

# Stories from the Crew

Volume 8, Issue 4 – Insert – CREW STORIES by Mike Bickel

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## Berlingeri – Back in the Game... AGAIN!

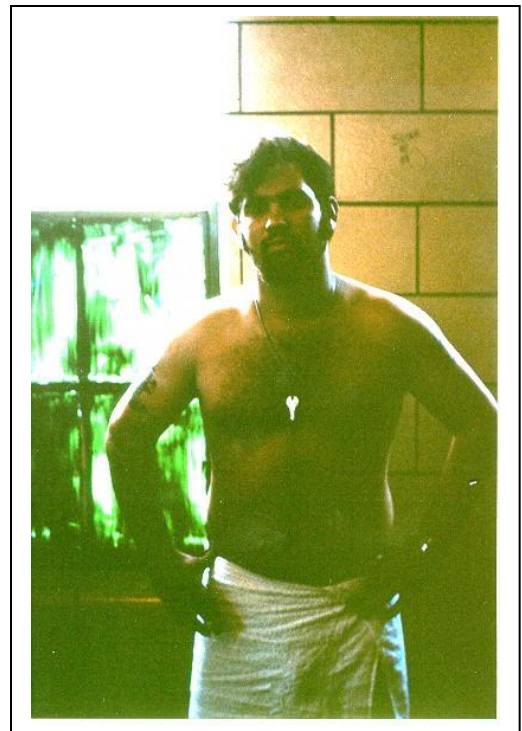
When I knew Frank Berlingeri, he was a Machinist Mate 3<sup>rd</sup> Class and Oiler, and we served many watches together submerged with me playing diving officer and he as the trim manifold operator. Many pleasant memories also up on the bridge with Frank. He was quite a hilarious guy. He'd say stuff with a straight face that would initially give you that headlight bewildered look until you figured out he was just messin' with you. Probably one of the best "Sea Story" guys I've ever met. And super intelligent too... so he could really fool you. But I understand that new Ensigns are pretty easy to fool anyway.

So when I learned about the reunions that the Sirago was having and saw his name on Bill Gerber's roster in 1999, I immediately called him up on the phone to tell him that I was planning to come to the 1999 reunion (my first) and that I hoped I'd see him there. While on the phone with him, the person who answered referred to him as Doctor Berlingeri and I thought ...wha??...(try to picture that headlight bewildered look again..) and Frank told me that he was truly a Doctor. I guess there was a long silence on the phone when he said that and he said "Bird... you still there...??" (My nickname on the boat was "Bird" – that's another story). He had me pretty convinced by the end of the phone call telling me that "A pump's a pump", but lurking inside me was this disbelief so I called a few other crew members that I knew on Gerber's list and asked them about him and they confirmed that he was, in fact, a real live Doctor and that they too had been surprised when they found that out. Frank couldn't come to the 1999 reunion, but he came to the 2001 reunion (his first) and a bunch of us who all knew each other must have stayed up until 0400 talking about old times and how happy we all were to see each other again. I reminded him at that reunion about how he used to crack me up telling me that he was going to be so famous some day... that you'd probably find his face on flip cards and people would really seek out his "rookie" card before he became real famous. He'd be on that trim manifold telling me this with his wrench in his hand making a pose and then said "Picture this.... **Berlingeri Pumps Forward Trim to Sea**". I told him at that reunion, that now I wished I DID have a picture of Frank Berlingeri on the Trim Manifold so that I could own one of those "Rookie flip cards" and be able to say that "I knew Frank Berlingeri when he was a rookie and here's the card to prove it".

The photo to the right is the only photo I have of Frank Berlingeri from the old days which would be suitable for such a "Rookie Flip Card".

Well – to me, Frank had done just what he said he would do. He DID become famous... certainly for those who knew him "when" – here he was helping hundreds of folks after storms and disasters and just ordinary folks who needed a doctor's help. He always did rush to help anyone in distress on the boat and I guess that I never had figured that this would be the passion and talent that would take him far in the world.

And now... HE'S DOING IT AGAIN! A few months ago Frank told me that he was looking to get back to doing "real medicine" where he was needed. He had gotten a bit more than frustrated with all the Managed Care, paperwork, and, in general, the red tape which keeps a person from being able to do something he loves to do. I think we can all relate to issues with health and frustration with the "system".



He told me that he was going to get back in the service and be a uniformed doctor. He has joined the U.S. Army and is now a Lt. Col. soon to be off to Iraq to help where help is needed.

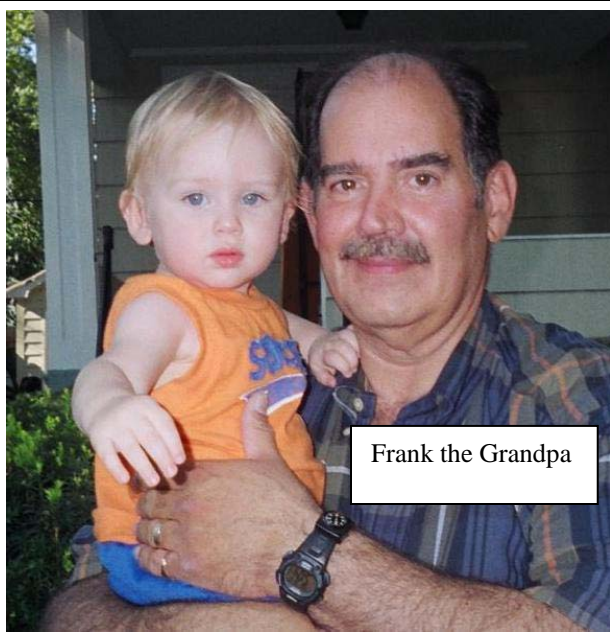
Below are photos of Frank Berlinger in his new uniform (with Dolphins you will notice). For any folks who know Frank and think this is another Sea Story... the photos are provided which pretty much speak for themselves. I'll let Frank describe what he's doing in his own words:

Dear Mike, How are you doing? I went to Officers Basic Course at Fort Sam Houston where the Army AAMED is headquartered. It was a two week "charm school" where they give you the basics of officer responsibilities, etc. This two week course was only for prior military service members. If you never had any military experience you had to go to a six to nine week course. I have orders to report to Fort Benning, GA where I will be working as a physician at Martin Army Community Hospital as a staff physician. This stint will be for three months and the January 2008 I will be headed for Iraq to one of the Combat Surgical Hospitals over there. We all made it through the Viet Nam years and we had a blast... boy scouts with weapons... but there is still a part of me that almost feels guilty for not going to 'Nam with many of my friends that served in the "brown water navy" in the "Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club". On an intellectual level I know there was nothing I could do to save the friends I lost there, but there is still a void there that I need to fill. I feel that if I can do anything to save or help these kids fighting over there it would help me fill that void.

LTC Francis Berlinger MD USAR MC.



Frank's New Mode of Transport.



Frank the Grandpa



Frank pointing to his Dolphins while a Skimmer points to his Surface Warfare Pin