



The Klaxon

Newsletter of the Submarine Force Library and Museum Association

Groton, CT

Summer 2006

The Distorted History of USS PUFFER (SS 268)

Submitted by Mr. Craig McDonald

Editor's note: The author is Director of Data and Information Services at Indiana University. His father, Donald B. McDonald, Jr, served in PUFFER on the second and all subsequent war patrols and sparked the author's interest in submarines in general and PUFFER specifically. Mr. McDonald has compiled a complete history of PUFFER which will be published by McFarland Publishing within the next 18 months. The written history was compiled from primary sources: PUFFER veteran's interviews, war patrol reports, letters and diaries from the period, and other documents written by the crew as well as other historical archive material. Mr. McDonald wrote this article to correct what his research showed him to be an incorrect account of what happened to PUFFER's crew following her first war patrol.

In the seven year process of researching and writing a history of *PUFFER*, I have discovered an error in the initial writing of the boat's history. The written history began with the unpublished *Operational History* of submarines compiled and written in 1945 and 1946 by Richard G. Voge, W. J. Holmes, W. H. Hazzard, D. S. Graham, and H. J. Kuehn. It was later published in 1949 in condensed form as *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* by Theodore Roscoe. Both texts suggested a large number of crew members were transferred from *PUFFER* after the first war patrol. Hard data will prove the historians wrong. The events during the first war patrol of *PUFFER* that lead to this false conclusion are open to interpretation. I have interviewed crew members that were there and read the history, and will give my interpretation of the events.

There are four questions that must be answered to clarify the history. The answers to the first and second questions are logically related. If there was a complete loss of control, then breaking up the officers and crew would be a reasonable action to take.

1) Did Commander Jensen or other officers mentally lose control of themselves, of the crew, or both? Similarly, did some crew members fail to follow orders or lose control of their mental faculties?



USS PUFFER (SS 268)

2) Were the officers and crew broken up?

3) Were other crews broken up after similar situations?

4) Were new crew members welcomed or shunned?

While on her first patrol on or about 9 October 1942, after torpedoing a tanker, a severe depth charge attack by the escort forced *PUFFER* to a depth in excess of 500 feet. The boat was submerged for nearly 38 hours. The crew hung on enduring additional depth charges, sauna like temperature and humidity; lights and hopes faded as the batteries died, and oxygen in the air dwindled.

1) In order to conserve oxygen men were ordered to lie down in their bunks. For a man in a hypoxic environment (low oxygen) to return to activity was very difficult – it was both mentally and physically painful to merely return to a standing position let alone to do work. Men were literally unable to stand their watches. The ability to follow orders was more “could not” than “would not”. As the effects of adrenaline (insomnia, mood changes, helplessness and depression) heightened the mental consequences of hypoxia (negativity, indecision, disorientation, and belligerence), the commanding officer and some crew members became morose. Some men were angry at first and later gave up any hope of survival.

Four crew members totally lost control of their mental orientation.

31 hours into the ordeal, Jensen complimented the crew in the war patrol report:

Due to tension, bad air, heat, humidity, hard work on the bucket brigades, etc. the crew were practically out on their feet, but carrying on like veterans.

A decision had to be made. Reasoning and emotions were affected by the low oxygen condition. Commander Jensen, unable to make a decision, decided to take a vote among the officers and crew with three choices: a) scuttle the boat; b) fight it out with the deck gun; and c) wait it out until darkness. Democracy became anarchy as emotions ran wild and crew members argued for their choice or could not decide. Somehow the decision to wait until darkness prevailed. Jensen retired to his cabin for a few hours rest with the words to the crew, “I’ve done all I can do boys. If you know how to pray, pray.” These words further demoralized the crew. Although in a state of extreme exhaustion other officers and crew, who had remained active, sustained a better mental orientation and persisted. To Jensen’s credit he directed the *PUFFER* and crew as it surfaced, evaded the waiting escort and returned the boat to Darwin.

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From the Desk of the President

Well, the short New England spring is long gone and the summer season is upon us. In the last issue, we bid farewell to departing museum director LCDR Chris Slawson and in this issue, we extend a hearty welcome to LCDR Randy Tupas.

We continue to seek artifacts and papers of historical significance to the US Submarine Force to add to the museum collection. We recognize that, in the past, some have been perhaps offended when an article was offered to the museum only to be rejected as "not suitable for the museum collection". We are offering a solution to that problem. We will accept items as gifts to the Association. The association will, in turn, offer the items to the museum. Items not accepted by the museum will be

offered for sale in the museum store (with the donor's permission) and the profits will go to help support the museum. That's a WIN/WIN for all concerned! This concept is further discussed in an expanded article on the subject in this issue of *The Klaxon*.

Our docent program continues to receive positive comments from museum visitors and we are gradually expanding the number of days each week that we have docents on duty. We hope to eventually have at least one docent on duty, preferably two, any time the museum is open. We are currently limited by the number of available volunteers, so please sign up to help us out if you live close to the museum and have the time to spare. Our next big push will be to get the education program up and running. To that end, we are partnering with several teachers and school administrators in the local Groton school system to develop a world class program. More to come on that.

The Submarine Force Library & Museum Association annual meeting was held on April 28, attended by 50 members and guests. We were honored to have several of our docents as guests at the meeting. The reception following the meeting was enjoyed by all. At the meeting the following officers were elected:

RADM David M. Goebel, President
CAPT Ray Woolrich, Vice President
CAPT Sean Sullivan, Secretary

EMC (SS) David Fowler, Treasurer

I speak for all the officers when I say thank you for your confidence and that we look forward to serving you all for another year.

Now that winter is over and summer is here, it's time for you all to come visit the museum. While you are here, tell us what you like and what you see as opportunities for improvement. We look forward to seeing you.

David M. Goebel



From the Desk of the Museum Director

As your new Director of the Submarine Force Library and Museum, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I call Houston, TX, home and graduated from Texas A&M University in 1991. My sea-service consists of a Division Officer tour aboard the USS NEW YORK CITY (SSN 696) stationed out of Pearl Harbor and a Department Head tour aboard the USS HENRY M. JACKSON (SSBN 730) stationed out of Bangor. I also

served as a Division Director and Instructor at Naval Nuclear Power School in Orlando, and worked as the Strategic Targeting Officer at COMSUBPAC.

Although at the helm for only two months, I am pleased to report that we have made progress in a number of areas. Design work is starting on the new Temporary Exhibition Room. Highlights include a new exhibit system to accommodate the easy installation of temporary graphic-panels and a flush mounted flat-panel monitor for multimedia displays. Restoration of the museum's two deck

guns is nearing completion (95% and 80%) and could be done within the next few months. We also jump-started our educational outreach program, holding our first meeting with Administrator Carolyn Doutré from the Groton School District. The pilot program will support the 7th grade science curriculum.

I am genuinely excited to serve in this eclectic position and look forward to working with the Association to improve the museum experience.

LCDR Randolph Tupas

Welcome To New Museum Director

We welcome the new Museum Director and Officer in Charge Historic Ship Nautilus. LCDR Randolph Tupas relieved LCDR Chris Slawson at a Change of Charge ceremony on 28 March, 2006. Lieutenant Commander Randolph Tupas, a native of Houston, Texas, graduated with honors from Texas A&M University in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering. He completed training at the Naval Nuclear Power School in Orlando, Florida, and the Nuclear Power Training Unit in Windsor, Connecticut.

After completing the Submarine Officer Basic Course, LCDR Tupas reported in May 1993 to USS NEW YORK CITY (SSN 696) in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. While assigned to NEW YORK CITY, he served as the Electrical Assistant, Reactor Controls Assistant, Chemical and Radiological Controls Assistant, and Damage Control Assistant, completing two deployments to the Western Pacific. In December 1996, he reported to the Naval Nuclear Power School in Orlando, Florida, where he served as a Division Director



and Instructor and earned a Master of Science degree in Engineering Management from the University of Central Florida.

After completing the Submarine Officer Advanced Course, LCDR Tupas reported in December 1999 to USS HENRY M JACKSON (SSBN 730) in Bangor, Washington. He served as the Strategic Weapons Officer, completing five strategic patrols. In March 2003, he was assigned to Commander Submarines Pacific in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where he worked to develop advanced submarine strategic weapons systems and procedures until February 2006.

LCDR Tupas' decorations include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (three awards), Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and numerous unit awards.

He is married to the former Sharlene Wiley of Waipahu, Hawaii. They reside in Groton, Connecticut, with their two sons Kyle and Austin.

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The original historian on Voge's staff may have alluded to the problems Jensen and some crew suffered under the physically harsh and mentally stressful conditions. The history stated:

Be careful and slow to form an estimate of men's value until he had been observed under stress. To a great extent the men who were on their feet, working to save themselves and the ship, when the long dive was over, were not the normal leaders of the crew.

According to Blair in *Silent Victory*:

When *PUFFER* came into port, Christie had nothing but praise for the ship and her captain. He wrote in his diary that 'strength of character...skill and experience and knowledge, the excellent state of training, saved the ship...A brilliant job carried through by guts, determination and the inspired example of the Commanding Officer.'

Christie's staff, meanwhile, conducted a thorough investigation of the episode. Those taking testimony then discovered to the extent to which Jensen had lost control of the crew.

2) Commander Jensen was relieved of his command. That fact was certain. The statement that the officers and crew were scattered is incorrect.

The original history text by Voge and staff reported:

There were several important suggestions by the officers. When a submarine had gone

through such an experience, the crew should be broken up. The common experiences of such an ordeal knits them together in such a bond that no one else can penetrate the inner circle. Men who subsequently made several patrols on *PUFFER* were still not members of the gang, if they hadn't been through THE depth charging.

Why did the original historians invent a break up of the crew, when it simply did not happen? Are officers included in the "crew"? Why was the psychological bonding effect of the crew invented to justify the break up of the crew? I conjecture that immediately after the war it was the desire to present as positive an explanation as possible and avoid including the negative aspects of the first patrol events. A "scientific" explanation served well by diverting attention from the real command issue and enlarged the situation to include the entire crew.

Roscoe paraphrased the original text; the bond became stronger as "knits" became "welded"; "the officers" became "*PUFFER*'s officers."

PUFFER's officers arrived at a number of conclusions, and these were noted by Force Command. When a submarine had gone through such an experience, its crew should be broken up. The sharing of *PUFFER*'s ordeal welded her men in a fraternal, almost

mystic bond, and no new comer was able to penetrate the inner circle. Men who subsequently made several successful patrols on *PUFFER* were still 'outsiders' – not members of the gang. They hadn't been through THE depth charging.

From the first two accounts it is not completely clear if Submarine Command took action. Command took "suggestions" and "noted" conclusions from the *PUFFER*'s officers. However, Blair in *Silent Victory* amplified on the earlier texts, made the breakup a reality, and extended the breakup of the crew to explicitly include the officers. "In view of this and other factors, one *PUFFER* officer suggested that the wardroom and crew be scattered to other boats." Blair continued by quoting a letter (written in the early 1970's) by Frank Gordon Selby, the new commanding officer of *PUFFER*, "...I had at least a 50 percent turnover in officers and in crew." With the addition of this information, the scattering of the crew and officers became a "reality".

The record shows there was a much less than a 50% turnover in officers. Lawrence Bernard was supposed to stay on *PUFFER*, but was replaced four days before the start of the second war patrol. Bernard had been taken off *S-39* a year earlier with pneumonia like symptoms. His

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breathing problems returned after the extended submergence of *PUFFER*. Selby very nearly had only one new officer. Excluding the change in command, *PUFFER* received one out of six new subordinate officers, S. Morrow Decker. Franklin Hess, Carl Dwyer, William Pugh, Walter Mazzone and Kenneth Dobson remained. Mazzone left after the second war patrol; Hess left after the third war patrol. In reality the suggestion to scatter the ward room was ignored and greatly exaggerated.

Selby's sentence quoted by Blair was structured in such a way that it was easily interpreted to mean at least 50% of the enlisted crew was transferred. In the nearly 30 years that passed between 1943 and the early 1970's, Selby may have read and believed the two earlier histories of *PUFFER* and confirmed the inaccurate transfer assumption back to Blair as fact. John Allen (MoMM2c), interviewed by Blair, estimated a 25% turnover in the crew, but Blair ignored his recollection.

My father joined *PUFFER* for the second war patrol. As a result of researching his history on *PUFFER*, I found the muster roll lists simply do not verify the scattering of the crew. The muster reports clearly show that only 20 of the 71 crew (about 28%) were transferred to new construction, other submarines, or relief crew duty. Five of the 20 returned to *PUFFER* after a one patrol respite. The chart below shows the crew rotation off *PUFFER* was very similar to the first war patrol on subsequent patrols by Selby.

Patrol Number (Crew count)

1 (71) 2 (72) 3 (71) 4 (71)

Continued On:

Second War Patrol	51			
Third War Patrol	37	50		
Fourth War Patrol	30	41	48	
Fifth War Patrol	25	30	35	49

At this time in the war with an expanding number of boats, about 25% of a crew was routinely rotated off a boat after a war patrol – *PUFFER*'s total was only two or three more than typical. Four crew members had broken down mentally under the stress of the first patrol - they probably accounted for the slightly larger than usual number of men transferred. Because the crew was not scattered, the loss of discipline was also probably greatly exaggerated.

Even though the muster rolls were available to recent authors, the mass transfer of the *PUFFER* crew persisted as reality. William Tuohy, Pulitzer Prize winning author, in *The Bravest Man – The Story of Richard O'Kane & U.S. Submariners in the Pacific War*, also relied heavily on the Voge text in 2001. Tuohy paraphrased the original text and revived the breaking up of the crew.

The Force Command concluded that when a submarine had been through such an ordeal the

crew should be broken up; otherwise newcomers would be considered 'outsiders' by those who went through THE depth charging.

The myth was repeated in 2006. In an extremely well documented text Michael Sturma in *Death at a Distance – The Loss of the Legendary USS HARDER* concluded the *PUFFER* transfers had occurred. Sturma wrote, citing Blair and Roscoe, "The *PUFFER*'s captain was subsequently relieved of command and more than half of the crew reassigned to other submarines."

3) In *USS PAMPANITO: Killer-Angel* published in 2000, Michno paraphrased Roscoe's account of *PUFFER*'s first patrol. His account led a reader to believe the entire crew of *PUFFER* was sent to other boats or duties.

In fact, after the depth charging *PAMPANITO* took, it was possible that her entire crew might be redistributed. Such was the experience of the USS *PUFFER* (SS268). ...After studying the situation, submarine command determined that when a boat had gone through such an experience, its crew should be disbanded and sent to other boats. The sharing of the ordeal welded the men together in a mystic bond, and no newcomer would ever be able to penetrate the circle, for he had not gone through the experience.

However, neither *PUFFER*'s crew, *PAMPANITO*'s crew, nor any other crew underwent a complete dispersion during the war.

4) 72% of the *PUFFER*'s crew continued on the second war patrol. My father, Donald B. McDonald (S2c), joined the crew for the remainder of the war. He was welcomed to the forward torpedo room by Fred Clouse (TM2c), William "Willie" Wilson (S1c) and Russell Tidd (S1c). He did torpedo training as Mike "Punchy" Kutscherousky's (TM2c) understudy. Jobs still needed to be done; the "outsiders" were as important to the survival of the boat as "THE" first war patrol crew. There was no talk about the first war patrol; it was the "Silent Service." After a year and a half, Dad still knew virtually nothing about the first war patrol. Wilson did not talk about it during seven war patrols; Dad did not ask about it. Dad suspected the crew had been ordered not to talk about it. But he found no mystic bond among the crew.

Selby wrote in the Personnel Section of the second war patrol report:

The crew conducted themselves like the veterans they are. No commanding officer could ask for a finer group of men to work with. It is considered remarkable that only two or three of the crew were still showing any signs of the nervous ordeal they underwent on the previous patrol. These men will be left in for a rest.

Of the seventeen new men who came aboard without previous war patrol experience all but two fitted into the crew very nicely. The

high caliber of firemen received was particularly noticed. The two mentioned are not temperamentally qualified for submarine duty and will be so designated.

Selby's endorsement of the crew spoke highly of the first patrol crew, verified the small number of new men who came aboard for the second patrol, and debunked the mystic bond myth. Fifteen of the new crew members were welcomed and "fitted into the crew nicely."

The continued historic inaccuracy that the officers and crew of *PUFFER* were dispersed must be corrected. This myth, which has been propagated by various authors, casts a shadow on the heroic actions of the officers and crew members who saved *PUFFER*. These actions should not be forgotten or in any way diminished.

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Interviews

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McDonald, Donald B. Ongoing telephone conversations and interviews

Tidd, Russell. Ongoing email and written correspondence, 2001 to present.

Downsizing?

Artifacts and documents needed for the museum

Sooner or later, we all reach the point where we have just too much stuff and we need to downsize. The question is what to do with all that stuff? Many of you may have submarine related items collected from many years association with the submarine community, items that might be highly desirable for addition to the library & museum collection.

As with all museums, the Submarine Force Library & Museum must seek a balance between resources and the type of material that we add to the collection. Unfortunately, this means the museum cannot take all items offered for a variety of reasons, the chief being limited storage space for artifacts and in many cases the museum already has sufficient quantities of the item(s) being offered. So, occasionally when one offers items to the museum the items may not be accepted by the museum for the above reasons.

However, there is a way to provide the museum with appropriate artifacts and documents and at the same time allow you to downsize. What we are proposing is that you donate your items directly to the Submarine Force Library & Museum Association. The association will in turn offer the items to the museum or library as appropriate. Items the museum accepts will be added to the collection or library as appropriate and you will be informed which items the museum is able to accept. Items that cannot

be accepted by the museum would, with your permission, then be offered for sale to museum visitors in the museum store and the proceeds used to help support the museum. We recognize that those items, although they may have been gathering dust in the attic for years, are personal items of which you are rightly very proud, and we believe offering them for others to enjoy when you can no longer use them is a WIN/WIN situation. Again, let us stress that items would only be offered in the museum store if they are refused by the museum and then only with your permission.

The following outline provides some guidance as to the kinds of artifacts and documents we are looking for:

Ship's Materials:

- Ship's Battle Flag
- Ship's Launching Bow Banner
- Ship's Commissioning/Decommissioning Pennant
- Ship's Ensign
- Ship's Jack
- Ship's Bell
- Ship's Builder's Plaque
- Ship's Uniform Insignia/Patch/Plaque
- Pieces of Ship's Hardware/ Ship's issue ashtrays/Silverware/Sponsor's Gift/

Personal Items:

- Medals and Campaign Ribbons, Annapolis Class Rings

Photographic and Scrapbook Albums relating to ship's service/commands
Original art work, watercolors, prints, oil paintings, commemorative envelopes, coins
Unclassified Deck Logs, Night Order Books, Technical Manuals, Personal Papers (letters and diaries are of great importance). Please note, we do not hold, and cannot accept any classified material.

Common items, such as "end of tour"/award/appreciation plaques (no personalized certificates please), cigarette lighters, personalized ashtrays, glassware, and coffee cups are popular "memorabilia" items, and while they may not hold real historical value will be welcome if they could be sold in the museum store.

If you have any items that may be appropriate for inclusion in the museum collection and you are willing to donate those items, please contact us at:

The Submarine Force Library & Museum Association
PO Box 501, Naval Submarine Base Groton, CT 06349

Items donated to the Submarine Force Library & Museum Association are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law for their fair market value. Donors are responsible for determining the fair market value.

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Reunions

If you have a submarine reunion coming up and would like it mentioned in *The Klaxon*, please send us the particulars. We will include as much information as space allows. We will only publish information on submarine reunions.

JOINT USS GEORGE WASHINGTON CLASS REUNION

USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (SSBN598)

USS PATRICK HENRY (SSBN 599)
USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (SSBN 600)

USS ROBERT E. LEE (SSBN 601)
USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (SSBN 602)
August 24-27, 2006

Location: Groton Motor Inn & Suites
Groton, CT

Contact: W.T. "Doc" McCance
16 Chapman Lane
Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Telephone: 860.464.6758
Email: 11doc@comcast.net
Web site: www.598Class.us

USS BUMPER (SS 333) ASSOCIATION

September 18-21, 2006
Location: MCM Grande' Hotel Fun Dome
Odessa, TX 79762

Contact: Edward W Stone, Secretary
308 Merritt Avenue
Syracuse, NY 13207-2713

Telephone: 315.469.3825

USS ETHAN ALLEN (SSBN/SSN 608)

October 12-15, 2006
Location: Kings Bay Area, Georgia

Contact: Herb Richardson
8952 Centerway Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Email: reunion2006@ssbn608.org

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Wanted: New Members

If you received a complimentary copy of *The Klaxon*, why not consider becoming a member of the Association and join the growing numbers who are "Helping to Preserve Our Proud Submarine Heritage?" Use the form provided in this issue to join.

The Association supports the Museum and NAUTILUS by providing funds for displays and other projects when such funding is not available from appropriated funds. Income for the Association is provided by membership dues, donations and museum store profits.

Donations, which are always appreciated, are also tax-deductible.



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