

The After Battery Rat

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My Idea of a Sub School Graduation Talk

I recently attended a Basic Enlisted Submarine School graduation. Like everything else in both life and our military forces today, all the presentations and graduation speeches were temperate, colorless, gentle admonitions to go forth and do good stuff... Keep your fly zipped and don't piss on the petunias.

I sat there and mentally composed what I would have said to these fine young men poised on the threshold of the finest experience of their lives. John Kill asked me to put into words what I felt being a submariner was all about from a raghat point of view.

A Submarine School graduation talk should ignite a raging fire in a young man's heart.

"Gentlemen, you represent the top 2% of The United States Navy and to be here with your butts planted in folding steel chairs in this magic carpet ride launching pad, you had to volunteer not once, but twice. Once to join the finest navy that there ever was or ever will be and next, to sign up for one of the most respected fraternal organizations in the history of naval warfare - The United States Submarine Service.

"The course completion certificate you will be given here today will serve as your adoption papers in a family that will embrace you for a lifetime and define you as a citizen of this fair republic who earned his rights by unselfish arduous service in a universally recognized tough, elite outfit. A man... A very wise man, once told me to look on the back of my Dolphins...

"Dex, you see an expiration date on your Dolphins?"

"No, sure don't."

"You know why?"

"Don't have a clue."

"Because you are just as much a member of this community today as you were the day they pinned those Dolphins on your wet dungaree shirt."

"Think about that a second... Let that sink in. The United States Submarine Force is a commitment you have made voluntarily, and have proven, through rigorous selection and the successful completion of this course, worthy of acceptance in an organization of special men having lifetime benefits.

"You are the latest, bright, shiny link in a continuous chain of American Submariners who have established a worldwide, fully justified reputation as the world's toughest saltwater meateaters riding the finest steel sharks ever made.

"You stand on the threshold of an adventure... An unparalleled magic carpet ride that will exceed anything you can conjure up in your finest fantasy. What you are about to embark on, is a trip that would make Jules' Verne's eyes pop out. I envy you. I am so damn jealous of your youthful enthusiasm, your evident pride in your accomplishment and the amazing journey you begin here today.

"Ah, the yellow brick road.

"Fathers will point you out in bus stations..."

"Son, you see that sailor over there?"

"Yessir."

"He's a submarine sailor. He rides submarines."

"He rides submarines. Can you think of a prouder title? I saw a little kid riding a tricycle on the sidewalk in Groton. The kid was wearing a T-shirt that read, *'My dad is a submariner'*. I can only think of one kid's T-shirt that would top that... *'My dad checks Meg Ryan for ticks.'*

"Your voluntary selection of the Sub Force as your way to serve your nation has given you access to the seaports of the globe and a life where you will be able to fit all your worldly possessions in a seabag.

"You will go places in the oceans of the globe where damn few men have ever been... Where you will hear sounds and experience sensations known only to a minute fraction of the world's population.

"You will serve in the most advanced technical submersible platforms known to man. Craft that serve as the farthest extended invisible bulwark of American defense.

"You will go from here to earn your Dolphins, representing your qualification and acceptance as a United States Submariner.

"I have previously mentioned how I envy you. I have had my opportunity to dance the saltwater fandango with the Goddess of the Main Induction. I have experienced the camaraderie that you will soon experience. I have heard the creak and groan of steel at depth, but nowhere near the depths the modern marvels you will ride, will achieve.

"You have opened the magic oyster that will change your life forever and that will serve as your ticket to adventure. You have achieved a status that will provide the only credentials required to sit at tables covered with beer glass rings and swap bullshit and sea stories with your undersea fraternity brothers while the sailors not associated with the life below sunshine penetration look on in wonder and envy.

"And, you will be forever embraced by the elite Sub Force family up to the point that the Great Commander issues you your pine peacoat and assigns you to a boat moored at the Big Silver Pier in the Sky.

"A hand salute to the mothers who bore you. The parents who put the steel of honor and conviction in your spine and the patriotic values in your hearts. You are, by the road you have chosen to travel, a credit to, not only your family, hometown, state and nation but to yourselves.

"Let me assure you that your name will be listed alongside the best of the best. It will appear on a list containing both long ago legends and giants of the force and the names of the pioneers of nuclear propulsion. Lads, that is a damn fine group of men to be associated with.

"In conclusion, as you sit here today, there are lads in your hometown whose greatest thrill in life will be making a three cushion shot at the local pool hall. They will never travel more than 300 miles from the hospital where they were born and end up marrying some sweetheart whose ambition will begin and end with accumulating grocery store discount coupons and attending PTA spaghetti dinners.

"The closest those jaybirds will get to exotic faraway lands will be thumbing through the pages of a barbershop National Geographic.

"While your uncle Ralph is back home guarding his hen house with a rusty 20-gauge, you will be cruising the seas of the planet, hauling ordinance capable of causing urban renewal with a 500-mile radius. You will be standing watch over weapons, capable of sending entire populations off to Hell in a fiery flash.

"The American submariner is the principle reason the bad guys rarely get to peek under Lady Liberty's nightie and your kids don't eat sushi at school.

"You have joined the family of America's undersea warriors.

"Tomorrow when you shave, take a good look in the mirror, smile and say to yourself...

"Mothers, lock up your daughters, there's a new boatsailor in town."

"WELCOME ABOARD, SAILOR."