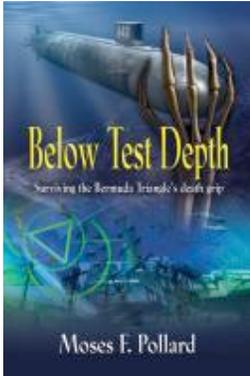


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Below Test Depth

Surviving the Bermuda Triangle's death grip

Moses F. Pollard



Neither the Viet Nam war nor the Cold war had ever claimed victory over a nuclear powered submarine. Yet, in the gripping chain of events in the midst of a the most mysterious region in the world, commonly referred to as the "Devils Triangle", the USS George Bancroft, SSBN-643(G) struggled to avoid her death trap. What lies beneath the deep, dark waters of the "Bermuda Triangle" remains an unsolved mystery even today.

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Moses F. Pollard

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Chapter One: Submarine Patrols

Few jobs afford you the closeness and camaraderie that one receives while stationed onboard a nuclear powered submarine. The closeness is not only appreciated, but it is a necessity. When we talk about closeness, we are not only describing the relationship with each other but tight living quarters as well. Since everything is so compact, even the living, social and work spaces have more than one use or purpose.

All of the crewmembers on a submarine are cross-trained in other duties to compensate for times when a crew member is sick, missing or cannot perform their duty. As a Quartermaster (navigation) on the Bancroft, I was also cross-trained as a Sonar Technician, Radioman as well as in security positions when we were in port. Every member of a submarine is also thoroughly trained to be a proficient fire fighter.

The most deadly enemy to a submarine while at sea is a fire. Fighting fires was not something that I enjoyed doing, but I, like others, had to become an expert fire fighter to help save the boat from fire. If you want to survive in a fire on a submarine, you must realize that a submarine fire must be quickly and efficiently extinguished. The crew only has a few precious moments during a fire before all of the oxygen that you have will dissipate. In this enclosed environment you do not have the luxury of calling for outside help. On board a submarine, your crewmates are your only ally. You must work closely as a team to accomplish this life saving task.

Survival of the crew of a nuclear powered submarine is important for national security. The submarines that patrol the oceans of this world may be the last line of defense against an

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attack on the United States. Better yet it may be a deterrent to attacks on the United States. Someone once wrote that, "The primary duty of a submarine has never been to control the oceans, but to deny control of the oceans to our enemies."

I vividly remember the four cruises I made onboard the nuclear powered and nuclear armed USS George Bancroft SSBN643 as a member of the Gold Crew. For me it was fulfillment of a dream. For a young sailor like me being assigned to a submarine was an adventure waiting to happen. When I reflect on my historic last patrol I marvel at the awesome responsibility that we all had as crew members of the USS George Bancroft.

I feel that I have been a part of something big, very big. I had no idea that when I first set foot on the George Bancroft, that it would be such a memorable experience. What I experienced during the winter of 1976 was perhaps the most terrifying cruise in the Bancroft's history. The patrol occurred while operating in what is known as the "Bermuda Triangle."

The George Bancroft was a Fleet Ballistic Missile Benjamin Franklin Class submarine. The James K. Polk that my late brother, Herb, served on was included in this class of submarine.

According to my brother Herb, the Polk was a good boat with a great crew.

Herb told me the story about the time while on another sub that they had accidentally run it into an underwater mountain.

I was young and very naive about submarines so I asked him what seemed to be a legitimate question. I said, "Herb; did you feel it when the sub hit the mountain?"

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He looked at me laughed and said, "If you drive a car into a concrete wall, would you feel it?"

Then just like a good brother would, he explained the story well enough that I finally got it.

Realizing that his family didn't understand what he did for a living, Herb took me and some of his other siblings to the amphibious base in Norfolk, Virginia to show us some submarines. I was impressed by the way the Marines at the Submarine Base Gate snapped to attention and saluted the insignia on the windshield of Herb's 1969 Plymouth Road Runner.

When we got to the pier, there were several submarines moored in place. They appeared to be similar to some type of large steel sea creatures. Herb allowed us to get out and walk close to where the subs were positioned as he began identifying the visible parts of their superstructures.

Herb explained the differences between the two types of submarines (A fast attack and a FBM-Boomer) and their purposes. Herb explained that the submarine that he was assigned to at that time, was called a Fast Attack submarine. Herb said that it is called a fast attack, because it was designed to run silently and attack fast. Fast attack submarines explained Herb, were used primarily to destroy enemy submarines and surface ships. Herb, referred to surface ships as sitting targets. He explained that by design a fast attack submarine (SSN) was agile and quick enough to sneak into enemy territory, fire torpedoes at it and dive so deep that the surface ship could not find nor destroy it. He further explained that the Boomers (Fleet Ballistic Missile) submarines were there as a deterrent to any country who might consider launching missiles at the United States. He said that by remaining undetected underwater, a FBM submarine posed a threat to enemy forces. They know said

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Herb, that if they launch their birds at us, we will launch our missiles at them. You can't defend against something that you cannot see, and as long as the FBM subs are undetected, they are a deterrent, said Herb.

Looking at the space between the water and the deck of the submarine docked by the pier, I asked Herb how they were able to stand up on that small thing.

He said, "What you don't see can hurt you." He explained that beneath the surface of the water were three floors of submarine structure. He explained that what we were observing was just the super structure, which is flooded once the sub dives. Herb said that just to look at the submarine, you would not think that there is much to it, but when it dives below surface, it becomes the enemy's worst nightmare.

While we were standing beside the pier, one of his old shipmates walked by and seeing Herb started telling war stories about their days on a sub.

Herb's old shipmate was a slightly overweight guy with a thick neatly trimmed beard. His eyes were puffy as if he suffered from too many nights of burning the candle at both ends or partying too much. He was a great orator, his gestures and expressions were definite attention holders. He would get so involved in his story that he would lean on Herb's shoulder for support and laugh until tears ran down his face.

Herb's shipmate said that he was on the USS Tinosa SSN 606 with Herb when they ran into that underwater mountain.

Herb pointed toward me and said to his shipmate, "My little brother wants to know if it hurt when we hit the mountain."

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The shipmate looked at me with an over exaggerated grin on his face and shouted, "You damn right it hurt!" He said that he was asleep in the Chiefs quarters and all of a sudden, he felt the impact and was simultaneously flung out onto the floor. He pointed up to his front tooth and said, "That impact knocked my damn tooth out."

He had all of us laughing as he told us that while he was lying on the floor in the dark holding his mouth, Herb ran right over him and stepped squarely on his nuts. He said, he forgot all about his tooth and rolled around on the floor holding his testicles and groaning.

Herb said that they had to scramble to secure the torpedo room before it could flood the whole ship.

Herb said that after a short while, his shipmate had finally gotten himself together and joined him and the other shipmates in trying to save the ship.

As Herb explained the very exciting and dangerous aspects of a submarine (like the sonar and nuclear power plant operation and fun things like crossing the North Pole thus gaining the designation of being a "Blue Nose"), I knew at that instant what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a submarine sailor just like my big brother.

The Benjamin class submarines (like the Bancroft) served as a long range Ballistic Missile submarine and deployed 16 Fleet Ballistic Missiles. Each of these ballistic missiles contained sixteen ballistic warheads. Each warhead was capable of taking out an entire city. They had an armament of four 21 inch torpedo tubes. These submarines were 425 feet long and thirty-three feet wide. They each had a draft of 32 feet. Each of these submarines could comfortably carry 14 officers and 126 enlisted men.

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My submarine was the fourth ship of the United States Navy to be named in honor of George Bancroft, United States Secretary. Construction started: August 24, 1963, she was launched March 20, 1965. It was built in Groton, Connecticut by the Electric Boat Corporation and commissioned on January 22, 1966. During her 27 years of service, the USS George Bancroft made 70 patrols and was decommissioned in September 1993. The George Bancroft had a displacement of 8,250 lbs.

This mass of HY80 steel was a complex underwater fighting machine. It was designed to travel for months on end without the need to refuel. The George Bancroft was also armed with an array of powerful torpedoes. In its deadly armament the Bancroft also carried at least two nuclear warhead Mk 45 torpedoes. Each of these nuclear warhead torpedoes was capable of destroying a small island or city.

The Mk. 45 Torpedoes were great weapons, but always poised the possibility that one of those deadly weapons might fall off the loading tray and cause a nuclear spill in the torpedo room. These weapons were so extremely dangerous to the safety of the crew, that they were discontinued shortly after my final patrol.

The Bancroft was capable of traveling in excess of 21 knots while submerged. She could dive to a depth of 1000 feet below the surface and surface with an emergency blow in a matter of minutes. The Bancroft had the advanced navigation systems of Loran Alpha and Loran Charlie. This nuclear powered vessel was also equipped with a diesel engine, able to operate for days on battery power. At ultra quiet, she was virtually undetectable by any vessel on or below the surface.

The Benjamin Franklin was the first submarine launched in this class, thus giving the classification for all submarine designed to her specifications. Several of the subs in this class

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(including the Bancroft) were later transformed into trident submarines.

Strong and reliable, these subs enjoyed a long service with the Navy. By the time I began my sub service, these vessels were very seasoned in their role as a deterrent to nuclear war. All the kinks had been worked out of them and they were still going strong. I believe that the Bancroft enjoyed some of its best patrols ever while I was on board. This had nothing to do with my presence, but the ship engaged in test firing three FB missiles at distant targets with perfect results. The Top Secret clearance required of Submariners suggested that we not divulge information about the patrols until ten years had passed after declassifying it. I would not violate such a crucial rule for the purpose of writing a book, so I waited until the Bancroft was decommissioned before I attempted to publish it.

Although this book is being published more than thirty years later, I still vividly remember details of that almost fatal patrol in the "Bermuda Triangle" as if it had happened yesterday.

Since my years in the Navy, I have managed to complete a successful career in law enforcement, but I will always remember the kinship that I had with my fellow shipmates. Lasting memories of our time together still linger on in my mind even until today.

Chapter Seven: A STINKY SITUATION

When I arrived at the Quartermaster stand Pasiniski was busy spinning his pencil around in his hand.

“Bored huh?” I said to Pasinski.

“Yeah,” said Pasiniski, “me and the master of boredom up there;” nodding his head toward the Officer of the Deck.

I looked up at the “Con,” saw who it was and said I am glad that we only had to stand four hour watches.

We exchanged our turnover information then Pasinski said, “Hey man I am going to bed.”

“Roger that.” I said.

“Petty Officer Pollard has assumed the Quarter Master of the Watch,” I said to the Officer of the Deck.

I immediately made my log entry, set my first position and then began tidying up around the work station. The night was so quiet that you could hear a mouse pissing on cotton. I had plenty of time to let my mind wonder off into past patrols.

One of the funniest things happened to one of my shipmates on my second patrol. Like this night, it was very calm and peaceful. We were traveling at about four knots at about 400 feet below surface. I was hoping to just make it through the watch without falling asleep.

About an hour into my watch the on duty IC-man came up to ask if he could blow the sanitary tanks. I approached the “Con”

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and asked the Officer of the Deck if we could break silence to blow the sanitary tanks.

The Officer of the Deck came down to the QM stand and said, "Do we have good water?"

"Yes sir, we are in great shape," I said.

"Very well," said the Officer of the Deck!

"Diving Officer, come to 270 degrees, all-ahead one-third, said the Officer of the Deck."

I made my log entries. We cleared our baffles, that is to say that we made a circle to make sure that no one was tracking us. When we came back to our course it was back to our normal patrol speed of four knots at 400 feet below surface.

About forty-five minutes to an hour had passed since my last log entry. As I was leaning back in my chair to relax until it was time for my next navigational fix, we heard a loud boom that startled all of us in the control room.

The Officer of the Deck, shouted, "What in heaven's name was that?"

I said, "I don't know."

He said, "Go below to see what just happened."

As I scampered down the stairs my adrenalin was racing, not knowing what to expect? Was there a hole in the submarine? Did we hit a mountain? I could not imagine what could have made such a loud sound.

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When I entered the enlisted men's birthing area, I immediately knew what had caused the loud boom that we heard in the control room. The stench of three day old feces, urine, soggy toilet paper and other body excretions had been blown onto the walls, floor, ceiling and door of the stainless steel men's restroom. As my eyes quickly surveyed the chaotic scene I remembered that my last log entry forty minutes ago was that we were blowing the sanitary tanks! The entire crew was trained on how to properly use the toilet.

On a submarine the flushing mechanism for a toilet is a ball system. There is a large ball inside the base of the commode that is opened and closed with a long handle lever attached to the side of the commode. It is similar to a flushing handle on a household commode only much longer and larger. When we are blowing sanitary tanks, a metal warning sign that reads ("DO NOT USE") is hung on the door of every stall to warn crew members that we are blowing the tanks into the sea. You can still use the toilet, but you should not flush it, because opening the valve while it is under pressure will cause what is in the sanitary tank, to blow back into the boat.

I quickly realized that the great noise was the sound of 3000 pounds of air pressure sucking everything that was in the sanitary tank up through the flushing valve into the boat. In a split second it came with such tremendous force that it emptied the tank. As I stood there startled at that gross scene, one of my shipmates came staggering out of the bathroom stall completely covered in the slimy remains of hundreds of pounds of human waste.

Seaman Vasquez looked at me with a sly grin on his face and said, "I guess I screwed up!"

I said, "You sure did!"

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Vasquez said, "I knew better, this is my second patrol." He said, "I awoke had to use the bathroom and did not notice the signs on the stalls." "When I opened the valve to flush the stool, I couldn't close it." "Man the stuff just kept blowing out of the flushing valve and *I just couldn't close it.*"

His normally shiny black hair was covered with feces and toilet paper. His coveralls were drenched in urine and waste so much so that I could no longer tell what color it was.

I replied, "You gotta get out of those nasty clothes."

Other officers, chiefs and crewman were now on the scene, but all of them stopped at the entrance to the bathroom.

I quickly ran back to the control room to inform the officer of the deck of what happened and to make my proper log entry. Immediately the Captain appeared in the Control room looking like he had been thrown out of his bed in the middle of a nightmare.

"What's going on?" he cried out briskly to the Officer of the Deck.

"Someone blew the sanitary tanks inward, Sir" he replied.

"Oh, Shit," said the Captain and then looked in my direction.

"Do we have good water?" He asked me.

"Yes Sir," I replied.

The Captain then ordered the Officer of the Deck to make sure that we did not pick up any contacts from the loud noise that we had just made.

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I could hardly keep my composure as I thought about the scene with Vasquez. I could not imagine ever seeing anything grosser than seeing a man covered in crap. I chuckled out loud over and over to myself as I plotted my next position on the navigation chart. I was not laughing at Vasquez, because I liked him as a friend, but the scene was something else.

Captain Wilson was very disturbed by the event, which by the noise alone placed us in jeopardy of being detected by an enemy submarine. The Captain was also concerned about the morale and well being of his crew. Thank God, that once we had cleared our baffles, that we had not been detected by any other submarines. Vasquez did not fare so well after this incident, because the crew had to help him “field day” the bathroom area.

Seaman Vasquez was nick-named “the crapper,” for the remainder of the patrol.

I was glad to see my relief come up on time to relieve me from this shift. As I was giving him a complete run down of the chain of events, the Officer of the Deck asked me how long would it be before we needed to get a fix (which is a navigational position with Loran Alpha).

“Not for another two hours,” I replied.

Once relieved, I immediately went straight to my bunk to get some rest. For some odd reason I suspected that we would be busy for the next several hours.

Chapter 11: The Ghost ship-Day 21

I had just come on watch when Sonar notified the "Con" that they had a surface contact.

Surface contact bearing 090 a warship turning two four bladed screws, came the report.

The Officer of the Deck said "QMOW do we have good water?"

"Yes, Sir" I replied.

"Very well," "Diving Officer make your depth 600 feet, right full rudder all-ahead full."

"Aye," said the diving officer.

We then made a very wide sweep of the ocean completing our circular trip back to our course of 270 degrees. When we settled down, still at 500 feet below surface, we heard the Sonar department announce that we still had the same surface ship.

The Office of the Deck repeated the same question to me "QMOW, do we have good water?"

"Yes Sir," I replied acknowledging that we were in over three hundred fathoms of water with no land within twenty miles in any direction.

"Make your depth 800 feet all ahead-flank and rig for Ultra Quiet," said the Officer of the Deck to the Diving Officer.

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“Left full rudder” he said and the Diving Officer acknowledged his order and proceeded to the specified command.

We were flying through the water for what seemed like forty-five minutes. When we slowed up and came up to 400 feet, there was complete silence for about thirty minutes. Sonar came back and said “Con,” we have a contact bearing 070 degrees a surface warship traveling at six knots on two four bladed screws.

I notified the Officer of the Deck that I was going into Sonar to listen to the contact myself. In addition to being qualified as a Helmsman and Quartermaster, I also was qualified as a Radio watch and Sonar watch. When I entered Sonar, they looked at me and threw up their hands as if to say we give up.

“There is no way that this guy could track us at “ultra quiet,” one of them said.

“No,” said the other Sonar Tech, when we go silent our ship is super quiet.

“Want to listen said the Sonar Tech?”

“Yes,” I replied that’s why I came in here.

“Be my guest,” he said handing me the head set.

I placed the head set over my ears closed my eyes and listened intently for several minutes. I could hear the two four bladed screws turning in rhythm at a steady pace. Chucc, Chucc, Chucc, Chucc went the sound of the propeller blades. The blades were making very distinct sounds as they continued to track us through the water.

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When I returned to the Control room, the Officer of the Deck called for me to report to the "Con." As soon as I stepped on the "Con", he asked me if I could hear the contact.

"I said absolutely, Sir."

The Officer of the Deck asked me to see if we were in good water. Standby Sir I said then I proceeded to get a Navigational position to plot our current position on the chart. Satisfied that we were in deep water I acknowledged that information to the Officer of the Deck.

Hearing my report, he said lets swing out and get behind him for a while.

"Yes, Sir" I said and recommended a course change that would place us behind the contact.

"Diving Officer, all ahead-flank," said the Officer of the Deck.

We made a wide semi-circle which should have placed us behind the contact by the time we slowed down to our normal patrol speed.

Once we completed our semicircle turn at flank speed, we settled down to our usual patrol speed of four knots. We had only arrived back on course about fifteen minutes when the contact was picked up by Sonar again. This is getting weird, I thought to myself. I didn't dare vocalize my concern, but you could sense that all of us who knew where we were located were uneasy.

This continued for about two hours before I felt that I needed someone above my pay grade checking on this contact.

I then requested permission to notify the Chief Quarter Master.

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The Officers Of The Deck said, "Yes, and wake up the Navigator."

"Chief," I said shaking him on the shoulder to awaken him.

Startled, he jumped up and said "What the hell is going on?"

"We have a problem with a contact," I said.

Chief Spaugy jumped up, ran in the bathroom, threw some water on his face and headed to the QM stand. The Navigator was awakened by the messenger of the watch and we all arrived back at the QM stand about the same time.

"Moses," said Chief Spaugy "did you listen to the contact?"

"Yes sir," I said and it is a text book sound of a two four bladed screw surface ship.

The Chief then went into the Sonar room where he remained for what seemed like an eternity. When he emerged he was a little flushed in his face. The Navigator who was visibly still half asleep asked him what he thought.

"Strange," he said, "strange."

"What do you mean," said the Navigator?

"Well it's a war ship alright," said Chief Spaugy, "but at the rate that those screws are turning, it should be closing in on us then it is."

Hearing this, the Navigator, said to the Officer of the Deck that he recommended we come to all stop.

"Great idea," said Chief Spaugy.

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We came to all stop and just drifted for a few minutes.

Chief Spaugy called Sonar on the phone and asked if the ship was closing on us?

“No Sir,” replied the Sonar Tech.

“ARE YOU SURE?” Asked, Chief Spaugy.

“Yes sir,” the Sonar Tech replied it is still four miles out and not closing at all.

“It is as if they knew we were going to all stop,” the Sonar Tech said.

“That’s impossible,” said the Navigator. “I didn’t think of doing that until the Chief said that they we not closing on us.”

You could hear a pin drop on a carpet floor in the control room for several minutes.

Our silence was broken when QM3 Pasinsky came in the control room unknowingly singing loudly with his head phones on. His off tune voice echoed the lyrics, “Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting.”

When Pasinski realized that both of his bosses were in the control room, he snatched the head phones from his ears and stopped abruptly in his tracks.

“Sorry,” he said as he squeezed past the Chief to where I was standing.

Pasinsky leaned over toward me and said “what in the Hell is going on?”

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I said, "stand-by a minute and I will explain it."

Chief Spaugy advised me to go ahead with my watch turn over with Pasinsky.

I explained to Petty Officer Pasinsky, the chain of events that had taken place over the past three hours.

Pasinsky said this is all I need, a dammed "Ghost Ship" on my watch.

I laughed at his expressions of dismay then patted him on his shoulder and departed from the QM stand.

During my next eight hours off I stayed in my bunk listening to my music on tape and letting my mind run wild. It was hard to wind down from all the strange events going on in this weird place. For the first time in my life I felt defenseless against the sudden strange occurrences taking place on our boat. It seemed that what was going to be would be and we were just puppets on a string at the mercy of fate. Although I had received my salvation in a Baptist Church eight years earlier, I was never really taught faith the way I needed it now. I had learned about faith by observing and listening to my mother talk about how God can provide. This was something totally different. I had never been exposed to the life experience that I was having on this cruise.

I listened to the words of Elton John's "Good-bye Yellow Brick Road," and Al Green's Greatest Hits, until my body relaxed enough to go to sleep. As I drifted off to sleep the thoughts of the warm summer breeze of the Isle of Palm Beach in beautiful Charleston, sent me into a strange dream world.

A restful sleep was what I needed, but I was soon to encounter a bazaar dream which caused me great uneasiness.

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The dream showed me being chased by a bangle tiger into a two story house where I escaped out of the upstairs window leaving the tiger trapped inside. The jump from the second floor window startled me to the point that I abruptly awoke from my sleep. I had broken out into a sweat from being chased by that tiger. I checked my watch and noticed that I had slept about six and a half hours. Strange dream, I thought to myself but shrugged it off and got up to use the restroom. Little did I know that I would be haunted periodically by that same dream until I married my wife Carolyn some six years later.

I took the opportunity to take a regular shower instead of (the submarine shower: get wet, soap up, and rinse off), I took a long hot water wasting relaxing shower. Feeling like a new person, I dried off, dressed and headed to the chow hall. I had a taste for a good cheese burger and fried onions. CS3 Kroll was the duty cook. The New York native with a big snout was a good comic impersonator with a great sense of humor. Kroll loved to poke fun at everyone and everything.

Kroll could tell a new joke everyday of an eighty-day patrol and never tell the same one twice. Although some were sexist or racist, I knew all he wanted was a laugh.

He and I would always imitate Ali (me) and Howard Cosell for the mid-way party night. Everyone including the Officers would gather in the enlisted men mess decks and laugh as I did my Ali impression.

I would say to Kroll "When the fight is over and Frazier don't answer the bell, I'll jump out the ring and take on Howard Cosell". Even Carbone enjoyed the act.

Knoll could do several impressions but my favorite was Lieutenant Colombo.

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As I passed by Kroll he tried to tell me a Pollock joke (his favorite).

CPO Mena walked up as we were talking and began joking with us. Knoll, Mena and I, walked in the cooler as I picked up a few frozen burgers.

Mena joked with me and said, "That many burgers were for the working crew men."

I laughed as I gave them to Petty Officer Knoll and asked him to "put that cook stuff on it."

Knoll was a really good cook who could make a burger taste so good that your tongue would slap your brain to death.

I grabbed an onion sliced it up, opened a can of mushrooms and sautéed them. I was getting ready for some good eating.

Kroll was busy talking while preparing the burger for me.

On a submarine there is an open mess, you can cook a meal anytime you want to. However it is better to have friends as cooks. Kroll and Mena both liked to have fun. As my mushrooms and onions began to simmer, I heard the announcement for the next drill.

I listened with disbelief at the poor timing of the drill as I was preparing my food. "Fire, Fire, Fire, Fire in the lower missile compartment," said the Chief of the Watch and the general alarm was sounded, bong, bong, bong.

Kroll and I turned off three burners on the stove and rushed to our assigned areas. No one sleeps or relaxes during an emergency or a drill. Each crew member has a specific job or a place to report or respond to during an emergency.

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Luckily for me, the drill didn't last very long. Twenty minutes later I was in the chow hall enjoying a great double cheeseburger. Although the burger came a little later than I had planned to devour it, the taste was every bit as good. Several crewmembers walked past as I devoured the burger and commented on how good it looked. I spoke, smiled and continued to enjoy my burger. I expressed my thanks; Kroll and I headed to the Quartermaster stand wondering what we would find when we got there.

QM1 Brinkman seemed a little edgy as he gave me the relief briefing. He stated that we still had the contact and that the Engineer had been testing the sound made by the skew of our boat for tones.

"The Engineer's concern" said Brinkman "was that what Sonar may be hearing was our own noise from our propeller."

The Engineer said "without a doubt that the ship must be real but, all doubt must be removed."

Brinkman said "that the Engineer and officer of the deck had tried everything that they knew how to find the ghost ship but without success."

He said chief Spaugy had gotten on everyone's nerves by trying to find the ship or a reason for not finding it. He said Chief Spaugy had recommended every course change possible and still the contact was there. I looked down at the real chart and it looked like a child had been playing with an Etch-O-Sketch pad. Brinkman said that the Officer of the Deck had gone up to periscope depth twice on his watch. He said that the first time that they went to periscope depth was during daylight and even he did not see any ships on the surface.

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I asked how the visibility was and he said that it was crystal clear all the way to the horizon about 12 miles.

Brinkman said that Sonar said that the ship was no more than four miles from us, which would be easy to see. He said that the second time they went up to periscope depth, that the sun had just set and the ship would have been running a few night lights for navigation and warnings. Brinkman like my other shipmates had no explanation for not seeing the ship on the surface.

Feeling very fatigued, Brinkman stretched his arms yawned, said "See you later" and exited to the control room

Everyone seemed on edge because of the "ghost ship" that wouldn't leave us alone. I began my watch as usual, but decided I was not going to let the "ghost ship" bother me anymore.

Almost everyone on the boat knew by this point that we were in the Bermuda Triangle. Some were very concerned, some didn't care, and some believed our lives were in danger.

Several crewmen came up to the Quartermaster stand during my four-hour watch, but the one that I remembered most was someone who seldom talked at all, the Chief of the Boat, Chief Lawhorne. Chief Lawhorne was a very strong powerful man who was deceptively fast on his feet for his size. The large chief could out run the average crewmember for short distances.

Chief Lawhorne came up about an hour before the end of the watch.

He stopped at my Quartermaster stand and said, "Where are we Pollard?"

I showed him and anticipated his next question and said, "Yes."

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He said, "Yes what?"

I said, "Yes, we still have the contact."

Chief Lawhorne looked up at me and said "How did you know I was going to ask you that?"

I answered, that everyone else had asked the same question.

Chief Lawhorne was the "Chief of the boat" ("COB"). He was the top enlisted man on the boat and an African American. The "COB" loved to play Bid Whist and Spades. We spent plenty of hour's playing cards, laughing and joking.

The "COB" reminded me of my brother, Herbert, both were chiefs who made rank fast, and both were perfectionists and professionals in their field.

The "COB" was a Chief Torpedoman, my brother Herb was a Chief Quartermaster, but their demeanor was identical.

The "COB" asked me if it was true that the ship couldn't be seen. I said, "Yes."

He tapped his fingers on the Quartermaster stand and asked me if I believed in the Devils Triangle.

I said, "No"

The "COB" said "well it's strange isn't it?"

I said "yes."

As he was about to leave, he turned and said, "Pray, my boy, pray."

Moses Pollard

I jumped as I received a buzz from Sonar, who stated they had lost the contact.

I asked the technician if he was sure the contact was lost. He confirmed yes, stating that they had not been able to track it for about ten minutes.

I notified the officer of the deck and logged the information in the Quartermaster log. Just as quickly as the “ghost ship” appeared, it vanished.

Where did it go? Why after several days of trying everything that we knew, did it just disappear? Was it really gone or was it just toying with us for fun?

I was never sure that the ghost ship ever really vanished. It seemed too good to be true. Regardless of the reason that we had lost the ship, the fact is that everyone was relieved to be rid of it. Even some of these macho submariners, who had withstood the test of pressure tanks, escape hatch training and countless deep dives were feeling a little uneasy about something we couldn't see. Everyone cheered in the control room as it was announced out loud that we had lost the contact.

The Executive Officer entered the control room, but I knew he was coming before I actually saw him because the bold cherry smell from his pipe had already teased my senses warning me of his arrival long before he arrived. The Executive Officer leaned across the Quartermaster desk, spoke and checked our position. The aroma from the EX-O's pipe filled the control room like a strong fragrance being sprayed from an aerosol can. He studied the chart for several minutes before walking back down the hall toward the Captain's Stateroom.

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About thirty minutes passed before the friendly face of my relief appeared. I greeted Billy Pasniski with a smile and stated that we lost the contact.

Billy looking pale with his blond hair glistening with dampness from the recent shower looked at me and said the strangest thing that I had ever heard from him.

He looked at me in a questioning manner, and said, "What if Mark was right, what if we are going to lose it?"

I said, "I'll see you later," and before he could continue I left.

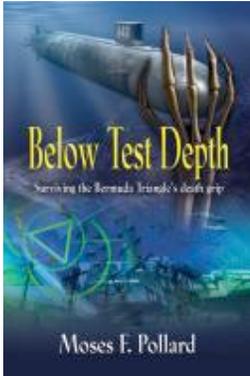
I met the navigator on his way up to the Quartermaster stand and spoke to him.

He stopped me and asked why I was rushing.

I said, "Everything is so weird."

He agreed as he asked who was on the QM watch.

"Billy," I said and exited before he could get the next sentence out of his mouth.



Neither the Viet Nam war nor the Cold war had ever claimed victory over a nuclear powered submarine. Yet, in the gripping chain of events in the midst of a the most mysterious region in the world, commonly referred to as the "Devils Triangle", the USS George Bancroft, SSBN-643(G) struggled to avoid her death trap. What lies beneath the deep, dark waters of the "Bermuda Triangle" remains an unsolved mystery even today.

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