

Sirago Newsletter



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Sea Stories

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Shipmates,

One of the sea story submissions (which follows) was long enough to merit inclusion in the main newsletter, so sit back and enjoy your May newsletter!

Regards – **Joe Roche**

THE GENIUS OF ET'S

By George "Goody" Goodwin
Sirago 57-60

The skinny shape slipped aboard the inboard DD; moving like a shadow he kept to the dark side of the tin can. The young sailor spent many nights in the shipyard exploring places that held intrigue and danger of discovery by the authorities. He was fearless, perhaps idiotic. This night would be one of his most exciting capers leading to *the* most exciting of all.

He reached the O-2 level port side. He was not supposed to be

on this ship; it had been refitted and mothballed for future use. He had earlier discovered the port side door of the bridge had a broken seal allowing easy entry to the inside where it was dark always. The bridge windows were covered over and all of the accesses were sealed, except the port side bridge water tight door.

"Slim", as he will be known hereafter, squatted behind the splinter shield of the port bridge wing keeping his eyes moving around the adjacent piers for any activity that would signal an approaching security vehicle. The shipyard was quiet; a weekend night like this security in the yard was lax. He peeled the bridge door open just enough for his slender frame to slip into the compartment and then he gently pulled it shut behind him, drawing the middle dog down into position.

This was his second trip to the DD. He had discovered this treasure a few nights before but was not experienced enough to explore the lower decks. He was wary he might get disoriented while below decks and that frightened him. How sick would that be to be discovered lost out of bounds on a mothballed DD? He would need a light and a way to mark his way below in order to find his way back when he wanted to return to the barge later in the evening. Slim had procured a one-cell life jacket light and a ball of shot-line for this operation. He was proud of his ability to plan and carry it out without letting anyone else in on it.

Slim kept to the bridge for a few minutes letting his adrenaline thin and his breathing to moderate. He liked the bridge. It was large but not too large and everything was within easy reach. He felt comfortable in this space but the mood shifted when he faced aft and looked down the steel ladder entering the depths of the ship. It was dark down there. Some of the brightness from the shipyard street lights breached the window coverings and provided a smidgen of illumination to help Slim see with his night vision all that was on the bridge but that all ended about 5 steps down that ladder. That is why he had the life jacket light and the ball of shot-line.

With the end of the line tied to the helm wheel Slim descended the ladder. When he reached the next deck down he stopped and turned on his light which he had pinned to his shirt front. He was intrigued by the compartmentation on this level. Slim had never been on a surface ship before and he knew nothing about the numbers and letters on the door frames. He read them but nothing made sense. In boot camp he'd learned that port was even and starboard was odd. The mail deck was 1 and

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everything above went “01,” “02,” and so forth. He moved on.

Slim continued down the next ladder that presented itself. He found himself near a space that looked like the officers’ mess. So far he had passed a radio room and a chart room/navigation space. The other spaces seemed to be admin offices and some other smaller compartments that may have been staterooms. After he reached the crew’s mess below the wardroom deck he felt certain that the rest of the tour would be less and less exciting not to say more and more scary. Slim was not comfortable in the lower spaces. He couldn’t trust his hearing to warn him of discovery by the shipyard security.

Slim stumbled back up the ladders he had descended following the orange shot-line, winding it around the cardboard spool. When he reached the O-1 level Slim found a plate on one of the door frames that read, “Radio Room”. He tried the handle and the door swung open freely. He was in the radio room. Larger than “radio” on the fleetboat tied up across the pier. There seemed to be similar stacks of equipments but Slim was suddenly alert. There was a frigging RBO just like the one in crew’s mess on his boat!

Slim’s mind raced and sorted out various recent experiences that were controlling his life on board the boat across the pier. Recent personnel changes on Sirago had been unsettling to the crew that had brought her into the yard. Slim’s new LPO was a skimmer converted to submarines. Worse still, he was an engineman converted to electronics technician. Coupled over with a first class crow to boot. The total package made for a nauseating experience for him and the other ET. Slim was unrated and only recently qualified SS. His next senior PO was a hippy from San Francisco who was a head case but a lot of fun. Slim got along well with the hippy. They connected on an intellectual level and watched out for each other. Both were either really liked or really disliked by the other crew. Mostly liked. We shall call this other man “Biff”.

Biff and Slim were the only ET’s on board the boat until the arrival of the new skimmer LPO. They had been tasked to remove some electronics that fell under their responsibility and repair those pieces during the yard period. One of Biff’s major projects for the yard period was to overhaul the RBO from the crew’s mess. With all the fun of being in Philadelphia and the excesses of the day Biff had let this project slip away. The ship’s RBO was scattered about the work bench on the barge that served as a berthing space for the duty section and makeshift workshop for several ratings on Sirago. Biff had made a project of daily removing something vital from the RBO and leaving it in close proximity to the rest of the equipment. After a month or so the RBO resembled an exploded view of what the radio contained. The cabinet was nearly empty and all of the insides resided within a 3 foot circle on the workbench. Slim thought Biff was riding the vents with this project and he was certain he would inherit the job of re-assembly. In fact the RBO was an old timer and replacement parts were nearly impossible to find in the supply system.

With the sudden arrival of the skimmer LPO came a new world order for Biff and Slim. Let’s go ahead and name the skimmer “High and Tight” or “HT”. HT spent his first few days aboard inspecting records of repair, machinery cards, custody cards and the like. He kept his mouth shut about the RBO spectacle until he figured out what was supposed to be happening with it. HT didn’t like Biff who was slippery and evasive about the ET division stuff and he didn’t like but trusted Slim who seemed to be conscientious albeit a little slow on the uptake. HT would pump Slim for information that he couldn’t get from Biff but he never felt like he was gaining anything substantive. HT’s discomfort level with these two numbnuts began to irritate him and he needed to assert his authority quickly.

The RBO became his platform for restoring order and discipline to the ET division. HT called Biff and Slim into the cage that housed the workshop on the barge and basically held “quarters”. When the two slouchy bastards that comprised HT’s division were assembled and sort of facing him but still not looking at him he announced to Biff that he wanted the RBO completely assembled by the next week or he was going to write him up and take him to Captain’s Mast. Biff would surely lose his second class crow.

Still standing in the dim light of his make-shift illumination Slim’s mind returned to the RBO on the shelf in front of him. It was identical to that which Biff should have had overhauled. Slim checked the mounting of the radio and also checked the name plate data and began scheming.

The next day Slim found Biff in the ET cage staring at the RBO parts on the bench. His usually fit frame took on the appearance of a beaten man. There was no way he was going to put this mess back together anytime soon. Biff was quietly contemplating, in order of best to worst solutions, disappearance, murder, suicide, arson, desertion. Slim felt his pain but he also felt superior. Thank gawd he wasn’t responsible for that mess. Nothing looked usable anymore and even though he liked Biff a lot he couldn’t help secretly enjoying the comedy of the scene. Especially now that he had a secret and felt he held the future of the world in his sneaky hands.

“Hey, Biff” slim murmured gently.

“Yeah” said Biff not looking up.

“How’s it going?”

“F*ck...”

“Shitty deal, eh?”

“F*ck...”

“I may have a solution for you, Biff”

Biff blew a defeated “phh”.

Slim continued: “I may know how to fix this real easy. Give me a few days to get my shit together and we’ll see if my idea will work, o.k.?”

“Yeah, right.” Biff was not convinced. Slim was young, weird, and not too quick on the up-take.

Later, Slim made another foray into the bowels of the DD. He made an assessment of the wonderful, healthy, shiny, spanking new RBO in the radio room. He memorized a list of the tools he would need to do the job. He would need to extract the innards of the DD radio, remove the nameplate, swap everything and leave the DD radio room looking untouched. Risky but doable for a punk from the city. No sweat. Piece of cake.

It took several trips across the pier to complete the task of swapping out the guts of the RBO’s and swapping the nameplates. Slim worked alone and secretly. He knew anybody could be a rat intentionally or not. Secrecy and swiftness captured in a net of boldness was the way to pull this caper off. Slim performed the operation on a weekend when most of the crew were traveling to homes in Norfolk. By Monday morning there was the Sirago RBO on the workbench all pretty and assembled. Not a speck of dust or dirt on the bench. Not a trace of the effort that was expended to make a miracle. The radio he had moved to the DD was not so neat. He had basically piled the old parts into the new drawer and pushed it shut. From the outside the DD radio looked just fine.

Biff was the first one to find Slim in the ET cage. Slim was just hanging around trying to look busy. He had been etching the ET tools with a carbon stick from a flashlight battery wrapped with a piece of copper wire plugged into the 110 volt socket on the bench. Slim wore electricians rubber gloves to keep from getting electrocuted but his eyes were itchy from staring at the little arc that the carbon stick made when he traced “ET” on the wrenches and screwdrivers. He didn’t know about flashburn yet. Slim was not real quick on the up-take. Slim spent 4 or 5 minutes filling Biff in on the situation on the bench. He didn’t want to cause Biff any worry but at the same time he couldn’t say too much to alleviate Biff’s concerns. Slim was smug and Biff was ecstatic.

HT arrived to find Slim sitting with his head in his hands gently rubbing his eyes and smoking a cigarette. Biff was messing with the RBO; turning the screw heads so all the slots lined up. Biff looked smug and sneaky. HT looked from one sneaky bastard to the other.

“What’s this?” HT spoke.

“Biff fixed the f*cking RBO, HT.” Slim answered. “Looks almost new, huh?”

HT made his way to the bench and placed his hand on the RBO as if to see if it was really there. He again looked at first one sneaky bastard and then the other.

“How did you do this?”

“Biff busted his ass all weekend. I helped”, Slim offered.

Biff was now using a rag to wipe the cabinet even though it was spit polish clean. HT moved along the bench to the desk that held the machinery history cards and custody cards and maintenance records. He had to step around Biff who wouldn’t yield. He found the machinery history card for the RBO and stared at it for a few moments and then eased back to the bench where Biff was now pretending to measure ohmage with a PSM-5 from the left side of the RBO to the other side. Slim glared at Biff willing him to stop with the bullshit behavior. Too much fake pretending was going to totally blow the caper. Slim hadn’t told Biff anything more than he needed to know about the RBO and he didn’t want this epic sea story to end badly.

By now HT was really giving the RBO a going over. He was matching the serial number from the card to the nameplate and when he was satisfied that this in fact was the Sirago RBO he got a screwdriver from Biff and spent another twenty minutes opening the cabinet and peeking at everything inside. As HT continued to examine the RBO in depth, Slim became concerned that there was something he had missed... some strange hitch between a "skimmer" RBO and one fit for a fleetboat. Was there a mark or tag or special component that was slightly different that HT knew about but the dimness of Slim's life jacket light failed to reveal? Slim needed to end this examination, right now! "I'd sure hate to see someone have to stand a captain's mast for messing up a perfectly good RBO. Maybe HT has never experienced a "boat mast" before, eh Biff?" HT turned his head toward Slim his eyes showing surprise. HT's mouth told Slim to 'shut the f*ck up', but his fingers began to quickly button up the RBO. Slim did shut his mouth... and never again mentioned anything about this particular incident... until he sent this story to be part of this newsletter - almost 48 years later. He wasn't too quick on the up-take.

CREW NEWS

We have found a couple of midshipmen who were aboard in 1968 – **Gary Johnson** and **Jim Gutmann**. We have also found “Most Wanted” **Ray Burroughs** (EN2, 67-70). But these 3 finds are more than offset by the 9 crew members that have died:

Robert Lee Johnson MMC 68-68 (died 21 Jan 2008)

Warren Sether TM1 48-52 (died 10 Dec 2007)

Orin Bell SO3 53-55 (died 1 Dec 2005)

Bill Brayshaw S2c 47-47 (died 25 Jun 2007)

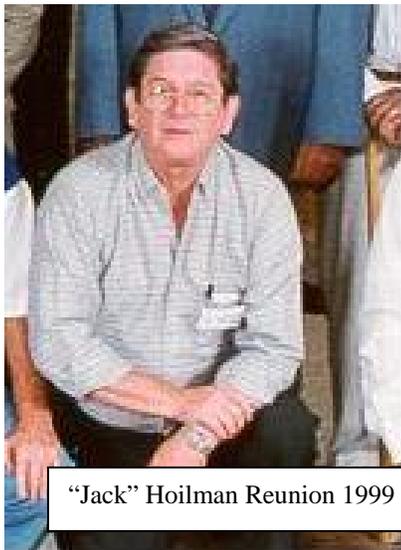
Dennis Horn SN 69-70 (died 6 Feb 2007)

Calvin Baines EM1 59-62 (died 30 Dec 2007)

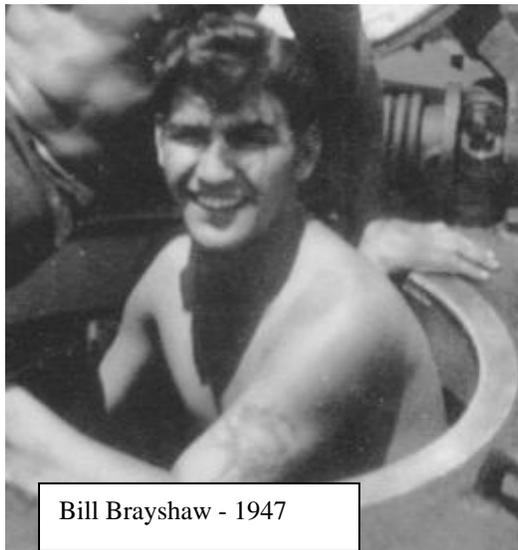
“Jack” Hoilman QM1 68-71 (died 27 Dec 2007)

Wallace Burton YN3 52-52 (died 11 Nov 2006)

Romane Burnell S1c Plank 45-46 (died 7 Feb 2008)



“Jack” Hoilman Reunion 1999



Bill Brayshaw - 1947



Orin Bell - 1954

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