

careful selection, their demonstrated intelligence and performance, and their association with the key force in the Navy today.

Epilogue

We, graying or gray, balding or bald, who were privileged to fight the War against the Japanese and drive the Submarine Force with such success through the Golden Age salute today's highly talented team. We know they will continue to build upon our legacy (it's already been over 20 years). They will succeed in reshaping the Force technologically and operationally to meet the electrifying political and military changes unfolding as Communism collapses. ■

THE BEDPAN STORY

by Vice Admiral James A. Zimble (MC) USN

As requested by the Editor of this REVIEW, I shall try to put to paper my infamous bedpan story which I would entitle, Confessions of a Submarine-Qualified Surgeon General. You can call it anything you want. It's certainly hard to believe that one insignificant bedpan can, if properly deployed, totally mission degrade a 100 million dollar (1960 dollars) state-of-the-art, HY-80 steel encased, nuclear-powered fleet ballistic missile submarine. Truly incredible.

First, a little background. I reported to the precommissioning Blue Crew of USS JOHN MARSHALL (SSBN 611) at Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in October 1960, as an eager young Medical Corps lieutenant who had just completed one-year's training at Deep Sea Diving School, Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D.C; Basic Submarine School, Nuclear Power School, and Undersea Medicine School, New London, Connecticut; and Nuclear Propulsion Prototype Training, West Milton, NY. Needless to say, I was raring to go even after learning that I, a full lieutenant, was the most junior officer on board. The skipper was a four-striper, the XO a three-striper, and almost all department heads were LCDR's. Such a top-heavy wardroom was the standard for FBM's in those days, albeit quite humbling for a post internship physician.

The CO and I developed a tenuous relationship of mutual respect. How could the relationship be otherwise between a young Jewish doctor and a senior officer who was a Christian Scientist? I truly admired him for his knowledge, skill and demeanor as a superbly competent "NUKE" and leader ... and for his willingness to comply with the dictates of allopathic medicine -- once I had given him a full dissertation on the pathophysiology, therapy and prognosis of any disease process which might affect a member of the crew. Incidentally, our relationship improved immeasurably when he realized that I could completely alleviate his symptoms of chronic mal de mer when he rode the bridge by administering just one Bonamine tablet (which must assuredly have been a disappointment to Mary Baker Eddy).

His nickname was "Steely Blue", an appropriate name for a stern leader whose azure Paul-Newmanish eyes never blinked nor strayed from anyone receiving one of his earnest lectures; and he was extremely proud of the fact that he and he alone had achieved the noteworthy reputation of always leaving the yard exactly on time for sea trials and had always returned on time ... or early ... after fully completing all trials without untoward event. It was a reputation of which anyone would be immensely proud. Little did he know how precarious such a reputation might be with an allopath on board.

I apologize for the length of this *background material*; however, I don't know any other way to give proper impact to this complex tale. You need to know that I was blessed with two very experienced Chief Hospital Corpsmen who through great patience and forbearance were able to break me in to the arcane practice of medicine aboard a nuclear-powered submarine. The sick bay was directly beneath the Control Room in Ethan Allen class boats, which meant that the access hatch of the radar mast well was in sick bay spaces. One of my corpsmen was rather compulsive about neat, orderly and safe stowage of all equipment. In fact, he was positively obsessed on the subject. Now, all masts on our submarine had an under-ice position to protect them when surfacing beneath ice. By tripping the under-ice switch in the Control Room two chocks holding the mast were hydraulically activated, allowing the mast to settle to the bottom of the mast well. Since Newport News is located in relatively southern waters, it should come as no

surprise that the masts were never tested in the under-ice position after initial installation.

Back to my compulsive Chief. Soon after beginning to stow medical gear in our sick bay, he came upon the access hatch to the radar mast well. Imagine his ecstasy as he discovered the almost made-to-order fit: our one and only bedpan in the void between the bottom of the mast (when supported by the chocks) and the floor of the mast well. It was indeed a bedpan locker. And for the next several months that was where our bedpan was stored ... until that fateful morning.

On 25 November 1960, the Friday after Thanksgiving, having completed all sea trials, we were scheduled to commence our shakedown cruise. We were to sail early in the morning up the York River to Yorktown for our load-out of torpedoes with which we were then to test our capabilities in Newport. The evening prior to departure a recently reported officer was OOD. He was extremely earnest, and he intended to make an extremely good first impression. Therefore, whilst on watch, instead of relaxing so that he could properly digest his Thanksgiving dinner, he proceeded to test all masts -- including the radar mast, of course -- in the under ice position. All masts tested perfectly. No problems were encountered ... until the following morning, the morning of scheduled departure, when it was discovered that we had no radar. We had no radar because the wave guide was totally mangled by a remarkably resilient bedpan resting in the mast well.

I have never before or since witnessed as angry an individual as Steely Blue was that morning. And I have never before or since suffered the experience of having someone that angry with me. Sure, the ship was delayed (mission degraded) for almost four hours -- four truly unbearable hours for the members of the USS JOHN MARSHALL medical department. Yes, the Friday after Thanksgiving was a holiday that year, so the workmen had to be paid triple time for their repair work. But worst of all, the skipper's reputation was irrevocably destroyed. His anger was justified and appropriately directed. It is quite remarkable and of great credit to his ultimate philanthropy ... and my utter amazement ... that subsequent to this incident I have been able to be promoted beyond the rank of Lieutenant, Medical Corps, United States Navy. ■