

‘Oh! Scythian’.

Standing on the upper deck of H.M.S. Grenville on a bright July morning in 1958 in Portland harbour, watching a Submarine making its way out to sea. Standing near me was Lt Cdr Buckley, the Squadron Engineer Officer. I commented to him about the shiny new Submarine, and he said "That's not a new boat, that's the 'Auriga' and she's just been streamlined and I was Engineer Officer in her back in 1946."

Then I made the fateful comment. "I would like to take a trip in one of those " !!!!!!!!!!!!! Two or three days later a signal came aboard for me to join the Submarine 'Scythian' on the following day. Getting approval to go, I trotted along 'Q' pier and crossing the three springy gangways to the third boat out and was informed that 'we' were going out over night, back the next day. 'Even better' says me.

Leaving harbour, being a Stoker maybe I should have been in the engine room, but I stayed in the corner of the control room watching everything that happened. After a while a chap came down a ladder which I assumed led up to the bridge, dressed in a Submarine sweater. Words were whispered, there was a clunk as the hatch was shut and a loud hissing noise and the front end of the boat tilted downwards. We were diving. My very first dive in a Submarine.

Suddenly - All the lights went out. Instant blackness. 'Stand by to surface', and up we went again. A Canadian PO rushed around with a bag of things and soon the lights came on again. 'Stand by to dive'. The loud hissing noise again and down we went again. The man in the sweater was peering through the periscope, all very exciting to me, then the cry 'Oh Scythian how can you do this to me ! Stand by to surface' - again. Looking through the periscope the CO had seen the forward DSEA marker buoy bobbing around on the surface, its aerial extended and busily transmitting the 'distress' signal. We surfaced again and the buoy returned to its well - and lashed down !

We had surfaced again during the night, probably for a fix. Laying in a bunk in the killicks mess I couldn't have fallen out in the gentle roll as I was locked into that bunk by the two 'baby's bottom' light fittings in strategic places.

Arriving back in my own mess on Grenville the next day, I swore to myself that I would never, ever go in a Submarine again. That had been the worse night at sea ever, even after being in a Tank Landing Ship that rolled in the rain.

Several months later, the peace of the Stokers mess was shattered by a scream of anguish. M(E)I Knocker White, an ex Aircraft Carrier H.M.S. Eagle rating, was clutching a draft note - to H.M.S. Dolphin for 'Submarine training'. He really did not want to go !!

But in spite of my experience in 'Scythian' I said, "Well Knocker, I will go in your place ". I think I may have drank his tot that day.

4th of November 1958 saw me passing through H.M.S. Dolphin Main Gate for the very first time. I was billeted in the almost brand new 'Wolfe' block and we attended classes in the 'Brown area'. Diesel Jones was one of the more renowned instructors and the, dreaded by all, Chief Stoker 'JT' John Thomas was 'regulating' in 'Adamant' block, down in the Fort. 'Don't mess with my lads' - See me first !!!!! Even the Jaunty stood well clear.

In my training class there were several 'to become outstanding' characters like 'Charlie Squibb' and 'Badges Duckett', then there was Knobby Clarke who used to go into raptures when the subject of 'Shafting' came up.

At that time the Submarine Escape Training Tank (SETT) was quite new and still a very serious toy, as it always was.

My next trip to sea in a Submarine was on a training class day at sea from 'Dolphin' in 'Tactician'. Now there's a name to raise the hair on the back of your neck.

A 1942 boat with valuable war service in the Far East, her eleven torpedo tubes had spat terrible vengeance on the enemy towards the end of WW2. Now still working well, she was showing the new Submariners what Submarine life was really like.

On 'passing out' I was not too disappointed that having only been back from the Mediterranean for about a year and a half, I was being drafted to S/M I - Malta. 'Forth for Submarines'.

On arrival on 'Forth' on 1st April 1959 (!!!) she was still in the floating dock, but going aboard I dumped my gear and dashed ashore to revisit some of my old haunts. Waiting for a bus outside the dockyard Cospicua gate, I was picked up by a passing car - also going to Valetta. Having passed through Floriana and setting off up King George V road to Valetta main gate, **CRUNCH !** The car I was in collided with another going in the opposite direction - off side to off side. Here we go again ! Having experienced the sound of tearing metal once or twice the last time in Malta, but this time I had only been back on the island for less than 2 hours !!!! Serious for the cars, but not the passengers; stepping out and leaving the owner to sort it out, I carried on to my destination on foot. It may have been 'The Gut', or the Australia bar in Victoria square on Kingsway !!!!!

'Forth' arrived back in her normal billet in Msida creek a couple of days later and very soon her Submarines started arriving back alongside. Inboard boat I think may have been 'Tapir' preparing for a deployment, next out was 'Tally Ho!' and then the outboard boat was 'Tabard'. Standing on 'Forth's well deck looking down, there was only one boat that I wanted to go in. 'Tally Ho!' was the only one that really looked like a Submarine. Horseshoe bridge, tall periscope standards - and a 4" gun at the front of the bridge.

With her two forward pointing external torpedo tubes and her two aft pointing ones, a seriously businesslike looking boat this one !

A few days later I was drafted to 'TH!' for Part three training. Talk of a dog with two tails !!!!! Soon introduced to 'Pip' and 'Squeak' the two very experienced Vickers engines, all brass and telegraph gongs - which I spent a lot of time polishing over the next months. The Stokers mess, right back aft, beyond the engine and motor room, was pretty isolated from the rest of the boat and in there I thought that it may have been part of the wardroom. Railway carriage layout, with five sets of two high bunks, athwart ships on the port side and on the starboard side of the walkway fore and aft were two sets of bunks two high. All varnished and polished wood with immaculate mattress covers. The aftermost port side bunks were close up to the dare I say it 'the ensuite' bathroom.

The Stokers own bathroom, mostly filled with stores had two wash basins and its own slop drain tank. The Stokers heads were further forrard on the other side of the Motor room/ stokers mess bulkhead, back end of the motor room, near the oily bilge pump, and set on the top of 'R' tank, between the prop shafts. Accessed through a hatch in the motor room deck.

In the centre of the Stokers mess, right where anyone could fall down was the access hatch to the shaft space - here lived the two stern glands, the Plumber blocks, the Thrust blocks (**Calm down Knobby !**) the tail clutches, as well as a 'Reducer' and a hydraulic telemotor pump.

At the back end of the Stokers mess was the After SSE (Submerged Signal Ejector), LP Blower and further aft was an HP air compressor (Reavels TC 6), the steering gear and the After planes operating gear. Talking of 'coffin bunks' The after, bottom bunk, facing the bathroom bulkhead was 'the coffin bunk'. Accessed only from one end, enclosed at the bottom, forrard and after sides, and above and below, with at most 12" of clearance. A fairly good place to 'sleep it off' after a good run ashore, or to hide away.

In those days we used woolly army type blankets and striped pillows. Some people washed out linen gash bags and used them as pillow cases. But we were 'hot bunking', so never got in the same 'pit' twice.

Bob Charmers, (Senior Killick, 'Killick of the mess' and maker up of the Stokers watch bill) Terry Moriarty or Dad Warnes would get the mess rum issue.

The CO was Lt Arnold Melhuish, the Jimmy was Hugh Thompson, The engineer was David Marsh. There was also a Lt Round-Turner and I believe a Lt McCloud-Hatch and a Sitwell or Sizeland [*Ed: possibly Mike Sizeland?*]. The Chief Stoker was Jas V (Jumbo) Johnson and the Stoker PO was 'T' Boat Bill Bailey.

A brilliant old boat that served us well.

One good Part three question was. What is the Ashwell System?