleet," he would say with a glint in his eyes. "Out there in the real Navy, you will have a job to do, and the well-being of your shipmates will depend on how well you do it." Of course, we all believed him. I think maybe there was one man in boot who didn't believe the Chief, but he soon was dispatched to 4050 Company and we never saw him again.

After I left Recruit Training Center, I held to that belief for three years, during which time I shuttled back and forth across the

United States, attending various Navy service schools. In each new command, someone in a position of authority would be sure to stand up and say, "Well, yes; but just wait till you get to the fleet, You'll appreciate all this training." So there I was in July 1971 at Hikam Air Force Base in Honolulu, where I was to catch a plane that would fly the rest of the crew and me to Guam where we would take the boat from our counterparts. I was excited. I'd had a belly full of schools and speeches.

The first thing I noticed when I got to the terminal, was that I had not met even half of the crew. Later I would understand why. But at that moment I wasn't worried about it. I just reveled in the salty banter that swirled about me, as I sat in my spotless whites, clutching my briefcase that was crammed with stationery and crib notes from school. The names of my new mates especially sounded good to my ears. Ripper. Red Dog. Spook. Triple-A. And one Chief seemed to be good naturedly answering to the handle of All Meals; well at least he looked the part. It was exciting to think that these characters were all deserving of colorful nicknames. All my life--don't ask me why--I had wanted a nickname. Now there I was, surrounded by a whole fleet of them. Even the officers had made up names, most of them pungent handles that incensed their owners like Lippy Lanai, Clean Gene, and Little Big Man. I loved it. Then I noticed something else. An inordinate percentage of my shipmates seemed to be staggering around as if they were drunk.

As a matter of fact, they were wall-eyed, blind, falling down drunk. I watched the shit begin to roll down hill. The Captain

merely glared for a moment at Ripper Daymon, out leading SONAR technician, who had his lid cocked so far back on his head, it looked more like a nurse's cap than a rag hat. The Executive Officer, hovering ever at the skipper's elbow, caught the glance and turned to the Engineering Officer to say a quiet word. Eng turned his face with cocked eyebrow to a group of junior officers and said something crisp. Then there was a flurry of department heads descending on division chiefs, who then puffed themselves into caricatures of symbols of authority and proceeded to pretend to jump with both feet onto the backs of enlisted men. It was a little confusing, but then I noticed that the only ones who seemed to be getting particularly up tight in the enlisted ranks were the new men like myself who were not quite sure how serious to take the bawling and chewing and nagging. In the end, we simply carried half the crew aboard the aircraft and flew off to Guam.

When we deplaned at Anderson AFB some seven and a half hours later, it was dark, hot, and very humid. A lot of the men were just beginning to feel human again, and stepping out into the tepid air didn't seem to do much for their sense of humor. I walked swiftly down the ramp from the after hatch of the plane, and squinted through the heat at the floodlights that shone on the concrete strip. I noticed that in the heavy air everything moved in pastel shades, from the crew in their dingy and rumpled whites, to the light stink of aviation fuel that hovered over the field. Overhead thick grey clouds lumbered after some languid thunder that bumped on the horizon.

Three grey buses and a staff car pulled up alongside of the air-

craft. Our Captain and a few of the more senior officers got into the car. As I walked past, I saw the Old Man crack a bottle of Cold Duck. The Engineer held out a brace of champagne glasses while the flunky behind the wheel offered cigars. Well, I thought, rank does have its privileges. I grabbed a rusty pole and swung myself aboard the last of the buses. The driver was a chubbly little native, with lots of gold in his mouth, and beads of sweat in the crinkles around his eyes.

"Hafa adai," I said politely, which is like saying Aloha in Hawaii.

"Hi, sailor," returned the little man. "You like Oly or Schlitz?" he asked as he reached back on the floor behind his seat and lugged out the top of a fifty gallon poly sack, which seemed to hold a couple of cases of each, and several pounds of ice.

"Hey, Elliot, hand me one of them little peckers, will you Babe?"

It was Fat Pat, one of the nuclear trained technicians whom I had barely met, but had already decided I liked. He struck me as being a man I could trust. I passed him an Oly.

"What's the story here, Pat, we gotta pay for this, or what?"

Pat drew off a third of a can of brew and let out a satisfied grunt. "Oh no, man, the beer is paid for out of the ship's rec fund. The Goldies buy us when we arrive to take the boat, and we buy them when it's their turn. It's tradition, and a damned good one too!"

His speech paced Pat through the rest of the can. Then he turned his attention to the poly bag, which was making the rounds of the bus. The men all seemed to be making the most of the situation, except for a few of the new members like myself, who looked at each other with guarded bewilderment. I couldn't shake the feeling that what we were

doing was highly illegal, but I grabbed a beer the next time the bag went around, and tried to look like one of the guys. Somewhere in the fleet, I thought, Robert Peck would be doing the same thing.

By the time the convoy of buses arrived at its destination, the crew was plastered again. As the bus rolled under the flood lights of the guard shack at Proteus Point, I poked my head out the window to catch sight of the submarine. She was not there. Henry Clay was still out to sea, but the USS Proteus was there, lying fat and ugly in the scungy water. Proteus was the submarine tender for the squadron, and though I had never seen her before that moment I had already picked up my mate's dislike for both the ship and her crew.

A large hand gripped my shoulder. "Come on, Straight Arrow, let's hit the pier!" Pat gave my shoulder a squeeze and smiled. "The beer's all gone," he said, "aint no point in hanging around here all night," and he lumbered off the bus.

FIVE

For all their undisguised dislike for sub tenders, my shipmates were bolting from the buses and sprinting for the Proteus gangway as if she were a floating casino. As I walked out on the pier, I saw one of the men in my division step off the bus ahead. From the back he looked like a six foot sculpture of a 200 pound bowling pin, complete with red stripe and scuff marks. Steven Petrofsky was an old friend of mine, the only man on Henry Clay that I knew before report-

ing for duty. Back in '69 we went through inertial instruments school together in Dam Neck, Virginia. Ski looked like your stereotypical Polack and he took a lot of ribbing, but when it came to tronics or photography, he was a definite heavy. He graduated top man in our class.

"Hey, Ski," I hollered, and skipped across the pier to catch up.

"Whaddya say, Dave, everything copascetic?" He spun around to show me a friendly moon shaped face, and button brown eyes, like the kind you see painted on Japanese dolls, with thick dark eyebrows that float high on a broad round forehead.

"Oh yeah, it's cool; but where's the fire? Aren't we supposed to wait out here for our sea bags?" By this time we were half way up the ramp leading to the quarterdeck of the tender. Looking over my shoulder, I could see the semi-trailer truck which would be carrying our baggage entering the compound.

Steve snorted as he tugged at his back pocket to clear his wallet. At the top of the ramp we saluted the Officer Of The Deck, presented our I.D. cards, and Ski snapped off a perfunctory "Permission to come aboard." The OOD growled something undistinguishable from the ambient noise of straining hawsers, and I got the distinct impression that we were not welcome aboard. But my buddy cruised across the quarterdeck unpurturbed, so I trailed along in lockstep, feeling secure in his wake.

"Dave, my man- you are about to learn your first lesson about making FBM patrols!" Ski spoke to me over his shoulder as we scurried along the port side of the vessel like two fugitives. We ducked down a hatch amidships and clattered down the first of three ladders lead-

ing to the ship's lower levels.

"How's that," I panted as I tried not to step on Steve's fingers on the rungs below my feet.

"Well it's like this; we are going to berth here on the tender for the next few days till we get the boat from the Goldies. The situation is strictly temporary, and the accommodations are...ah, how shall I say..." There was a pause then, during which all I heard was the rattling of our shoes on the iron ladder, and then a nasty snicker that floated up from beneath Ski's white hat. At length he said, "Actually, Dave, if you thought it was hot outside...heh, heh, heh. Well, well, here we are!" He was doing his best W.C. Fields; it was corn, but I liked it.

Deep in the bowels of the ship, we came to a compartment which I suppose might have been 30 or 40 feet square. It's hard to say because there were close to 90 sailors milling about, laughing, smoking cigarettes, and getting in each other's way. Everywhere I looked were rows and rows of iron racks, stacked four high on the deck, each covered with a thin cotton mattress and a pathetic little bag of feathers, which I presumed was somebody's idea of a pillow--though it wasn't mine. In one corner of the compartment there droned a two bladed fan which, with slight modification, I'm sure could have been made to power a light plane through the sticky air. I stood with my hand still clutching the ladder and my mouth going dry, one eye on the confusion in the room and the other on Steve as he strolled over to speak to one of the SONAR technicians.

The other man was small, not youngish but a runty fellow, with glasses and no evidence of a beard. His name was Bailey, and he

had staked a claim to one of the topmost bunks near a door that apparently led to the head judging by the amount of traffic in that direction, and the sounds of running water that emanated from the room at frequent intervals. Ski and Bailey entered into a kind of Laurel and Hardy conversation, most of which was lost on me since Ski had his back to me, but I could tell that he was playing the part of Hardy. Bailey's expression became by degrees more somber, and he bobbed his head a lot. Then his hand moved nonchalantly up to his bunk and he delicately moved his things from the upper berth to a lower one. Petrofsky plopped the black Samsonite briefcase that he'd carried aboard, onto the mattress and turned to face me.

"I'll get us some sheets, Dave, but you won't need them unless you hustle for a bunk."

A glance around the compartment proved him out; there didn't seem to be much available, and I understood then why the men had all been so anxious to get aboard. Bailey hoisted himself into the berth under Ski's rack and turned his face to the bulkhead, while Steve ran off to the linen locker. Someone had thrown a sea bag on the rack under Bailey, but the berth on the deck was still vacant, so I put my briefcase down onto the mattress.

"Hey, Beetle, aint you going for sheets?" I said, feeling pretty embarrassed calling Bailey by his nickname because I barely knew him. He rolled over on his back and pressed his eyes with his hands.

"No, I'm pretty beat...besides, Papa Ski said he'd get some for me too."

"Oh, say listen, Beetle; Steve didn't muscle you out of the top

rack, did he?"

"Nah, I just owed him a favor from last off-crew when he fixed my amplifier. Ski didn't think he'd fit very well in one of the middle berths."

At that moment Petrofsky returned with a large was of linen which he assured us was fresh from the ship's laundry. The sheets looked like something out of my mother's rag bag, but we each took a set and spent the next half hour taking turns making up our bunks and preparing for bed. By degrees my blood had slowed from the excitement of our arrival, and I kept expecting to cool off, but gradually I came to an unforeseen conclusion about our sleeping quarters...somehow we had been transplanted into a rain forest. I looked at the bodies that lay so torpid in the sweltering heat, and I wondered how long it would take us to start growing mold.

Things quieted down in the compartment--I guess it must have been a little after midnight when the lights were doused. Lying in the semi-darkness, I listened to the fan, and the plink of poker chips rising from a clearing in the middle of the space, where a few of the guys still huddled over a small table and played cards by the light of a single bulb. I imagined the chips were raindrops dripping from the eaves fo my father's house in the Winter. The room grew pregnant with the sound; deep within the recesses of the forest I fastened myself to the fan and flew away home.

Plink. Plink. I open my eyes, but only the lids. Across the space, in the clearing, the light still shines down like a small pale sun. Red chip. Blue. The ritual creeps on. Fearful spirits hide behind rough stone faces and call on the gods. I doze.

The hunters straggle back to the den in groups of two and three. The hunt did not go well. The cat was quick, and too clever. But there is good news. There was war! Air men, five, six, a dozen; they came low through the haze, crackling names. "Red Wing Five, this is Blue Fox...we hold Bubbleheads on the scope at 7 o'clock, over." You never heard such flak: all that "Jungle Cat," and "Look out, Black Dog!" Sheeit, they fouled the air with all their static, done spoiled the bait. Then they took off, but we hung around to drink some more. They waited for us outside. Mixing the air with spit and curses, we fought. It was good; inside tight and fast, hooking, spearing, butting, and dancing the ritual tattoo--it was fine. We had them, you know, and they flew. But this one, he didn't escape. He went down screaming, you know, the way they always do. Old Black Dog, his blood runs thin and electric. Oh...what a buzz, man. And them pretty crimson icicles, like jello in the dust!

Morning. Sometime during the night Fat Pat rolled into the skid above me. His forearm hung in my face and I read the hour on his watch. Five thirty. The boat was due in at seven. She'd probably be late...might be early. I ducked my head beneath Pat's hand and shuffled through the tangle of sea bags to the head. I lathered up at one of the porcelain bowls and took a few swipes at my face before giving up in disgust. I watched a thin red line begin to break and

stain the foam on my chin...it was not a day for shaving. My senses woke--it seemed for the first time--when I brushed the sleep from my mouth. The humid air pressed my sides. The space began to fill up as more of my shipmates made ready for the new day. I hustled into a shower stall and let the water beat on my neck. The sound and smell of rum and English Leather, and the men swirled around me. I toweled off and put on a clean set of whites.

Topside at six. On the weather deck of the Proteus, I rested my elbows on the starboard rail and dropped morning phlegm into the water eighty feet below. The harbor stretched listless in the morning blush. I watched a school of fish break through the smoked glass surface of the water. They flitted about in the translucent scum around the tender's bilges, snapping at garbage and other floating objects of a suspicious brown color. I was glad I had skipped breakfast.

I stood in the very prow of the vessel and looked to the mouth of Apra Harbor. I saw whitecaps dancing beyond the breakwater but no sign of a submarine. If Henry Clay was close on arrival, she would be in the inner harbor where my vision was blocked by a large metal framed warehouse.

"Morning, Straight Arrow." The sound was friendly but, coming as it did from the edges of my attention, it startled me. The voice, as I turned to discover, belonged to Tom Spalding, one of the Navigational Aids Technicians in my division. I smiled and watched him come forward in a loose gait that sniffed of power. Nonchalance dripped off his shuffle, but somehow you knew he was really on the balls of his feet. I had met Spalding in the ship's office back at

Pearl. He was a couple of inches taller than me, about six foot even, with thick brown hair, grey eyes that looked right at you, and an easy clean smile framed by a crisp Fu Man Chu. I hadn't figured Spalding out to my satisfaction at that point; he seemed to be well liked by the men, as near as I could tell in those first two months, but he wore the air of a rebel and I wasn't sure I could trust him. At any rate, however, I felt like liking him, though I didn't know why until I spent some time thinking about it.

I liked his direct way of speaking his mind. I liked the swarthy shade of his skin and the way his uniform conformed to his body, instead of the other way around. And, most of all, I liked Spalding because he hung the name Straight Arrow on me, and made me feel like I was a part of the crew. It was, in fact, a dumb name, the kind of name you would give a real dude. But I had always wanted a nickname and I figured Straight Arrow would do just fine for a start.

To be perfectly honest, the name fit. I had heard that grooming in the submarine force was relatively lax. But I had my hair cut close, strictly to specs, and if my face seemed to be marked with hairline deuling scars, at least it was cleared of stubble. I was one of the few enlisted men in my division who asked for starch in my whites, and my shoes bore the kind of shine that could only be applied by a Filipino steward, or the kind of sailor who sat around on Sunday afternoons watching five hours of football on television while he shined his shoes. When I was in the Navy, I shined shoes on airplanes and in bus terminals. Now, when I think back on all the time I wasted with Kiwi and cotton balls, I want to throw up. I haven't much to say in defense; I just tried to play the game by the rules--

staying neat seemed to be in the manual--now, if you can't understand that kind of mentality, maybe you should go back to college, but this time listen more and answer less.

None of this passed between Spalding and myself as we lounged like two lizards on the bow of the Proteus. We were still in the process of measuring each other, so our speech stuck pretty much to traditional routes. Tom had taken a seat on a huge iron cleat and faced inboard to catch the sun on his face. I settled my back on a rung of the rail and squinted at my feet.

Tom lit a big Panatela and said, "Sleep much?"

I snorted to let him know that I hadn't, then asked, "You?"

"Oh yeah, fine." He blew a robust cloud over the deck. "Me and Leo Stoos went in with a couple of the SONAR techs...got us an air-conditioned room on the beach."

I relived my fitful night, down below in the rain forest. "Oh," I said, flat as I could manage, and turned to spit over the side. "Jesus Christ!"

Spalding cocked his head up at me. "Aint no big deal, Arrow; we do it all the time," he said thinking of course that I was expressing disapproval of his accommodations.

But he had missed my drift. I wasn't overly concerned about comfort; something else had my attention. While we had coasted in the warm morning rays, a submarine had stoled into the harbor. When I turned, the boat stood broadside about a hundred yards off the starboard beam, so close that if she had pivoted on her bow we could easily have danced right up her stern. I'd never seen a missile carrying sub before, and had no idea they were so big. A dozen or

line handlers were topside. In their orange life jackets and dungarees, they looked like so many ladybugs on a black log. The conning officer ordered a backing bell and the water thrashed up around the huge rudder sticking eight or ten feet into the sunlight.

The boat was painted black. All black from the rudder, on up the turtle back to the sail, rising into a monstrous dorsal fin with just the tip shaved off, and forward of the sail where the bow curved down into a broad rude snout that ruttet in the murky water. She was sleek and beautiful, and the most sinister looking beast I had ever seen in my life. My stomach muscles felt taut as piano wires stretched out of tune.

"What am I doing here?" I muttered the words, forgetting that I was not alone.

Tom stood up to the rail with me. "Reckon you'll do just fine, Arrow," he said.

"I had no idea she was so big."

Tom laughed softly and flipped his cigar butt over the side. "You better wait till you get inside," he said and walked away toward the nearest ladder.

SEVEN

I would like to say that after Tom left me standing there on the weather deck of the Proteus I remained a good while, lost in contemplation of the challenge before me. I wouldn't even mind writing

that I was filled with dread and the fear of failure. But the truth is that I stayed there for nearly an hour...feeling sorry for myself. Over and over I asked myself, "What am I doing here?" And always the answer came, "What would I be doing anywhere else?"

Papa Ski had seen my discomfort on a couple of occasions back at Pearl. In all my recollections I see him still with his scuffed size twelves propped on a rail or a desk, a generous rubber-lipped smile sighted down the length of his frame, beaming at me between the notch formed by his toes. "Arrow, my boy," he'd say in his best W.C. Fields voice, "Don't sweat it!" Petrofsky had seen a few technicians make the transition from school to the fleet. They all go to sea doubting their abilities. They all flop around mullet eyed for a while, gasping for breath in the new environment. But then, miraculously, the metamorphosis occurs; the man finds his gills and flits off, turning in perfect time with the rest of the school. That was Ski's theory.

But I knew I was in trouble. I had bluffed my way through nearly two years of electronics training, studying only for exams, and had learned absolutely nothing. My plan was to go to college at the Navy's expense and earn a degree. With a degree I would be granted a commission, and then what would I need to know about standing wave ratios and hole flow? Nothing. Naval officers are leaders, if anything, not doers. When I washed out of Purdue, I was in trouble... and I knew it.

Petrofsky and Spalding smiled at my anxiety, perceiving it as a kind of white and formless apparition. But I knew my difficulty as something much more tangible. Of course, I didn't blame myself. I blamed Marie.

I didn't think of Marie as the innocent girl I had courted through two years of high school and a year of college. I had forgotten her simple grace, the trusting look in her smile. I had forgotten how I felt when I saw her at the detention home in our town where she sung in her volunteer's soprano, her strong fingers rapping the stiff keys of an out of tune piano, and later the blush beneath the unabashed questions put to her by the tough girls who devoured her most unconscious gestures. I didn't think about the first three years of our marriage, when Marie's faith in me was so complete that, one day when I asked her to polish certain parts of the motor in our new Volkswagen, she did it without batting an eye and never stopped to think that maybe it was a stupid thing to do. I didn't think of any of these things. I just didn't think I loved her...and without that simple thought to lean on, I couldn't imagine why we should stay married.

How could I love Marie? She had put me in a hopeless bind. It was she who had wanted a baby to care for while I was busy studying. When our son was born, I thought it was enough for me to cook, and shop, and clean our apartment. I freed Marie from all cares save that of tending to our baby boy. But she spawned fears, things incomprehensible to me. Her world was filled with hate and danger.

I shouted at our son because he cried when I was trying to study, and Marie feared that I would hurt him. "Grow up." I told her time and time again in the month after she came home from the hospital. Each time I said the words, my insensitivity became more evident. One day she seemed to be in great pain but would not, or could not, say why. I was outraged. I bullied her into going back to the hos-

pital, against her strong protest. The doctor told me that Marie was suffering severe post-partem depression. I was not impressed. I had never heard of such a malady. Then he took me aside. "Mr. Elliot," he said, "you had better not leave your wife alone for any length of time. She may well try to take her own life."

She may try to take her own life. The words choked like chloring gas and colored everything I touched a pale dry yellow.

Right after Christmas I put Marie and our son on a plane and sent them home to her mother. I felt that I was of no use to either of them and, besides, I had end of term exams to take at school. When they returned early in February, the baby still cried, I still hollered, and Marie's faith in me had disintegrated.

We didn't fight much; our relations were much more hostile than that. Our conversations turned ever more civil until we couldn't stomach to look each other in the eyes. My demands for affection grew inversely proportional to Marie's ability to be affectionate, and by the end of that year that part of our marriage had become unsatisfying for both of us.

Neither were things satisfactory at school. Where I had once been careful about attending all my classes, I began to miss more than I attended. I was put on academic probation. Eventually, I managed to work my way back into the good graces of the college, but the Navy had smelled out a basic malfunction in a man whom they expected to excel. The day after I received word from the school that I was off of probation, I got my walking papers from the Navy command. Even as I apologized to Marie, I let it show in the set of my shoulders and in the veiled stare from my eyes that it was her fault.

In those days, I was eager to assign the blame for my failures. I overlooked the fact that blame has no real value, and was only interested in fixing it somewhere so it could become weightless.

EIGHT

It took nearly two hours to conn the boat into the exact desired position alongside the Proteus. By the end of that time better than half the Blue Crew was manning the rails on each level of the tender. Friendly shouts of "Hey Gunner," and "Whaddya say, Random," soon gave way to cat calls. The chiding flew outward from the tender as my shipmates tried to dent the smiles breaking beneath the squints of the men on the submarine. There was much good natured banter as the sal-low faced linehandlers picked their way over the mossy black deck with more than a hint of clumsiness.

One end of a length of white line was lashed to a pair of hawsers thick as fire hoses. On the other end of the line, a grapefruit sized knot, known as a monkeyfist, was attached, and this hard ball of twine was cast across the last fifty feet of water between the two vessels. Sailors have been passing mooring lines in this way for centuries; the system works and carries the smell of tradition. But in their determination not to lose their footing, the men of the sub allowed the monkeyfist to fall into the water. Twice. On the third occurrence, the hoots from my mates swelled up causing ears on the boat to burn. But then a surly man on board, a big fellow of maybe

250 pounds, looked up at us and roared, "Welcome home, Turkeys!!" Several of his companions took up the cry and completely silenced the jeers from the tender. Nothing more than business as usual passed between the two crews for the remainder of the berthing.

At last an aluminum gangway was dropped from amidships of the tender, and permission was granted for the Blue Crew to board the sub. Almost immediately the bridge quivered beneath the bulk of a familiar figure.

"H-e-e-y, Steve," I yelled down, "wait for me."

Petrofsky tilted his great moon face and beamed. I made for the nearest companionway and rattled down four sets of ladders. In half a minute I was crossing the gangway where I flipped salutes, first to the deck watch, and then to the ensign hanging limp at the stern end of the missile deck.

Ski smirked around the length of a fat cigar and shook his head. "You did it backwards, Arrow; you should have saluted the ensign, then the watch."

I felt the blood rising in my neck. "Hey, man, why you rock my dog," I said with as much bravado as I could summon, "He don't bark you!" I said as we strolled to the capsule loading hatch, where a steady stream of men bubbled up from below decks.

Within five minutes the whole topside area aft of the sail was jammed with bodies. As soon as Ski saw the ladder clear, he jumped down into the breach. I followed, looking below and trying to anticipate anything from snakes to starving wolverines. Three rungs down the ladder I stopped. My face was at the juncture where there is a gap between the hull and the superstructure of the boat. I

nearly gagged on the odor curling out of the space.

Ask a person on the street and they will probably tell you that a submarine is like a single giant iron pipe, rounded at the ends for purposes of aerodynamics. There is some truth to that notion. But most modern submarines are built in two parts. The inner shell, or pressure hull, if seen naked would resemble a rectangular box which had been dropped on one end from a great height, so that it was no longer rectangular, but presented the eye with several bends, or elbows. Connected to this box by means of welds, is the cigar shaped superstructure, which is in fact shaped so as to be streamlined. Between the two shells is the open space, which by means of various apertures is allowed to flood when the boat is submerged. This much I had learned at sub school. But, like everything else I'd heard, this bit of information lacked the color of reality. I can't say what things might have collected in the free flooding space of the Henry Clay the previous couple of months. I can only report that, whatever there was, it was certainly dead, and the stench was enough to stop me cold.

After a day or two the smell died away as the black hull baked under the sun. I wouldn't discover that odor again for some eighty odd days, and on that second occasion, it would strike me as some rare and exotic perfume. But on that first day, I hesitated on the ladder and weighed the idea of desertion. Well, it was just an instant. Then someone stepped on my hand.

I fell the last ten feet from the ladder with a sharp little cry and tucked my fingers under the opposite arm, trying to keep them from leaving my body for greener pastures. Ski shook his head in

what was rapidly becoming his standard comment on my behavior and moved away around the corner. I followed.

Picture two rows of pale green corn silos in a railroad tunnel. That is the upper level of the Missile Compartment on Henry Clay.

"Hey, Ski." When he paused, I caught up and said, "Is this what they call 'Sherwood Forest?'"

Steve's eyes narrowed a fraction. "If that's what they told you at sub school, Arrow, forget you ever heard the phrase." He seemed then to look at the overhead as if he expected some kind of guidance from above. "If you can't do that," he said, "at least don't ever say Sherwood Forest to any of the Missile Technicians."

I looked up too. "Why not," I asked.

"Because they will throw up in your face!" Ski growled and then he was off again.

I didn't understand that conversation for almost two years. When I did figure it out, I decided to write this book someday.

At the forward end of the Missile Compartment, we stopped and ducked through a hatch so as to enter the Navigation Center which, on the upper level, is the first space you come to in the Operations Compartment. I should say that Ski stopped and ducked. I smacked my knee on one side of the metal hatch and, as I bolted upright in pain, I conked my head. I stumbled into the next compartment close to tears, definitely in flames.

"Watch your step," Ski said indifferently.

I didn't answer. Couldn't. I hobbled after him, confused, hurt, and half scared. I tried to look composed as one could who needed one hand to rub his head, one to clutch a swelling knee, and still

another to blow his nose. I got introduced to my counterpart on the Gold Crew while I was contorted in a kind of fetal position trying to hold myself everywhere at once. The man's name was Noah. Really. He looked at me, then ever so slightly winked his shoulders at Ski.

Noah extended his hand. "Your first patrol, Dave?"

"Yes," I said, "how about you?"

"This was my fifth. Come on, I'll show you around."

The Navigation Center had the shape of a very small quonset.

Floor space was limited to four narrow alleys just wide enough so that if someone wanted to pass both of you had to turn sideways. Electronic equipment seemed to grow in the space; it hung from the overhead, clung to the walls, and was rooted to the deck. If you have never been in this kind of environment, it might be hard for you to imagine the congestion. I am not speaking either of toasters and blenders: one appliance, one cord. Instead, you must picture yourself walking along a display aisle in a wholesale appliance store where dozens of items, hundreds of items line the shelves, cords dangling...but then, you still don't have the idea.

Now, shrink your imagination; squeeze through the pores of your chest. The light is poor but you can see the various organs of your body. Paint them all grey. There is barely room to move about let alone breathe. It is as if you do not summon the air to your lungs; instead it comes to you from some unseen bellows. You hear the faint whistle and feel the draft from unexpected quarters, on the back of your neck and around your feet. Everywhere there are sinews, synaptic tendrils and bundles of fiber, connecting, feeding the machines of your body. Lay your fingers light about you, on kidney and

spleen, or even on the walls of muscle--they are that close together. Everything you see and touch trembles with inner vibrations, as does the very space in which you stand. You feel it in your feet, energy flowing, the subtle throb of a distant mindless heart.

Now you are beginning to think submarine. Add rows and banks of miniature Christmas lights; most are steady, some flicker and flash, some wink and go out. Ride over the hollow thrum of rushing air; phase in the buzz, pitch and whine of dozens of mechanical voices, punctuated with the rattle of an electric typewriter nailing reams of data to the page. Check out the street signs: DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE.. ..WARNING DO NOT REMOVE....POSSIBILITY OF ELECTRICAL SHOCK. Throw in a myriad configuration of tubes, plugs, pipes, valves, levers, stems, handles, sockets, wheels, slides, indicators, actuators, meters, panels, gages, breakers, extinguishers, boards, and fuses. Suck in traces of gases, fumes, and vapors. Lap at the bilges, blot the grease and oil with your cheek. Then take your starting eyes and lave the florescent space. Stroke the pale bodies that sprawl there in disarray. See them wonder why they are there. And know that they are, each one, only pieces of equipment.

Noah's tour filled me with wonder. I wondered how I could be so ignorant. Not only did I not know how to operate any of the equipment, I also had trouble identifying much of it. I wondered if I would ever feel at home in the Nav Center, like the other men who lounged so comfortably, their bodies melted over the irregular surfaces where they sat. There was only one chair in the space, a spring backed naugahyde seat which was bolted to the deck in front of something called the Navigation Control Console. The other seats

were fashioned from four foot lockers that had been covered with foam and vinyl. I wondered at the strange crosscurrents of conversation as the two crews traded knowledge like pieces of property; apparently it took three bits of news about Honolulu to get one parcel of information about the status of equipment aboard the sub.

Noah showed me around with such an off hand air of confidence I could tell that he was exceptionally sharp. I wondered why he was still rated only Seaman. He was young for a five patroller, but his obvious competency indicated that he should have been at least a second class petty officer.

In one corner of the Nav Center, Spalding huddled with one of the Goldies. As we walded up, he raised his eyes and said, "Still think it's big, Arrow?"

"Hardly," I said.

Tom looked through my eyes for a moment, reading the discomfort that lay just beneath the surface of my outward expression. He let it slide. "Fine looking set of handles you got there, Noah," he said complimenting the whiskers that Noah had stroked and waxed until they looked like two brown iron rings the size of doughnuts stuch on either side of his mouth. Noah just rolled his eyes and stroked.

"So what's new in Pearl, Spaldez?" he asked.

I had heard the conversation before on the peripheries of my tour. "Say, I don't suppose I could get lost around here, could I?" I said.

Tom halted in the middle of handing Noah his lighter. "Not likely, Arrow; just watch out for them chain gangs."

Noah nodded in agreement as he grabbed the lighter. "Yeah, man, don't even cross the chains!"

I twitched my head nervously. "Huh," I said, "what chains?"

Noah just said, "You'll know them when you see them," and began to pump Spalding for news about rock concerts.

I drifted away. Now that I was inside the boat, I felt more on the outside than ever. There was a continuity evident in the conversations I heard that I was not a part of and did not understand. There were none enlisted men in the Navigation Division; two Chiefs and seven rag hats. Of the seven, only two of us were new. My first instinct was to run with the other new man, but I caught sight of him in tow behind one of the Chiefs. He moved down the passageways as if he knew where he was going, so I put my head down and pretended the same.

The Chiefs in the division were seen usually at morning muster, and then they were off to the club or to the Chief's Quarters where there was sure to be a game of cards. I knew little of the Chiefs, but in the few conversations we shared, they both struck me as being affable gentlemen. I held their nicknames in abeyance: "Mean Gene" and "All Meals Moran" appeared to me as shades which, like the chains, I would recognize when I encountered them.

Next in line under the Chiefs, was Petrofsky, the only first class petty officer in the division. Technically, we were the Chief's responsibility, but for all practical purposes, we belonged to Papa Ski. Within the division there were three branches of specialization; SINS techs like myself, Navigational Aids men, and Navigational Data Computer techs. In each area the command would try to achieve a balance of skills, and in each case the senior man by rate would be in charge of the other two. Beyond this, there was a further delegation of re-

sponsibility for every group of tasks, so that we had a Publications Petty Officer, a Repair Parts Petty Officer, a Data Package Petty Officer, and so on, until hardly a cockroach in the bilge did not have some sort of power. It was a charming system (with peculiar vagaries as you will see) which had, as its major asset, the fact that when something went wrong through neglect or carelessness, we always knew who to blame. Sometimes it took a while to sift through the layers of command, but time was supplied to us in large doses...also blame. But once the blame was assigned, of course, no one really cared. You always had to rest blame on someone's head but, once you did, it just seemed to vaporize.

On my first patrol the Nav Center configuration was somewhat askew as the boat had somehow acquired four SINS techs: besides Petrofsky and myself there was a married second class named Peter Barrison, and a third class single john whose name was James Best. The NAVAIDS men were led by Mean Gene Harkness, and with him was Tom Spalding who was single, and another single third class petty officer, a cowboy from Oregon named John Hathaway Smart, an all-American boy if ever you saw one.

I suppose you might wonder why I go on so about the men's rate and marital status. If so, you obviously don't have a working knowledge of the standard Navy shit list. Suppose for a minute that liberty has been set for the crew, but a certain number of bodies are required to stay behind to stand fire watch. Every leading petty officer in the fleet has in the back of his mind a list of those men whom he would like to volunteer for such tasks. But what if there is harmony in the division, or say at least that there are not enough shitbirds to fill

the bill. What then? Well, first you pick the junior men, and if there is still doubt, then you grab the single johns, of course. No one in charge wants to see some married puke hang himself in the showers because he couldn't get home to make his wife just one more time before the ship deployed. Have a heart! Babies need their Daddies. The single men don't mind; what do they do with their time anyway? Probably just blow their roll on easy liquor and expensive women, or worse. So what do they care?

So much for bullshit. If you haven't bogged down by now, you understand that we were covered in the SINS and NAVAIDS areas, but in the computer branch we were a man short. In this area, we had only two men, one being the Chief, All Meals Moran, and the other being the second new man on board, a married fellow named Louis Ellenberger. Ellenberger was from Wyoming. One day not long after he reported for duty, he showed up at a ship's picnic wearing boots and a black stetson. Smart and Ellenberger gravitated toward each other in that moment like cows in a snow storm.

I had discovered no such rapport during the two months previous. Most all the men with whom I had made an acquaintance had been cordial enough, but there was no one of them whom I felt I could ask the hundreds of dumb questions which occurred to me as I strolled around the boat my first day aboard. I was possessed of a great sense of failure. I felt, that in wasting my chance at a college degree, I had consigned myself to four years of limbo. My marriage seemed bound for tedium. If I had a paddle I didn't know it. I picked my way about the boat, feeling clumsy, and focused my ears on the cat calls that swelled up in my conscience.

NINE

I wish I could tell you exactly what this story is about. I used to say the effort was quasi therapeutic because that was an easy answer, something my friends could clutch at, and nod to with apparent understanding. But, the truth is, I really don't know what this story is, or why. There seems to be a presence of heat involved, something that compels me to write it down, to mold the vagaries of mordant laughter and frustration till they assume recognizable shape. I talk about being dumb, about blame, and now I notice that the word conscience has crept onto the page. I was surprised. I do not choose all the words.

Each time I sit down to write, I read the previous lines and find anachronisms of myself. Take conscience for example; I haven't given conscience a thought in years...except maybe as an abstract commodity. I don't know when it happened exactly, but somewhere along the line of my experience it became too tedious to be continually beating my actions against my conscience to see if I was doing the right thing. It is much easier to trust your instinctual comparators; after all that is the value of experience: the more you have stored, the less time you have to waste rationalizing. But, as I write this story down, the old strains creep into my fingers and I remember. If not all the details and nuances of indecision, I at least remember what it was like when conscience was tangible as an orange, when a mere pinch was sufficient to fill the air with the fine mist of doubt, and the faint aroma of guilt. I remember now, and regret that I did

not notice then, the gradual almost imperceptible erosion of ideals which I had taken to be solid as granite.

It was mid-morning my first day aboard ship when I made my way to the mess decks on Henry Clay. The space was roughly rectangular, maybe forty feet long and fifteen wide. On the far wall hung a movie screen, beneath which the cooks had placed a table bearing open boxes of pears, apples, oranges, and purple grapes. There was a row of bench tables on either side of the compartment, covered with red vinyl cloths; pretty garish I thought as I contrasted the crimson blotches with the pale faces of most of the men who lounged there in their faded dungarees. It was easy to pick out the Goldies, as they had a way of sprawling in their seats, heavy and mindless as molten lava. Lumpy, pasty faced, it was as if a giant sculptor had spattered the room with large chunks of wet modeling clay. Each of the Goldies had a piece of fruit, and several had one of each variety.

Interspersed amongst the off-going crew were a few members of the Blue Crew. Crisper than their counterparts, they squirmed in their seats, and knocked their elbows on the metal rimmed tables as they asked pointed questions: "What's the story on the starboard steam generator...why wasn't the buoy flown this run...how could they... when did they... and, most often, why didn't they?" The questions were put subtly by small men behind glasses, or were leveled broadside by men who had to stoop to enter the space and had fists as big as my folded knee. The answers came in shrugs and puffs of cigar smoke blown at the overhead, and occasionally in high toned orations that dulled the ears of anyone in earshot. I stood at the head of

the twin rows of tables. Green as I was, I could smell the lethargy and frustration blended with the scent of pears and White Owls. The Goldies had us by the nuts. In two days they were going home.

"Whaddya say, Straight Arrow, you going to give Blinky a shot?"

The voice behind me was playful, but trimmed with nasal overtones that pared away the humor and grated on the small of my back. I took a small step forward and turned around. "Hello, Robert Paul. What did you say?"

"Ahem...oh, I was just wondering if you were going to wrestle Blinky...after he whips up on Metzger the Magician here. Ahem...uh, you want some coffee?"

"Yeah, thanks. Just black will be fine."

Williams, the man I addressed as Robert Paul, strolled a few paces back to one corner of the chow hall where there was a self-help apparatus with two coffee spouts and a soft ice cream dispenser. I turned my attention to the table adjacent to where we were standing. A couple of young men were arm wrestling, but I hadn't paid much notice.

"You the new man in N-Navigation?"

I returned the smile that accompanied the polite tone of the question. "Yes, one of them. It's my first day aboard. Are you Metzger?"

"No," he said, and turned his attention back to the match.

"Nah, that's Blinky. Ahem...can't you tell? Here's your coffee. Of course, I don't know for sure, but I've heard it said that Blinky has a twin sister...only he isn't sure what color her eyes are, because their eyes blink 180 degrees out of phase. Eh-eh-eh, pretty

funny, huh?"

I flinched. "Coffee always this bitter?"

"What!? This is good brew, man, you aint seen--hey, come on, Metz; he's almost got you now."

Williams was right. The seaman called Blinky had the distant look of a man in the zone. His pupils focused like twin laser beams on the bloodless knuckles of his opponent, and he quietly drove his arm down to the table.

"Two out of-of-of three," he offered with a shy smile.

Metzger shrugged his shoulders and cradled his right arm. "No, believe I'll let you slide today, boy. I wouldn't want you to hurt yourself. Besides I got to get a load in the dryer. Later," he said and nodded my way as he swaggered off.

"Have a seat, Dave," Williams said as he slid onto the bench next to Blinky. "This fellow doesn't lose many, do you, bub?"

I flopped into a seat across from the other two.

"N-No, not too often...would you like to try?"

I snorted through the mist rising from my cup. "No thanks; got no desire to eat crow my first day aboard. But maybe Robert Paul will strap you on."

The corners of Blinky's mouth quivered then as Williams slopped half a cup of coffee down his shirt. "No, Willy doesn't ever t-take anyone on; he says that's k-kid stuff."

The remark launched a kind of verbal polka between my two companions which I did not feel equipped to join. I fetched a refill, dropped a large dollop of cream in my cup, and settled back into my seat to watch the dance. Of the two men, I knew Williams best and

liked him least.

Blinky was one of the crew members I had not met before, but already I sensed that I would like him. The persistent flicker that punctuated his vision and gave him his name, didn't hide the obvious sincerity of his spirit, and there was nothing shifty in the flutter of his speech. I liked the relaxed set of his jaw and the way he held himself, alert but not tense. I liked Blinky right away; he was one of those easy friends you find in a crowd of small talk. I liked him as well as you can like someone at first meeting and, as much as I liked him, I disliked Williams.

I had already picked up the habit of addressing Williams as Robert Paul, his first and middle names. It was a way of holding him at arms length, right out. The first time I heard one of the other men call him that way, I thought it was almost rude, and I felt sorry for him, but the feeling soon passed. There was something leechy about the man that made you feel like you would regret any friendly overtures.

It wasn't that Willy was bad. But, somehow, he never smiled at you without making you wonder if he didn't need to change his pants. I didn't trust him. His eyes were grey and didn't blink at all unless he was trying to be coy; like, he'd come up and say, "Arrow, old buddy, ahem...how would you like to take my watch during the movie tonight," and he'd slide his eyelids half way down his cheeks the way a blushing woman does. The rest of the time, Willy's eyes were locked in the same kind of wide-eyed stare you see on rows of mullet in a fish market--you got the feeling that he was watching everything, and seeing nothing.

I listened to the sawing of the two voices across the table from me and fixed my gaze on the blank movie screen at the far end of the hall. Back and forth they rasped, with an occasional hitch when Blinky would stutter. Each time his voice would catch, my thoughts were pinched a little further out of the time and place. I began to think about home.

Marie and our son and I were at Makapuu Beach. It is warm and the sun is so bright I have to squint. My son and I are rolling in the breakers and, through droplets of salt water that cling to my eyes, I see Marie running toward us on the sand. She is laughing...

"Wake up, Dave; I need you." The hand on my shoulder belonged to Petrofsky. "Come on, my man, the Goldies brought us a real can of worms this time; we've got to get cracking!" I stood up and followed him out of the hall.

